

Community membership through socially situated writing processes:

A journey of inkshedding into Inkshed

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Abstract

This research examines the ways that socially mediated writing processes facilitate membership in communities of practice. Writing practices are located within rhetorical contexts and as newcomers to a community participate in community practices, they learn to recognize the rhetorical context in which they are writing. As their competence in the rhetorical context increases, they move from a position of peripheral membership in that community to a position of full participation or membership.

Drawing on theories of practice and genre to understand the ways that writing practices form communities and shape membership, the research investigates the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning (CASLL) and a writing process called inkshedding. The study uses a variety of qualitative methods to examine the ways that learning to inkshed facilitates (and sometimes frustrates) membership in CASLL. Each stage of the inkshedding activity is presented as a stage in membership. The initial stage of writing in inkshedding engenders feelings of anxiety that confront newcomers in their peripheral position. The circulation of texts illustrates the different ways that texts can be read, moving newcomers either to increased participation in the collective or leaving them on the periphery. The subsequent publication of selected texts mirrors the ways that newcomers may successfully become full participants.

This study of writing practices and community membership contributes to a growing body of literature that demonstrates the central role that writing plays in the development of collectives. It is significant because it offers a detailed account of a process whereby individuals become full members of a community of practice through writing practices and thus supports notions of writing as socially situated. It also

supports notions that community membership is attained through gradually increasing participation in community practices.

Abstract

Cette étude examine la façon dont les processus d'écriture socialement médiatisés facilitent l'appartenance aux communautés de praticiens. La pratique de l'écriture se situe dans des contextes rhétoriques, et au fur et à mesure que les nouveaux arrivants d'une communauté participent aux pratiques de groupe, ils apprennent à reconnaître le contexte rhétorique dans lequel ils écrivent. Lorsqu'ils deviennent plus compétents dans ce contexte rhétorique, ils passent d'une position périphérique à une position de participant de plein droit, c'est-à-dire de membre. En se fondant sur des théories de pratique et de genre dont le but est de comprendre la façon dont les pratiques d'écriture façonnent les communautés et l'appartenance à celle-ci, cette étude examine la Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning (CASLL), ainsi qu'un procédé d'écriture appelé « inkshedding ». Cette étude a recours à une gamme de méthodes qualitatives pour examiner de quelle manière l'apprentissage de l'« inkshedding » facilite l'appartenance au CASLL, mais aussi comment cela en frustre parfois les membres. Chaque étape de l'activité du « inkshedding » est présentée comme une étape vers le statut de membre. Les premiers écrits selon cette méthode reflètent l'anxiété à laquelle font face les débutants dans leur position périphérique. La circulation des textes illustre les différentes façons dont les textes peuvent être lus, ce qui génère une participation accrue des nouveaux arrivants, ou leur abandon en périphérie. La publication de textes choisis qui suit illustre les façons dont le nouvel arrivant peut devenir un participant en bonne et due forme.

Cette étude des pratiques d'écriture et d'appartenance à une communauté vient s'ajouter à un nombre croissant d'ouvrages qui démontrent le rôle central que joue

l'écriture dans le développement de collectifs. Elle offre une description détaillée des processus par lesquels des individus deviennent membres à part entière de communauté de praticiens, par le biais de pratiques d'écriture, et elle appuie la notion selon laquelle on devient membre d'une communauté par la pratique.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Many years ago, with little confidence, and little perspective on life, I enrolled in a course called Writing Across the Curriculum with Anthony Paré at McGill University as an elective for my Master's degree. We met in the basement of the graduate student building where Anthony felt we would be more comfortable sitting at the round restaurant tables than trying to move desks around into small groups in a traditional crowded classroom. I was young, shy, and inexperienced in the field and I kept to myself. When I had to contribute, either in writing, or in group discussions, I tended to be harsh and critical in an effort to sound the way I thought an academic should.

One evening, early in the semester, Anthony came to class and rather than engage in our usual group discussions on our reading, he asked us to write our responses to an article we had read. He told us to write quickly and that our names were not necessary. I was unsure what he had in mind, but I knew I did not particularly like what the author of the article had suggested, so I wrote critically of the text and suggested that the author was out of touch with the reality of the classroom.

When most of us had finished writing, Anthony asked us to take what we had written and pass it two people to the right at the tables where we were grouped. The room filled with gasps and “oh no!”s. People squirmed, and I broke into a cold sweat. I did not want anyone to read what I had written. I was insecure and doubted my abilities to contribute appropriately to academic discourse. Despite the obvious discomfort in the room, however, we all complied, passing our papers on with apologies and excuses—“If I had known someone was going to read it....” As we passed the papers along, Anthony

explained that as we read we were to put a line in the margin by anything that stood out to us as significant or meaningful.

As I began to read, I was acutely aware of the fact that the authors of the texts I was reading were sitting across the table from me. I was not reading texts by unknown authors. Even though the names were not on the pages I was reading, I knew they were at my table. As a result, I found myself reading these texts differently than I did other academic texts where the author was an unknown entity who I could criticize from a distance. The discomfort of the situation made me read carefully, looking for meaningful connections to mark in the margin, trying to value the work of my classmates.

The pages circulated around the table. Each page I read, I gained new perspectives. Sometimes I added a line in the margin. Sometimes I just read. Eventually, my own text came back to me. I had worried that it was inadequate for the colleagues at my table and that they would find nothing worth marking in it. Worse than that, I felt a deep insecurity that my lack of credibility would be exposed to my classmates and that they would know that I was not really at the intellectual level of a graduate student. When my text reached my own hands, however, I was surprised to see lines in the margin, and even a few extra words scribbled at the bottom in response to what I had written. I felt both a strong sense of encouragement from and connection to the group with whom I had shared my writing.

I later learned that the activity that Anthony had taken us through that evening was called inkshedding. Invented by St. Thomas University professors Russ Hunt and Jim Reither in the early 1980s as a way to make student writing more meaningful, it definitely brought new meaning to my writing that night. Participation in inkshedding

shaped a path into my future. As I continued to participate in inkshedding in a variety of classes, and incorporate it in my own classroom once I began to teach, I became aware that something about inkshedding worked for me as a writer and as a teacher. That is, the activity seemed to facilitate writing that went beyond linguistic¹ activity and used language as a meaningful form of communication. I began to understand what it meant to use writing to communicate.

My observations from my inkshedding experiences so excited me that I wanted to explore inkshedding further, to understand the kinds of things I had seen in my own inkshedding experiences, and what I was seeing in my students'. As a result, I sought to design doctoral research that explored the inkshedding activity and the way that it worked as a classroom activity. What I soon learned, however, was that exploring inkshedding from the perspective of a classroom activity was offering only a fragmented perspective. Inkshedding, in fact, is an activity embraced and engaged in by an entire academic community whose unofficial title comes from the activity itself—Inkshed. The academic community, known officially as the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning (CASLL), holds annual conferences during which participants engage in inkshedding throughout the conference. By incorporating inkshedding into the four-day conference, they hope to encourage increased reflection, participation, and dialogic interaction. After attending my first conference, I knew that I could not study inkshedding without studying it within the context in which it regularly occurs—the conference. I could not separate the activity from the community that uses it. As a result,

¹ I use this term here to mark the difference between writing activities that focus on language use as independent of real or meaningful communication in the same way that Bakhtin (1986) pointed out that linguistics, or language use, is but one piece of a multi-faceted communicative unit of speech or writing that he called “utterance.” (The concept of utterance will be elaborated on more in Chapter 3.)

the scope of my study changed from classroom inkshedding to conference inkshedding where I was able to study the ways in which the community realized their goals through writing.

I arrived at the conference as an outsider—someone interested in the field of writing studies and the inkshedding activity, but not a member of CASLL, and certainly not an Inkshedder. I was introduced to a highly intense experience. The weekend was a retreat-style conference where no outside influences could distract us. There were no concurrent sessions, so everyone had the same input and conversations flowed naturally from conference room to dinner table to the bar. Many of those sessions were far from the talking head norm of traditional conferences. There were discussion groups, plays, and even a text. Perhaps most unusual was a talent show the last night of the conference. By the time I left my first conference, however, I felt like I had found a community to which I belonged and I felt strongly that inkshedding and the philosophies and interactions with the people around inkshedding made that happen. This experience mirrors the findings of Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Paré (1999), who studied discipline specific university and workplace writing. Their long-term ethnographic study of seven different sites, in which they sought to understand the relationship between university and workplace writing, suggested that learning writing practices of particular communities, “was a means by which individuals were socialized into the particular activities, ideologies, identities, meaning systems, power structures, institutional goals and cooperative endeavours enacted in each place” (Bazerman, 1999, p. vii). My research continues to build on these notions that connect writing with identity and membership by

exploring the ways that inkshedding at the Inkshed conference contributed to my sense of identity as an Inkshedder, and my membership in the collective.

While this thesis may sound suspiciously like a self-indulgent account of a process of self-discovery, it has a far wider scope than a personal fixation. As current theories in writing studies suggest, writing is a socially situated practice² (Dias et al., 1999). That is, writing is not simply an isolated multi-step process through which a writer ends up with a structurally, linguistically, and content-appropriate text. Rather, writing is a socially mediated act. It is dependent on specific social and rhetorical situations. No writer works in isolation, but, to write successfully, is subject to the values, attitudes and demands of the context in which she writes. Thus, my exploration of the way inkshedding facilitates membership in the collective is a way of exploring the ways that socially mediated writing processes, or social practices engaged in by communities through writing (henceforth called collective writing processes), act on individuals to shape the ways that individuals gain identity or membership as they participate in these value-laden practices. Because Inkshed is an academic community that deliberately uses writing as a tool for engagement and reflection, this exploration of the activity and the organization that uses it gives insights into broader issues of writing and identity. Studying inkshedding as a social process thus opens doors to understanding social writing processes, community structures, and identity formation.

This research contributes to a social concept of writing by confirming that writing abilities are dependent on social context. The social context is shaped by membership in collectives and understanding the values and hence practices of the collective. Thus, this study shows how writing practices are governed by the value systems of the communities

² Research and detailed theory behind this concept is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

in which they are located. I also suggest that writing expertise results from a socially situated learning process—a process of movement from peripheral participation in a collective to full participation. Writing, as a social practice, creates relationships within the social context. It also shapes knowledge and embodies particular values and ideologies. This, in turn, shapes collectives. The collectives, reciprocally, seek out, attract and need members who reinforce rhetorical and social practices reflective of their values.

My study unfolds in the following eight chapters. I begin, in Chapter 2, with an overview of modern writing studies and the theories that have developed to influence research and pedagogy in composition and rhetoric today. This historical context of writing studies is important because it describes some of the contributing factors to and philosophies behind both the inkshedding activity and Inkshed community. My discussion follows the movement from a form-based approach toward composition, through understanding writing as a process, to the work of contemporary social rhetoricians in which writing is understood as a social act. Within this overview I discuss the need for and the development of Inkshed.

I follow this historical context for writing studies and Inkshed with a theoretical context. Chapter 3 introduces some of the theoretical perspectives that have informed this research. I describe the theories behind Communities of Practice (CoPs) and make the case for looking at Inkshed as a CoP. Recognizing the lack of attention to language as a weakness in understanding Inkshed as a CoP (Barton & Hamilton, 2005; Barton & Tusting, 2005; Creese, 2005), I include work that helps to centralize language use in the study of community membership. This is also facilitated through genre theory as a way

of understanding the writing and language used within CoPs. I draw particularly on one aspect of CoPs called legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) to examine and understand the ways that newcomers move from a place on the periphery of the collective to a position of full participation or membership. I conclude this chapter with focused research questions exploring the connection between writing and community identity.

These research questions have emerged during the course of data collection and analysis. Emergent questions like this are characteristic of qualitative research. Thus, in Chapter 4, I discuss my rationale for using a qualitative approach in this study. I explain my methodological approach to studying Inkshed and identity, and how I have used a combination of phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative inquiry to shape the ways that I have developed and pursued my questions, and collected and analyzed data.

In Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, I present interwoven sets of data and my analysis and interpretation of that data. I have chosen to present these data chronologically (i.e., following the steps of the inkshedding activity), and the subsections that I use are based on themes that emerged from the data during my analysis. One of the ways that I have chosen to present my data and analysis is through short vignettes in which I describe seminal experiences from a personal perspective and in a narrative form. This draws on Lawrence-Lightfoot's idea of portraiture in qualitative research, in which researchers can blend "the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics and subtlety of human experience and organizational life" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv). I have embedded these vignettes within lengthier and more detailed descriptions of the data in an effort to provide multiple perspectives on the inkshedding experience and the themes that are present.

Other stylistic features are worth noting as well. Although I have followed APA style guidelines, I have done so with a few notable exceptions. First, APA requires that quotes of more than forty words be set off in a block. In Chapters 5-8, in which I present data, I have chosen to set off shorter quotes from the data in a block format as well. Although they are less than forty words, I feel that setting them in blocks helps to highlight the data. Second, there may appear to be inconsistencies in the way I present and use names of Inkshedders. Sometimes I use both first and last names, while other times I use only first names. This inconsistency is deliberate because the degree of formality that I use illustrates my differing levels of comfort with different Inkshedders. For example, early on, I write about Anthony Paré and Russ Hunt. Just as my comfort level with them developed as my membership in the community increased, so does the way I refer to them in my writing as a reflection of this increased comfort.

I start by exploring what it means to be an Inkshedder. In Chapter 5, I share data that describe some of the shared values and characteristics of Inkshedders in order to explore the multiple facets of the Inkshed identity. After describing a general kind of collective identity, I explore the stages of the inkshedding process in order to understand how newcomers learn to take on an Inkshed identity.

Chapter 6 looks at the initial stage of inkshedding—writing the text. I describe this stage in detail, but also look at the challenges that this stage presents to newcomers seeking membership. I look at the vulnerability that emerges as a powerful theme in Inkshedders' stories and the ways that newcomers deal with this reaction to public writing.

Chapter 7 examines the second stage of inkshedding in which texts are circulated, read, and highlighted. I look at issues of democracy at this stage as well as the influence that highlighting can have on identity and membership. In this chapter, I explore not only paper texts and the ways they are marked, but I also make a case for looking at conference participants themselves as texts who are circulated, read and marked. The ways that the collective responds to both paper and human texts impacts the ways in which newcomers are able to participate in the collective. That is, interactions influence membership.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I look at the final stage of inkshedding in which highlighted texts are excerpted, typed, copied and redistributed for further discussion. Looking at this stage as publication, I explore experiences of being public. I also look at this stage of inkshedding as a microcosm for the kinds of publication experiences that take place in academia. I show how publication is an essential component of community membership in academia.

In the final chapter, I reflect on some of the lessons learned through the process of this research. I look at the ways that my inkshedding experiences have crossed boundaries and borders and make connections between Inkshed, inkshedding, and other aspects of my life as a way of furthering and deepening my thinking about the ways in which writing facilitates participation, and participation is essential for community membership.

The findings of this research are important in a broader academic context because I believe they resonate with the kinds of experiences that both novice student writers undergo as they enter the academy, and doctoral students undergo as they actively

attempt to become members of a disciplinary community. The exploration of the Inkshed identity reflects the complex make-up of any collective. Students entering academia enter into a well-established and complex community. The newness and complexity of this entry may lead new students to feel anxious and insecure as they struggle to learn appropriate ways to interact within the new culture. These struggles may be made manifest through a variety of practices from failure to participate in writing assignments to using fear of failure as a motive for handing in someone else's work or even to dropping out. Applied more specifically to a classroom setting, my findings suggest that student participation may be both hindered and helped through interactions with other academic community members like professors or classmates who have the power to encourage or discourage and the tools to help students move from peripheral to full participation. This sheds light on the experience of those who persist and make an effort to learn the values and practices of the community and on the ways they develop fluency working within academia. My research suggests that through meaningful participation, new students can develop the abilities necessary to write effectively within their communities. Understanding the interrelation between the practices of academia and its values is a key factor in facilitating new students' transitions into the academy.

In short, these chapters work together to explore the experience of becoming an Inkshedder and the role that inkshedding has in that process. By examining a community that values writing as dialogic interaction, this study magnifies the role that writing has in community membership. The process of inkshedding and the process of learning to belong weave and grow together in mutually dependent ways.

Chapter 2

Historical Context

In 2006, the theme for the annual Inkshed conference was, “Context is everything: Everything is context.” The aim was to explore the myriad of contexts in which writing and reading take place, and the ways that language and context reciprocally shape each other. Drawing on this idea, my intent in this chapter is to provide an historical overview of modern writing studies that begins with the birth of writing studies as a discipline. I look at the ways writing studies has focused on the writer through cognitive and expressivist movements and I look at the impact of these movements in Canada and on the birth of Inkshed. I also look at the transition to a socially situated approach to writing and how that reflects Inkshed philosophies. It is important to note that although each new movement in writing studies was sometimes adopted with such enthusiasm that advocates sought to dismiss previous theories, I share the perspective of social rhetoricians (Bawarshi, 2003; Devitt, 1993; Dias et al., 1999) that each new movement added new dimensions to writing study theories. Thus, the various stages I introduce in this chapter all impact my research. From student-centered pedagogy to process writing to socially situated writing, each stage of development facilitates understanding of the way inkshedding contributes to membership.

Modern writing studies

The 1960s in North America, which saw a revolution in human rights and political agendas, also began a revolution in composition studies (Faigley, 1992), turning it from a virtually non-existent discipline to a burgeoning field of study and research. Contemporary scholars of composition studies place the beginning of this revolution in

1963 (Clark, 2003; North, 1987) at the annual conference for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Participants at the conference reported a surge in energy and enthusiasm for critical discussions, not only about writing pedagogy, but, more importantly, about research in writing. Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer (1963) published a call for inquiry-based research, pushing composition studies out of the realm of teacher anecdotes (North, 1987), and catapulting it into a realm of scientific rigour.

Throughout the 1960s, the same energy that infused the 1963 NCTE conference pervaded in discussions about writing. Thus, in 1964, English teachers who attended what has become known as the Woods Hole conference (a meeting of American educators), joined in the “New Education Movement” –a movement founded on the work of cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner. Bruner, like other cognitive psychologists, argued that learning is a process. The realization of this process required active student participation and self-discovery. The idea of process learning impacted writing instruction as teachers began approaching writing by encouraging individual writing processes rather than modeling other texts (Clark, 2003). This was a seminal movement in coming to understand and teach writing as a process.

Furthermore, in 1966, English teachers from Britain and the United States met at the Dartmouth conference. While the Americans had traditionally viewed English as a discipline with content to be mastered, the British had begun to focus on personal and linguistic growth. The British perspective contributed to the growing North American trend to focus on the writer rather than a written product. As Berlin (1990) explained:

The result of the Dartmouth conference was to reassert for U.S. teachers the value of the expressive model of writing. Writing is to be pursued in a

free and supportive environment in which the student is encouraged to engage in an act of self discovery. (p. 210)

In other words, writing pedagogy began to focus on student writers creating a text, rather than the resulting text alone.

The British influence introduced at the Dartmouth conference continued to affect North American practices—including those in Canada. One educator, James Moffett, was heavily influenced by British traditions. His 1968 work, *Teaching the universe of discourse*, emphasized a student-centered curriculum and peer interaction—ideas (as I describe in Chapter 5) that help to define an Inkshed identity 40 years later. The natural sequence of mental development became highly influential in institutions like McGill University's Faculty of Education. A professor at the time described the influence in the following way:

We were very much informed by the work that came out of the Dartmouth conference (the English version of that conference as it registered in John Dixon's *Growth through English* [1967]). That book initiated a radical shift in the teaching of English from a focus on subject matter to the pupil, and the notion of English as an instrument of personal growth. Close to the time of the conference, James Moffett had published his paradigm-shifting *Teaching the universe of discourse*, which soon became the revolutionary and core text for our English Methods courses. (Personal communication, 2/2/2006)

As this scholar noted, Moffett's work resonated with the work done by Dixon (1967) who promoted a developmental model of language—i.e., a model in which learning is

described as a process, each stage dependent on the previous one. Also highly influential at the time was *The development of writing abilities (11-18)*, by Britton, Burgess, Martin, Mcleod, and Rosen (1975), which analyzed the kinds of processes that teenagers go through when writing and showed that, like learning, writing is a process.

Notable in these works is the perspective that process learning gives to inkshedding. Both Moffett (1968) and Britton et al. (1975) described multiple developing perspectives that a writer has of audience. A writer begins with self as audience and gradually increases the audience to include friend, classmate, or teacher, and eventually moves out to a broader or general audience. Associated with these different audiences are different functions of writing. While Moffett described the initial writing for oneself as personal and informal, Britton et al. described it as expressive. I believe they are talking about the same thing—writing for the self. As the concept of audience broadens the style or function of writing also changes. Usually it becomes increasingly formalized.

This developmental process of learning an audience or expanding a concept of audience and the subsequent formalization of writing or changing function helps to describe what happens to a newcomer to Inkshed and the process of learning to inkshed. As she gradually learns the audience for whom she writes, she becomes more secure in the writing style called inkshedding.

Focus on the writer

As scholars and teachers began to try to understand how their students were writing and how they could facilitate student writing, Rohman (1965) posited that the writing process is made up of three basic stages. The first stage, he claimed, is prewriting

and is the stage in which ideas are generated, gathered, and organized. The second stage is the writing stage in which writers put information into a cohesive framework in writing. Finally, the third stage is rewriting in which writers reread what they have written and fix, change, move, add, delete or otherwise revise a text to arrive at a polished product. This understanding of writing as a process launched a new era of research and scholarship in the newly born field of composition studies. Young (1980) pointed to some “disharmonies” of the process movement. Although writing scholars embraced notions of process writing, they held a variety of views. These views unfolded in two directions, the cognitivist process movement, and the expressivist process movement.

Cognitivist process writing

The work of cognitive psychologists like Bruner, Piaget, and Vygotsky strongly influenced the work of the cognitive process movement in writing—so named for the exploration that writing researchers shared with psychologists into “the mental structures that determine behaviour” (Clark, 2003, p. 10). Scholars in writing studies wanted to understand the mental characteristics that governed how writers create texts. Therefore, the research in composition studies focused on writers writing (Bloom, 2003), or the intellectual processes that writers go through to create a text.

The first cognitive-based research on composing to emerge in the newly energized field of composition was done by Janet Emig in 1971. In her study, Emig asked questions about how grade 12 students write and explored their processes by asking them to speak aloud as they composed (a method known as think-aloud protocols by cognitive psychologists). Her work offered important insights into the writing process. Whereas Rohman (1965) and other scholars (Britton et al., 1975) suggested a

linear process from invention strategies to drafting and finally revision, Emig found that students did not create outlines or do other strategies before they wrote. Rather, the process was recursive and the students moved back and forth between stages. Thus, her results called into question the linearity of the writing process. However, her work confirmed that grade 12 students had stable writing processes.

Emig's results found support in other research. Perl (1979) studied the writing processes of unskilled college writers. She found that, although their writing was flawed, they had stable writing processes. Her research suggested that all writers follow a process, not just experienced ones. She also concluded, like Emig, that writing is not clearly linear, but involves reflection and going back and forth. This recursiveness is a significant but often overlooked aspect of process writing pedagogy and is important to this research because, as I describe in Chapter 7, some writing processes work better than others in inkshedding. For example, the inveterate planner struggles to write spontaneously, while those who prefer to do little revising struggle less in inkshedding.

One of the ways that cognitive psychology was particularly influential was in the way it described how abilities develop in a natural sequence. I briefly introduced the importance of developmental stages in which the writer moves from the personal to a broader concept of the world when I discussed the importance of Moffett's and Britton et al.'s work. Here, I expand on these theories in light of the work of cognitive process writing scholars, but the importance to my study remains the same. Like any writing, inkshedding is a process and coming to understand one's audience is both an inner process of identity and a development of writing process.

Piaget (1955) taught that knowledge, instead of simply being poured into a person, is constructed within the self. This means that a person's mental view of the world is continuously modified in order to incorporate information about the external world. This ongoing modification comes about through stages that increase in complexity according to age and experience. These ideas were similar to the influential work of Vygotsky (1978) who posited a "zone of proximal development." Vygotsky explained this zone as:

The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or on collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 86)

That is, mental development (or the way children acquire tools like language to understand and negotiate the culture of which they are a part), takes place through social interactions and collaborative problem solving. As a result of cognitivists like Piaget and Vygotsky, advocates of the cognitive process movement believed that writers develop through various stages and writers need to acquire tools to be able to function effectively.

The work of both Flower (1979) and Lunsford (1979) provided insights into writing stages. They conducted studies on novice writers, the results of which showed that the challenge for basic writers is that they are stuck in the early stages of cognitive development in their writing. As a result, they struggle in "de-centering and performing tasks which require analysis and synthesis" (Lunsford, p. 41). In other words, weak writers lack the skills to see beyond writing that centers around the self and therefore tends to lack explanations, elaborations, examples, and so on. Thus, these studies

claimed that novice writers failed to understand writing from a perspective that anticipates the needs of the reader. In contrast, the same research suggested that advanced writers are already further ahead. They are able to imagine their audience and therefore anticipate the needs of the reader as they write by providing details, examples and so on in order to better communicate with the reader. Although other researchers suggested that, for example, novice writers lack rhetorical complexity because schooling fails to require rhetorical complexity (they argued that the traits of advanced writers appear in novice writers in other circumstances outside the classroom (Bizzell, 1982; Rose, 1988)), the kinds of claims made about cognitive writing processes shaped a way of thinking about writing.

Because of her work with grade 12 writers, Emig (1971) began to see that writers begin with self-awareness and gradually progress to an awareness of others. This claim was central to cognitivist thinking. As a result, Emig's work gave scientific support to Britton et al.'s (1975) earlier assertion that students should first be introduced to personal and expressive writing before formal academic writing. This has become a standard idea in teaching writing. It is in keeping with how psychologists theorized cognitive development, that is, that individuals must first be self-aware. The data in later chapters illustrate some of this progression in the inkshedding process and the ways that coming to anticipate audience facilitates membership.

Perhaps the most revolutionary work done by the cognitivists was that of Flower and Hayes (1980, 1981; Flower, 1977, 1980a, 1980b). Like Emig (1971), they asked participants to speak their thoughts out loud during the composing process in order to understand how experts compose. Although this process was highly criticized as

“unnatural, artificial, and obtrusive” (Selzer, 1982, p. 179), and as an artifact of protocol analysis (Bizzell, 1986), Flower and Hayes gained notoriety for using read-aloud protocol in their attempt to understand the inner workings of the mind and to unlock the mental tools that govern writing processes. By studying expert writers, Flower and Hayes created a model that reflected a far more complex process than originally posited by Rohman. Based on their research, Flower and Hayes proposed a model of a process that included planning, generating, translating, and editing. They argued, like Perl (1979), that these stages are recursive, and writers slip back and forth through these stages.

With their process model, Flower and Hayes also established a four-point cognitive theory that served to help writing teachers and students understand this writing process. They claimed first that the writing process is in fact a set of highly complex mental or thinking processes that are organized during composition. Second, these multiple processes are often embedded within each other. Third, composing is a goal-directed process and the goal is governed by a complex network of preliminary goals that emerge within each of the mental processes. Finally, writers generate their own goals (teachers’ goals notwithstanding). They have both high-level and supporting goals that help them to achieve their purpose. The goals are not fixed. Rather, they change as the writer learns through the act of writing. These points became the basis for understanding the writing process and impacted both research and pedagogy. Not only did they serve to inform the kinds of observations being made about writing, they also provided a framework on which writing teachers could structure their classes to help students understand and develop their writing processes. Some of this attention to goals is useful

in understanding some of what happens in learning to inkshed. As Chapters 6, 7, and 8 explicate, part of the struggle in learning to Inkshed lies in conflict between the goals of the newcomers and the goals of the community.

Although advocates of the process movement have since come under heavy criticism for not taking social influences into consideration in their model for writing (Berlin, 1988; Bizzell, 1983; Faigley, 1986), the cognitive process movement helped to solidify writing studies as an academic discipline while making previously unimagined inroads into understanding writing processes.

Expressivist process movement

As the field of writing studies was burgeoning with its attempts to understand the ways writers write through positivist scientific research, a less scientific but also process-oriented approach to writing emerged. Like the cognitivist movement that sought to understand the process originally posited by Rohman (1965), the expressivists also explored process writing. However, the writing process, as understood by those in the expressivist camp like Murray (1969), Elbow (1973), and Graves (1983), is an individual act of exploration and discovery. Rather than being concerned with the science of the process, the expressivists were more concerned with exploiting the writing process to find individual truths. As such, they encouraged students to write in ways that were not dependent on traditional academic conventions. By introducing different kinds of writing activities, they hoped students would find their own inner voice (Berlin, 1990) because they felt that good writers had access to and used their inner voice.

The expressivist movement did not move forward on the basis of scientific rigour as employed by the cognitivists, but through personal and classroom writing experiences

of a few forward-looking scholars like Murray, Elbow, Graves, and Macrorie. This movement had significant effects on the invention of inkshedding because of the philosophies it shared with creators Hunt and Reither. One of the things that set the expressivist movement apart from a more traditional approach to writing, in which the final form was the focus, or the contemporary cognitivist approach, was the role of the teacher. Elbow, in *Writing without teachers* (1973), argued that teachers are not necessary for student learning. Teachers, he wrote, are “more useful when it is clearer that they are not necessary” (p. x). In other words, Elbow wanted to empower student learners by helping them to find their voice and take ownership for their learning. He taught that the role of the teacher was to facilitate exploration rather than teach explicit knowledge. Similarly, Murray (1969) explained that, when teachers embark on marking and grading student papers, they end up doing the revisions for the students, and often, make the paper their own. Thus, students lose out on the learning experience that is embedded in the writing process. Therefore, the role of a teacher is not to command or dictate or even to choose topics for writing. Rather, the role of teacher is to set up a safe environment in which students can explore, find their own voice, and be individuals. In line with this approach to writing pedagogy, Hunt and Reither tried to find classroom writing activities that were meaningful for students and gave them genuine opportunities to explore writing without fear of marking, grades and so on. Inkshedding was one result of these efforts.

The notion of freedom and voice was also important to the way that expressivist process writing developed. Elbow (1973) argued that when writers write they often feel constrained by other stages of writing, particularly editing. He compared writing to

speaking and explained how in speaking, except in special circumstances like diplomatic circles or when we are hyper-aware of the consequences of our words, we let our words flow freely. As soon as we sit down to write, however, we get “nervous, jumpy [and] inhibited” (p. 6) because we are trying to edit and create at the same time. As a result, Elbow proposed one of the most long-lasting and significant contributions of the expressivist movement, a technique which has become standard in writing classes today: freewriting. In this activity, students are asked to write without stopping for ten minutes. By forcing thoughts onto paper before they can be filtered through institutionalized thinking processes, writers are able to get at their inner voice and find out what they really think. In other words, at the philosophical foundation of Elbow’s approach is the claim that social influences detract from a pure truth hidden under the layers of cultural input (Berlin, 1982). Freewriting was an attempt to get at ideas free of cultural or social influence. While social constructionists argue that this is impossible, the activity, at the very least, is a useful heuristic for exploring ideas. To the critics who suggested that most of what is produced is garbage, Elbow responded that it is better to have the garbage on the outside where it can be discarded, rather than on the inside distracting the individual voice from what it really wants to say. Hunt and Reither built on freewriting when they created inkshedding. They shared Elbow’s notions that writing needed to be quick and spontaneous, but took the writing into a meaningful social context by giving writers and immediate audience³.

³ Although in recent discussions, Hunt has argued that inkshedding was never meant to be un-edited, introductions typically suggest that the writing in inkshedding is freewriting. In many ways, this kind of introduction to inkshedding (especially in classrooms, which, unfortunately, are beyond the scope of this study) meets the more cognitivists process demands and ideas of Moffett (1968) and Britton et. al. (1975) who argue for individual expressive writing before more formalized and theoretical writing.

This use of freewriting reflects a notion that was also important to Hunt and Reither—that writing is an organic process, or, as Murray and Elbow both argued, it is impossible to know what will be written before writing. Ideas come through the process of writing, so thinking through and outlining before writing will not accomplish the purpose of the writing. Writing grows and develops and ends as something different than it started out. Part of the freedom of the writing process is allowing the writing to do so. Hunt and Reither sought to use writing in inkshedding as a way of mutually exploring ideas.

Despite initial dismissal because of its lack of scientific rigour, by 1980 (Young, 1980) expressivism had firmly rooted itself as an approach to writing instruction by giving pedagogical support to empowering individual writers. Social rhetoricians suggested that, by privileging the individual, expressivism is ineffectual in the real world (Faigley, 1986; Berlin, 1988). However, the expressivist movement attempted to reconcile these views through synthesized notions of expressive and social process writing (Hill, 1990; Fishman & McCarthy, 1995).

In short, the process movement, both cognitivist and expressivist, sparked a movement in composition studies that continues to influence writing pedagogy today. Like the political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, the process approach to writing was empowering. It helped to reconceptualize the way teachers and scholars understand writing. As a result, process writing has come to mean:

devoting increased attention to writers and the activities in which writers engage when they create and produce a text, as opposed to analyzing and attempting to produce ‘model’ texts. (Clark, 2003, p. 7)

In other words, the understanding of writing as a process has empowered both teachers and students as it focused on writers as individual people, instead of on final written texts. It helped pedagogues approach writing instruction as movement through stages and allowed people like Hunt and Reither to explore writing as a heuristic in inkshedding. It also drove them to experiment with alternative kinds of writing practices including the exploration of expressive writing, developing an awareness of audience, and writing as a process of learning. The resulting process-oriented methods like conferencing, strategies for invention and revision (including editing as a final stage of revision) are now standard practices in writing classrooms (Clark, 2003).

Canada

Through this brief overview of writing theory from the 1960s to the 1980s, however, the presence of a Canadian movement in composition studies is conspicuously absent. This is not for lack of scholars in the field in Canada, but rather, a lack of a unified Canadian institution that was able to pull Canadian scholars together. As a result, Canadians interested in the study of writing were forced to attend conferences across the border in order to take part in the growing excitement in the field. A seminal point in writing studies in Canada came in 1979 when Carleton University in Ottawa hosted the first international conference devoted entirely to writing.

Two of the prime movers of this conference were Ian Pringle and Aviva Freedman. By the time this conference came about, research in writing studies drew heavily on theories of cognitive practices but was also being influenced by more expressivist innovations. As one participant of the conference explained:

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. What was clear in that conference was that aside from what one might call the James Britton school, studies in North America on writing were largely drawing on cognitive psychology and were thus almost always experimental. There was a refreshingly growing interest in writing as a process that emerged from the work of Donald Murray and Donald Graves at the University of New Hampshire, a focus that had widened in its range to include both children and adult writers. (Personal communication, 2/2/2006)

Thus, Canadian scholars were very much aware of the growing trends in writing studies, and were doing their best to participate in the process movement. Part of the way they did this was by meeting informally with other Canadian scholars at American conferences dedicated to writing. As Anthony Paré explained, most of these meetings were unexpected and accidental. When Canadians attended American conferences, they “randomly bumped into each other at conferences, and were shocked, surprised, and delighted to find that there was a fellow Canadian interested in writing research” (Personal interview, 12/5/2006). Occasionally, meetings were more organized. At one conference in Wyoming, several Canadian scholars, including Jim Reither, Russ Hunt, Chris Bullock, Anne Greenwood, David Reiter, Susan Stevenson, and Kay Stewart, gathered together as a group of Canadian scholars and, acknowledging the absence of any structure to pull Canadian scholars together, decided to work together to facilitate a Canadian community of peers. Primarily facilitated by Jim Reither and Russ Hunt, they

began a network for Canadians interested in the study and teaching of writing and reading. This loose network has since evolved into the more formal Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning (CASLL).

As Jim Reither (1985) explained, they wanted to provide a place for a Canadian discussion. He wrote:

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. (p. 3)

And so, by networking and spreading the word around to as many Canadians as they could, Jim Reither and Russ Hunt began a newsletter called W&R/T&P (Writing and Reading/Theory and Practice). Jim Reither (1985) explained the goal of the newsletter in the following way:

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. (p. 3)

Thus, Hunt, Reither and the other founding members of the community had a vision of a community in which intellectual inquiry would be stimulated. When they started, because of geographical logistics, the only way to do this was through writing—hence the birth of the newsletter. Importantly, however, the newsletter was a collaborative effort including nationwide contributions and readership. This kind of collaboration on a subject of deep importance to the participants served to form the basis of a community that has continued to grow.

Interestingly, this collective approach to writing, which is built on ideas that peers collaborate and work together to create knowledge, anticipated the next movement in writing studies. Work by Kuhn (1970), Geertz (1973), and Rorty (1979) laid a foundation for understanding basic social theories of knowledge, community, and language. Social

constructionist theorists argue that knowledge is created when experts within communities use common language to describe and draw conclusions about what they see. As the majority of a community agrees on the interpretation of observations, knowledge is created and established. Therefore, knowledge is a consensual understanding and interpretation of observed phenomena. Established facts change when enough anomalies occur to challenge established assumptions, and experts are forced to revisit and recreate their knowledge (Kuhn, 1970). However, this knowledge does not exist outside the interpretive framework of communities. The strength of communities provides a paradigm in which to make sense of observations. Society impacts how we understand or interpret what we see (Geertz, 1973). The way that communities and societies understand or interpret observations and turn them into knowledge is through language. Thus, knowledge is embedded in language (Bruffee, 1986). These ideas drove a social approach to writing.

A social approach to writing

In the 1980s many scholars (Berlin, 1988; Bizzell, 1983; Faigley, 1986) became critical of the work being done in the process writing movement because it failed to account for the social contexts in which writers write⁴. Social rhetoricians instead began looking at writing that was taking place in meaningful contexts. As Dias et al. (1999) explained, a social theory of writing argues that:

The contexts of writing not only influence it (facilitating it or frustrating it or nudging it in a particular direction) but are integral to it. The context is not simply the contingent circumstances within which we happen to

⁴ Hunt and Reither's dissatisfaction with the social aspect of freewriting that seemed meaningless without an audience drove them to exchange response texts in the creation of inkshedding.

switch on the writing motor. Writing is not a module that we bring along and plug into any situation we find ourselves in. Rather, the context constitutes the situation that defines the activity of writing; to write *is* to address the situation by means of textual production. (p. 17)

This notion of social situatedness finds basis in the work of social rhetoricians like Bakhtin (1986). Bakhtin argued that all use of language is connected in broader ways than the immediate context in which it occurs. As Dias et al. argued, it is dependent on “the procedure, regulations, relationships and activities that influence (and in turn are influenced by) the production of texts” (p. 9). Bakhtin suggested that anything an individual does or says is a culmination of all his or her background experiences, and the contexts in which those experiences have taken place.

Language is socially dynamic. That is to say, language, its use and its meaning varies depending on the context. It is imbued with connotations that carry forward into social interactions. This is important in writing studies because it reminds pedagogues that writing “is not a discrete clearly definable skill learned once and for all” (Dias et al., 1999, p. 9). Rather, it is “the outcome of continuing collaboration, of interactions that involve other people and their texts” (p. 10).

Some of the ways of studying the social context in writing came as scholars began to study writing outside the academy and moved to looking at real world writing practices in the workplace—or in other words, looking at the role of the community in which the writing takes place. The work of Knoblauch (1980), Odell and Goswami (1982), and Selzer (1983) looked at non-academic writing in specific workplace settings. This work typifies the ways that social rhetoricians revolutionized thinking about process writing

because it called into question the basic assumptions being generalized from academic writing processes to all writing processes. For example, Selzer (1982) observed, despite earlier findings that writing is recursive (Perl, 1979; Flower & Hayes, 1981), that writing in the engineering setting he studied was linear, with minimal time given to revision. This finding points to the specificity of context and how processes may vary according to context. Importantly, Selzer also claimed that the engineer he studied was highly sensitive to the reader, often writing for multiple readers with multiple agendas. This supported Knoblauch's (1980) work in corporate writing. Knoblauch explored the intentionality of writers and how complex the writing situations may be. Using a wide variety of samples from business, he showed how writers had to juggle various tasks for various audiences within the same text. In his research, for example, he found that at the same time writers had to sell a product in simple language, provide a legal document, and be accountable to multiple readers (from managers to internal reviewers), with the understanding that the document may contribute to the writers' promotion. This awareness of the social impact of a document was also supported in the work of Odell and Goswami (1982), who showed how insurance executives were able to explain rhetorical choices in their writing, thus showing a meta-rhetorical awareness of their writing.

The work of Dias et al. (1999) was especially important in exploring the social context in writing. Over seven years, the research team investigated and compared multiple workplace setting and their corresponding university settings. As the title of their research, *Worlds apart*, indicated, their work showed that school writing was far removed from the demands of workplace writing. Instead, each setting had its own

specific requirements, thus highlighting the dependence of writing on social context.

This social understanding of writing has evolved into another position in writing studies called genre theory. Genre theory contextualizes concerns with form and process within the social settings in which writing occurs. In the following chapter, I elaborate on this theory as a way of shaping and understanding my study of inkshedding.

Inkshedding

Responding in part to ideas of social constructionism, but also in large part to a growing frustration with student writing in the classroom, Russ Hunt and Jim Reither attempted to devise a classroom activity that would create meaningful writing for the students. Motivated by ideas of writing as a process of discovery, writing as rhetorical (i.e., the use of language for the communication of a position or point of view), and writing as social interaction, they sought to give students a real social context in which to write. As Hunt (2004) explained:

We wanted...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. (par 1, <http://www.stthomasu.ca/~hunt/dialogic/inkshed.htm>)

As a result, they created a writing activity called inkshedding. Over time, this writing activity, and the philosophies that motivated its creation, became the hallmark of the Canadian community that Hunt and Reither began. The newsletter dropped its awkward title of W&R/T&P in favor of *Inkshed*. And the conference that followed two years after the newsletter was born became known as the Inkshed conference. The initial

community, which started with a few people subscribing to a newsletter, now hosts an annual conference, an active listserv, and even the occasional publication. What drives the community and continues to hold it together is a passion not just for studying and learning about writing, but actually using writing to generate knowledge and community to use language in socially meaningful ways. (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5.)

Summary

Bakhtin (1986) wrote, “any utterance⁵ is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (p. 69). In other words, language and the way we use it is dependent on discussions that have taken place both through history and in parallel interactions. As a researcher, I recognize that I am stepping into a field and communities that have rich histories and cultural developments which I am only able to experience in the context of writing studies in 2007. In this chapter, I have briefly outlined my current understanding of the events and theories that contextualize the development and growth of the Inkshed community. The chapters that follow owe their existence to the patient and dedicated work of the scholars who established not just the field of writing studies, but the language that allows it to continue and interact with other fields. In the following chapter, I complexify this brief overview of writing studies and the birth of Inkshed by expanding on social theories of writing in a discussion of genre theory, which is complimented by theories of communities of practice. In so doing, I overlay a theoretical framework and create a new context, heavily dependent on the past, within which to examine the current role of writing and community—specifically, how inkshedding contributes to membership in the Inkshed community.

⁵ Bakhtin explained the concept of utterance as a unit of speech that is used for communication. It is spoken (or written) with the expectation of response or continued social interaction and is the basis for communication. I elaborate more on this concept in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Theoretical perspective

In the previous chapter, I provided not only an historical context for the emergence of the Inkshed community and inkshedding activity, but also, through the discussion of social constructionism, an introduction to theoretical and research perspectives from which to understand writing processes and the social nature of writing. In this chapter, I develop that theoretical perspective to build a framework within which to understand my research. (Chapter 4 follows up with specific methodologies.)

My research seeks to understand the ways that writing processes contribute to collective membership. I explore this question by examining the ways that inkshedding facilitates membership in the Inkshed collective. In other words, I seek to understand the experience of inkshedding and how it contributes to the social movement of participation—from outsider to insider, or from a position of peripheral participation to full participation. This exploration includes not just the process of becoming a full participant in the Inkshed community, but also, in order to understand participation, what it means to be an Inkshedder. Several theories have helped to frame a perspective from which to explore these questions. First, the theory of communities of practice (CoPs), as elaborated by Wenger (1998), provides a position from which to explore both the nature of the Inkshed community (or what it means to be a member of it), as well as the processes involved in becoming a full participant. It does so through embedded explanations of identity, practice and learning. I will explore these perspectives in this chapter and their value to my research, but also acknowledge the limitations and weaknesses of the theory. One of the significant limitations to the theories of CoPs is

lack of attention to language. I therefore draw on Barton and Hamilton's (2005) work in literacy and CoPs to add a framework for understanding writing and language within Inkshed. This ties in with my final section on genre theory, which helps to describe the relationship between writing practices and the communities that use them—in this case, the relationship between inkshedding and Inkshed.

Communities of Practice

The theory of CoPs, as conceptualized by Wenger (1998), and Lave and Wenger (1991) (and Rogoff and Lave, 1984), provides a framework from which to explore collectives and membership within those collectives. The theory of CoPs has gained much popularity in recent years and has been widely used from studies of workplace communities (Lesser & Storck, 2001; Boud & Middleton, 2003), to studies of teaching and integration in educational settings (Zeegers, 2000; Sutherland, et al., 2005). Dias et al. (1999) used the theory of CoPs in conjunction with genre theory and activity theory to understand writing practices both in school and the corresponding workplace. They concluded that:

Whether writing alone or with others, the writer is in a role, is situated in an organization or institution, among people, in a dialogic relationship with other texts..., within a cultural setting where writing is one other means of making one's mark or the sole means, within communities that impose a history of genres, institutional values and habits.... (p. 223)

My work reinforces this position. The work of Dias et al. suggests that the usefulness of the theory of CoPs lies in the ways in which it describes social interactions and dynamics. It helps to expose the ways that individuals learn to participate in various

collectives, and what that participation means. My research continues this work of joining CoPs and writing practices to reinforce the conclusions reached by Dias et al..

Wenger (1998) explained the basic idea behind CoPs in the following way:

Being alive as human beings means that we are constantly engaged in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds, from ensuring our physical survival to seeking the most lofty pleasures. As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words, we learn.

Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations.

These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities *communities of practice* [italics his]. (p. 45)

Thus, CoPs, according to Wenger (<http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm>, accessed 01/03/2007), “are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (par 4). Or, as Barton and Tusting (2005) explained, “the starting point for the idea of a community of practice is that people typically come together in groupings to carry out activities in everyday life, in the workplace, and in education” (p. 2). Thus, a CoP is not just a collective, but is a group of people who participate in shared actions for a common purpose.

According to Wenger, everyone participates in a variety of CoPs from workplace, to social life, to living situation, to hobbies and so on. Co-workers in an office practice a framework of rules, routines, and rituals. There may be conflict; there may be agreement; there may be both. Different workers have different responsibilities, and yet, all are bound together within the same framework that pulls them together. That is, despite possible conflicts, disparities, and differences, members of a CoP share an interdependence. (See the concept of mutual engagement later in this chapter.)

Similarly, students in a study group follow certain patterns and behaviours in an effort to achieve a collective purpose (i.e., to do well in class). The study group establishes its own informal characteristics and rules that govern practices of membership (such as how much time is acceptable for chatting, who is responsible for which assignments, how long meetings will go on, individual responsibilities, and so on). As students meet together they learn together. The learning process incorporates far more than covering the material assigned by the professor. It includes negotiating understandings and meanings together.

Some communities are more tightly structured than others and are easier to identify—like a workplace. Others may be less tangible—like a community in an internet chat room the members of which never actually meet face to face, know real names or other characteristics, but who share common interests, purposes, and activities. Often, memberships in communities are left undefined because of the loose nature of the collective.

Because humans tend to be social by nature, memberships in communities are multiple. One might be both a co-worker and part of a student study group. In my case,

as I began my entrance to the Inkshed community, I entered as a student, a researcher, a teacher, a mother, a girlfriend, a Mormon⁶, and so on. Each of these titles represents a different community to which I belonged. Sometimes they overlap and enhance each other; other times they may be in conflict. Regardless, they describe a variety of complex social practices in which people engage when they share a common purpose. Within these communities, learning takes place as members participate in practices. As individuals learn to participate in collectives, and feel like they belong to the community, their identity grows to reflect membership in the collective, just as mine has a teacher, mother, and so on. Thus, the following sections elaborate first on identity, second, on the way practice informs identity, and finally, on learning.

Identity

From work in psychology (Bruner, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to work in cultural and race studies (Giroux & McLaren, 1994; West, 1993), to literacy studies (Lankshear, Gee, Knobel & Searle, 1997; Street, 1985) and beyond, discussions of identity infuse multiple conversations. I recognize the broad and multi-layered concepts associated with each of the different conversations about identity. I recognize also that identities are complex and dynamic. They consist of a variety of roles such as student, mother, teacher, girlfriend, and so on that evolve as a result of practices specific to the community. For example, by paying tuition, going to class, and otherwise engaging in student practices, I take on the role of student. Practices and their subsequent roles vary according to circumstance, that is, according to which collective the individual is most actively taking part in at a given time. Different roles and participation in different communities may conflict or complement each other. As Hanley, Sturdy, Finchan, and

⁶ An identity I mention here because it plays a significant part in the data I present in later chapters.

Clark (2006) explained, “individuals bring to a community a personal history of involvement with workplace, social and familial groups whose norms may complement or conflict with one another” (p. 642). Although I am at once mother and student, I am more mother when I am at home and engaging in the practices of motherhood. While this often conflicts with my student role as I try to incorporate studies between meals, laundry and so on, I continue to maintain membership in both a student CoP and parent or family CoP. The intention of this study is to understand the process of learning to participate in the collective practices of Inkshed and to take on the role of Inkshedder (an identity that I elaborate on in Chapter 5). Therefore, my purpose is not to get into what constitutes identity *per se*, but rather, to explore identity as a continuing process of membership.

This view of identity as a process of membership is supported by Wenger (1998), who explained the concept of identity as, “a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities” (p. 5). In other words, identity is about how individuals change and are reshaped as they learn to participate in collectives. Thus, my study seeks to explore an experience of “becoming” in the Inkshed community.

Like Wenger, who posits identity as co-constituted with communities and their practices, I believe that:

Our identity includes our ability and our inability to shape the meanings that define our communities and our forms of belonging.... Building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities. (1998, p. 145)

Thus, identity grows and develops in conjunction with social interactions. Identity and membership are, for my purposes, synonymous. I learn to participate in the Inkshed collective by engaging in community practices. Talking about my membership in the Inkshed community is talking about how I function and interact within that community based on my constantly evolving identity. This perspective, that identity depends on social interactions, draws on a Bakhtinian understanding of identity, one that sees identity as being co-constituted through dialogue with others. Taylor (1994), who used the work of Bakhtin in his philosophical pursuit of a dialogic self, explained that individuals develop identity, or learn to participate in a community, through interactions with others. He said:

We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us. (p. 32)

Thus, “becoming in the context of the community” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5), or changing who one is, happens through meaningful interaction with others in the collective.

Interestingly, this process of identity is in keeping with the work of Britton et al. (1975) and Moffett (1968) who suggested that learning is mediated through social interactions and that writing is a process. (See Chapter 2). In Inkshed, an individual’s identity or membership may change (one may learn to engage in the community) through meaningful exchange of language with others.

Thus, the social interactions in which individuals engage help to shape and form identities. Identity is a developing process of membership. In the study of Inkshed, part of my goal is to look at the process of arriving with my personal histories, roles, and practices (mother, teacher, student, and so on), and explore the experience of learning

how to fully participate in Inkshed. In other words, this study looks at the process of becoming an Inkshedder. Becoming an Inkshedder happens through a process of learning to participate. Thus, the following section describes participation through a theory of practice. The section after that examines the actual learning process as described by legitimate peripheral participation.

Practice

In order to be considered a CoP, or a collective that shares common practices, a group will have three defining characteristics, according to Wenger (1998): mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Wenger explained each of these characteristics. First, when members of a community share a commitment to, and participation in, a common interest, they share a domain. The domain reflects what Wenger called the mutual engagement of community members. By this he explained that in order to be a CoP, group members negotiate and create meaning in regard to their common interest by participating with each other in the community. As is further explicated by genre theory (see later in this chapter), these negotiations do not take place in isolated or disassociated circumstances. For example, Inkshed and the engagement that occurs at Inkshed conferences takes place within a particular historical context (see Chapter 2) and as Chapter 5 explains, the engagement at conferences is reinforced by the collective values of the community.

Engagement is not to be confused with a utopian homogeneity in which everyone works happily together. Although individuals engage with each other to negotiate their domain, that engagement may come in the form of debate, challenge, or competition. Thus, mutual engagement describes the way members of a community participate for a

common purpose. The purpose is defined and negotiated through the process of participation. In the Inkshed community, for example, mutual engagement is strongly encouraged through opportunities for dialogic interactions (both oral and written). As later chapters describe, the inkshedding activity deliberately encourages individuals to engage and negotiate common interests.

The second defining characteristic of a CoP describes groups of people who share similar interests, and form a community in which members learn from each other through joint activities. In so doing they create what Wenger calls joint enterprise—a common purpose achievable through mutual accountability. Joint enterprise describes the way that a community is able to function and is integrally related with mutual engagement as it reflects the results of the negotiation that takes place as participants generate understanding, knowledge, and purpose. As Wenger explained, “It [joint enterprise] is defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it” (p. 77). This ongoing process of negotiation reflects how the group functions (Smith, 2003). Thus, whereas mutual engagement describes the process of negotiating common interest and purpose, joint enterprise describes a common purpose or goal attainable through mutual participation. For example, Inkshed uses inkshedding, dialogue and so on to engage its members. This engagement facilitates the common purpose to explore and study theories and pedagogies for studying writing and reading—and even more fundamentally, to engage in dialogic interactions (see Chapter 5). This exploration could not take place without commitment and responsibility from members. So, for example, some organize the conferences, others the talent show, others present papers or works in progress, and everyone agrees to inkshed. (These ideas will be expounded in greater detail in later

chapters in which I present my data.) Simply put, in the case of the Inkshed community, the concern for language has led to a deliberate use of the language through, primarily, the inkshedding activity (but also other activities that will be explored in the data) and thus has created a joint enterprise of dialogic engagement (in the study and teaching of writing and reading).

For the third defining characteristic of a CoP, Wenger (1998) explained that the members' common area of interest must stretch into practice. This practice is known as shared repertoire. "Over time, the joint pursuit of an enterprise creates resources for negotiating meaning" (p. 82). Thus, members have a repertoire of resources from which to draw in order to facilitate their enterprise. For example, language, actions, and even visual cues are standardized and therefore become tools in the ongoing negotiation of meaning. Thus, the practice reflects the capabilities that the group produces (Smith, 2003). This concept resonates with theories of genre, which I discuss later in this chapter in that values and practices mutually inform each other. Thus, in the Inkshed community, not only do participants share a common interest in writing, but they also use the inkshedding writing process to explore more ideas about writing⁷. While this study primarily looks at the inkshedding practice as a tool for negotiating community identity, many other tools (such as the talent show⁸, the performance-like nature of presentations, a reading table, and so on) also facilitate joint enterprise. While some of these tools may

⁷ This statement is actually problematic in that one reason some people are unable to move into full participation in the Inkshed community is because, while they may have overlapping interests, they do not share the same fundamental questions and interests that hold the community together. Discussion of data in Chapter 6 elaborates on this issue.

⁸ As I describe in Chapter 5, the talent show is a long-standing tradition of the conference. It is held the last night of the weekend and everyone is encouraged to participate. The term talent is used loosely.

be used at other conferences too, each community has their own way of making them work. Therefore the use of these tools at Inkshed provides insights into the community.

By looking at the Inkshed community as a community of practice, I can use Wenger's characteristics of communities to understand the characteristics of the collective—to understand what holds them together and how they function. Identifying the common passion for language, writing, reading and teaching that pulls Inkshedders together, and how they act on those common passions by using them (i.e., writing about writing) provides an important basis for understanding what it means to be called, or to identify oneself as, an Inkshedder. However, participation in the community practices requires, for a newcomer, a kind of conversion—a way of learning how to participate, or learning how to appropriately use the tools of a shared repertoire. Part of my research explores this change and the learning process described in theories of CoPs helps to do this.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

CoPs describe situations in which learning takes place. The community's practices, as described above, facilitate that learning. Legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), as conceived by Lave and Wenger (1991) describes the process of learning in communities, that is, how participation in community practices facilitates membership. In this section I give a brief overview of LPP and its relevance to this study of the Inkshed community and the inkshedding writing activity. I begin this overview with the words of Lave and Wenger (1991).

Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and . . . the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full

participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. (p. 29)

Essentially, LPP describes a process in which learning takes place through social practices. Learning, Lave and Wenger argued, is not a process of isolated bits of knowledge being planted in the head of a student to be applied later in a test situation. Instead, learning is the process of acquiring skills by doing or by participating in meaningful ways in a community of practice, or in Wenger's (1998) words, LPP is the "process by which newcomers become included in a community of practice" (p. 100).

In order for newcomers to a community to participate in a community, there must be a means by which the newcomer can gain access to the community. In LPP participatory access comes through what Lave and Wenger (1991) identify as peripherality and legitimacy.

i. Peripherality

The term peripherality refers to positions that newcomers take in a community. Significantly, the term peripheral in this case does not mean marginal or unimportant. Instead, it describes a position in which one can learn and gain access to the collective. While an old-timer (a term used by Lave and Wenger to describe those members of the community who have had long-term meaningful participation in the community) participates in the community with full responsibility, a newcomer participates, but with

less risk or responsibility than an old-timer. Sometimes a mentor facilitates this participation to make the learning process clearer or more manageable. Newcomers are not on the outside looking in at the practice, but are within the practice in a peripheral way. For example, Lave and Wenger (1991) note how apprentice tailors “first learn to make hats and drawers, informal and intimate garments for children. They move on to more external, formal garments ending with the Higher Heights suits” (p. 71). This example shows how apprentices move from tasks where the risk or cost of failure is low to a position in which they have learned all the practices required for the highest level of sewing. Through careful and patient practice, new tailors learn the practices that move them to a position of expertise or full participation within the community.

This initial peripheral participation is also evident in the Inkshed community. Chapter 6 details the frequent feelings of anxiety that accompany a peripheral position in Inkshed and elaborates on the impacts of this positioning to membership in the community. This entire project in Inkshed is an exploration of this peripheral positioning and the movement that takes place through participation to find a location of full participation in the collective.

ii. Legitimacy

The other essential aspect to gaining access to a community is having legitimate participation. Newcomers need to be “treated as a potential member” (Wenger, 1998, p. 101). This concept describes the quality of the participation. Tasks and responsibilities are real and genuine, and contribute in a meaningful way to the collective (although for a newcomer, not so much as to jeopardize the community). Without the genuine potential

to join the community, the newcomer will never be able to move from the periphery to full participation. As Wenger explains:

Granting the newcomers legitimacy is important because they are likely to come short of what the community regards as competent engagement.

Only with enough legitimacy can all their inevitable stumblings and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion. (p. 101)

In other words, legitimacy opens a doorway to meaningful participation. In Chapter 7 this issue comes into play in my discussion of how texts are circulated and read. I explore the ways in which my participation was legitimized and the impact this had on my participation.

Concepts of both peripherality and legitimacy contribute fundamental perspectives to understanding the inkshedding experience.

Essentially, the theory of CoPs helps to explain the social dynamics of collectives. It provides a framework for understanding the interactions of community members, and highlights the ways in which membership is facilitated. For these reasons, I have chosen to use this theory. However, the theory of CoPs, as rendered by Wenger (1998), is not without weaknesses or limits. In the following section I outline some of the main weaknesses of Wenger's work and discuss the implications of these weaknesses for my work. Also, I draw on the work of Barton and Tusting (2004) to propose an additional aspect of CoPs for my study.

Critique

First, terminology used, especially by Wenger (1998), in describing the theory of CoPs is sometimes problematic. Barton and Tusting (2005) explained that conceptual terms are “slippery and elusive” (p. 6). One of the most problematic terms is the use of the word “community.” William’s (1983) work on keywords details the complexity of the term community. He discussed multiple meanings for the term including such variances as “common concern” and “various forms of common organizaion.” Other interpretations refer to geographic locations or a homogenous entity. Although Wenger warned against using it to describe a utopian kind of cohesiveness, the use of the term community is criticized as being too positive and for implying a harmonious configuration. As Cox (2005) argued, “the term ‘community’ does lure the reader into the trap of seeing it simply as a rather large, helpful and friendly, bounded group” (p. 532). This criticism is worth mentioning because of a propensity among devoted Inkshedders to idealize the community. As a participant, I have found myself caught up and converted to a utopian view and passion for the Inkshed collective. However, as a researcher, I have had to take a more critical perspective and address uncomfortable issues in the community that make it less than harmonious.

Second, part of the problem with seeing a CoP as a collective in which everyone gets along is that it fails to recognize issues of power. Thus, Wenger’s critics point to his failure to recognize the role of power differentials and the way that one’s ability or capacity to perform a role impacts the ways that meaning is negotiated and knowledge is created (Roberts, 2006). Perceptions of power and equality are not taken into account. However, as my data illustrate (especially in Chapter 7) the perception of a lack of

equality, or the belief that there is an “in-group,” influences the ways that newcomers participate in Inkshed. Officially, Inkshed has a board of directors. However, the role of this body is minimal and its activity is mostly limited to an occasional approval of a request for funding. The real power distribution lies in informal but well-entrenched echelons of membership based largely on length of time in the collective. The highest level is that of original Inkshedder. This is a group that can in no way be breached—defined as those who attended the first Inkshed conference over twenty years ago. Old-timers (a term used by Lave and Wenger), or long-time Inkshedders may come close, but will never have the same level (although original Inkshedders are also old-timers). Russ Hunt, particularly, holds this prestige and, as a result, is turned to for leadership on how to inkshed. Another way in which power differentials are manifest is in the presence of expert scholars in the field inkshedding with, for example, graduate students. Despite attempts at equality, graduate students are uncomfortable engaging with experts. Thus, roles in a broader academic community may influence social dynamics in Inkshed.

Third, and closely related to issues of power, Wenger (1998) failed to address the role of, or need for trust. Sharing of knowledge, if not severely limited, is at best more difficult without trust. This is because, “trust, familiarity and mutual understanding, developed in their social and cultural contexts, are prerequisites for the successful transfer of tacit knowledge” (Roberts, 2006, p. 628). As my data suggest, trust is an essential component of the successful functioning of inkshedding and the Inkshed conference. Chapter 5 discusses some of the ways that trust is manifest at Inkshed conferences as well as the importance of trust as a defining characteristic of the Inkshed community.

Fourth, Roberts (2006) raised the issue of predisposition. According to the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), everyone learns equally to participate in communities. Change and learning come through practice. However, Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus challenges the notion that learning comes only through participation. Habitus, which Bourdieu defines as "the conditioning associated with a particular class of conditions of existence" (p. 53), explains that thought is unconsciously acquired, is resistant to change and is transferable to different contexts (Roberts, 2006). This implies that participation alone does not allow a newcomer to learn. Rather, her pre-existing experiences and thoughts will shape the kinds of participation that take place. The background conditioning, which Bourdieu explained as social and cultural capital, makes a difference in the ways people participate. Therefore, newcomers seeking membership in a community may be more or less predisposed to negotiate, interpret, and share meaning and knowledge. That some people are predisposed to participate in Inkshed explains why some people so embrace the community (often to the extent that they call it their "family"), others are ambivalent about membership, and still others, after one conference, refuse to go back.

Finally, one of the most significant weaknesses of the CoPs theory for this study is its failure to overtly address the role of language. Because Inkshed is about language and uses language to learn about language, I would be remiss if I failed to build into my framework a structure for exploring language in the inkshedding process and Inkshed community. It is worth noting that although Inkshed takes place in a Canadian context and its members therefore deal, on a regular basis, with issues of language—French/English tensions, multiple dialects, and multilingualism to name a few—I have

not chosen to focus on these issues of language. Instead, the following section introduces one way that I have found useful to look at language and its role in CoPs.

Language

Barton and Hamilton (2005) argued that Wenger (1998) provided a richly textually mediated vignette on which to base his discussion of CoPs, but failed to elaborate or capitalize on the contribution of language to the community he described and its practices. Barton and Hamilton (2005), Tusting (2005), and Creese (2005) all worked from the premise that without incorporating language use into the theory of CoPs, Wenger missed a key element in understanding social processes. Because language and the use of it constitute such an integral part of Inkshed (it is, in fact part of its official title—Canadian Association for the Study of *Language* and Learning), I feel it necessary to acknowledge the role of language in understanding the community. I draw on the work of Barton and Hamilton in literacy and CoPs to facilitate this discussion.

Barton and Hamilton (2005) drew on literacy studies to integrate language use with CoPs. They argued that most ethnographic research that looks at literacy studies does so through descriptions of social actions. This is because recent rhetorical theories (Bizzell, 2002; Dobrin & Weiser, 2002; Mahala & Swilky, 2003; Paré, 2002; Vandenberg, 1999) argue that language is social action. Language is not only about form and structure, but is also the doing of a social act. Because the theory that explains CoPs describes social actions, or ways in which participants engage with each other, it is appropriate that literacy studies, or ways of understanding language as social action, be incorporated as a way of understanding the interactions (particularly because engagement

is largely mediated through language). (This kind of work parallels and overlaps work being done in genre studies which I describe in the next section.)

Based on a theoretical position that explores literacy as social practice, Barton and Hamilton proposed a series of points to consider when looking at literacy in CoPs. Three of these points are useful in understanding the kinds of texts, language, and practices that take place in the Inkshed community. The points that inform this study include: literacy events, literacy practices, and social structure. They are important for the ways in which they reflect the role of writing in social contexts like the Inkshed conference.

Literacy events

The term ‘literacy event’ points to the fact that many of the social interactions in which people take part are based on and mediated by texts. According to Barton and Hamilton (1998), literacy events are:

activities where literacy has a role. . . . Events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them. The notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy, that it always exists in a social context. (p. 8)

In other words, a literacy event describes a social context in which literacy (i.e., the production and/or interpretation of a text) is used as a reflection of practices of the social context. According to Barton and Hamilton (2005), most spoken interactions (including day-to-day interactions) are highly mediated by texts. Consider, for example, how in a classroom discussions grow out of text-book readings; in an office setting a discussion of a memo or rearticulation of an email; at home, the request of a teenager to go out as a result of an MSN interaction; an argument over a grocery or to-do list; a bed-time story,

and so on. Thus, Barton and Hamilton argued that texts have roles in oral discourses—both directly and indirectly and therefore suggested that literacy events should constitute a basic unit of analysis in exploring CoPs. That is, researchers should explore texts and conversations around those texts as a way of understanding collective practices.

This perspective that looks at how texts are used in social interactions is useful in the case of inkshedding. It facilitates an understanding of the role of the inkshedding texts in the context of the conference and how they are used to both encourage dialogue and to reinsert dialogue into a conversation through publication. This is an important part of understanding how the community functions because it describes the practices that make Inkshed a community. In both Chapters 7 and 8 I explore the ways that inkshedding texts are central to literacy events. The practices around the texts generate social interactions. In Chapter 7 I explore these social interactions and conversations by looking at the ways texts are read, and in Chapter 8 I look at the ways that texts are published (both of which constitute multiple literacy events at an Inkshed conference). In addition, in Chapter 5, I look at how texts, and the practices that they encourage, reinforce collective values of the community.

Literacy practices

Literacy practices “refer to the general cultural ways of utilizing literacy which people draw upon in particular situations” (Barton, 2001, p. 96). In other words, the literacy events I described above result from more general practices. People draw from experiences in broader categories to be able to interpret and function in a literacy event. For example, drawing from background knowledge of a broad area of academic pursuits can help individuals negotiate between disciplines with similar demands and

expectations. This overlaps with the concept of habitus that I referred to when discussing predisposition, but focuses specifically on knowledge or language practices. In the case of inkshedding, practices from different communities overlap (e.g., from classroom practices, other conference settings, background experience in writing and so on. By drawing on the concept of general practices, I look at strategies that newcomers draw on to facilitate participation in inkshedding. I address some of these strategies in Chapters 6 and 7 as I explore the ways that people both write and read inkshed texts.

Social structure

If the term literacy events describes practices and dialogue associated with a given text, and literacy practices describe more generalizable kinds of patterns that transfer into practice from one literacy event to another, then social structure refers to the ways in which power distributions influence both practices and events. Like the criticism leveled against Wenger by Roberts (2006) for failing to acknowledge power differentials, the concept of social structure explores issues of power distribution in social contexts. In other words, literacy events take place not just in real-time social parameters, but also within broader social patterns. Therefore, this point helps to explore power differentials associated with the reading and writing of texts. As I report in Chapter 7, this issue of power is highly relevant in inkshedding. Although the literacy events and practices associated with Inkshed and inkshedding are theoretically democratic, clear issues of marginalization and favoritism emerge within them

In short, by exploring literacy events, practices and social structures in the inkshedding experience, I am able to add increased dimensions to understanding the role of writing in social interactions. That is, by looking at the negotiations, conversations

and texts that emerge out of inkshedding, I get a clearer sense of the practices that define the Inkshed community. I also gain insight into the role of texts as generative of action. While Barton and Hamilton's work specifically focused on the role of literacy within the framework of CoPs, similar kinds of explorations to understand the relationship between text and communities exist in the related field of genre studies. Genre theory has also had a significant impact on me in my exploration of the inkshed experience.

Genre Theory

Genre theory has proved useful in my research because it seeks to contextualize writing practices within the communities that use them, and explores the ways in which communities and their writing practices are mutually constitutive. This then helps to inform the relationship between the inkshedding activity and the community that uses it. Many scholars who embrace the notion of writing as a social act understand writing through genre theory (Miller, 1984; Bazerman, 1994; Swales, 1990; Medway, 2002; Paré, 2002; Devitt, 2004). As Miller (1984) explained, the purpose of using genre theory to understand texts is that "it seeks to explicate the knowledge that practice creates" (p. 27). In other words, it provides a way to understand the social context that drives the creation of a text. It also shows how the text is a response to the situation in which it occurs.

Miller (1984), in her landmark writing on genre, said that genre is "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (p. 159). Similarly, Paré and Smart (1994) suggested that genre is "a broad rhetorical strategy enacted within a community in order to regularize writer/reader transactions in ways that allow for the creation of particular knowledge" (p. 146). According to Russell (1997) genres are "typified ways of interacting in and among some activity system(s)" (p. 513). According to Berkenkotter

and Huckin (1995) genres are “dynamic rhetorical forms that are developed from actors’ responses to recurrent situations and that serve to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning” (p. 4). Schryer (1994) identified genres as “stabilized-for-now or stabilized enough sites of social and ideological action” (p. 108). And Freedman and Medway (1994) gave the broad explanation that “the new term ‘genre’ has been able to connect a recognition of regularities in discourse types with a broader social and cultural understanding of language in use” (p. 1). Each of these definitions reflects complex relationships and ideas. A common thread between them, however, suggests that genre reflects human action as realized through texts within a social situation. This social situation describes a rhetorical context.

Rhetorical context

Rhetorical context refers to a shared audience or community, purpose and exigence. Bitzer (1968) explained that a rhetorical situation is a:

complex of persons, events, objects and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. (p.

13)

The rhetorical context describes the situation in which language is used—including the participants, setting, tools and so on. The complex term in Bitzer’s description, which bears further exploration, is “exigence.”

The term “exigence” is commonly used in descriptions and explanations of genre theory, and while essential to the discussion, is often slippery and difficult to pin down.

For the purposes of this research, I draw on Miller's (1984/1994) work and take the position that "exigence is a set of particular social patterns" (1994, p. 32). It describes a socially constructed need for specific kinds of talk or writing. The ability to function, perform, or interact appropriately (i.e., in timeliness, form, content, and so on) within rhetorical situations requires that participants recognize the need for specific kinds of responses and that they are able to appropriately engage in the moment. Thus, exigence describes appropriacy of response in a rhetorical situation.

The role of response in genre theory has been described by several theorists (Bakhtin, 1986; Freedman, 1994). They articulated the ways that exigence leads to appropriate responses to the social situation, but that because responses are uttered in a social context, they expect another response or utterance in return. For example, Freedman (1994), in her article "Anyone for tennis," described genre as a tennis game and within it response as the concept of uptake. In order to return a shot in tennis, the player must first receive the ball and then play it back. Applied to genre theory, this describes situated language use and the way that participants respond to one another. The tennis players, or speakers, respond to a specific social situation within that situation. They are connected through the ball. They do not simply serve the ball, but also expect it to return. This is similar to Bakhtin's (1986) notion of dialogism. Bakhtin maintained that nothing can be said that is not part of a larger context; for example, previous conversations, experiences, and so on. Everything we say or think has a previous history and influence from all of life's experiences. Building on this notion of connectedness, Bakhtin described how people speak not in linguistic units but in acts of speech called utterances that are complete and that expect a response. As he explained:

an utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and from without, giving rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations. (p. 94)

In other words, meaningful interactions take place through use of language units called utterances. These utterances are shaped, created, and understood through broad social interactions. In the case of an inkshedding text, an utterance could be an entire text and/or a small highlighted section—whatever takes place in and as part of a dialogic experience. In order to be effective and dialogic, they must be used appropriately.

In the same way that Freedman's notion of the players, the court, the rules of the game and so on constitute a situation in which interactions take place both through receiving and responding. Bakhtin explained that we speak anticipating an uptake from another—expecting a connection—and the utterance is indicative of this. Recognizing when and how to appropriately utter⁹ or respond in a dialogue or rhetorical moment is critical. Genre scholars identify the ability to recognize the moment at which an utterance is appropriate and relevant, in addition to the ability to identify the next likely link in the chain of appropriate utterances, as *kairos* (Artemeva, 2006; Bourdieu, 1990; Schryer, 2006). *Kairos* is a term taken from classical rhetoric that means timeliness and is used in genre theory to describe timeliness of responses.

Recurring Situations

Language and its uses are interconnected, each response dependent on specific contexts and the response that went before. However, situations are rarely isolated events

⁹ My term here to turn Bakhtin's concept of "utterance" into a verb or action of using an utterance in a dialogic discourse.

or without common features. A tennis game will always have a unique set of circumstances depending on players, experience and so on, but certain features have evolved as characteristic of a tennis game—rackets, a ball, a net, lines, rules of play and so on. This example illustrates how situations recur. Genre theory helps explain the way that social values lead to recurring situations and how recurring situations help to reinforce the social values that produce them. Rather than reinventing language each time a similar situation arises, typical kinds of forms emerge that eventually become standardized (Miller, 1984; Schryer, 1994; Devitt, 2004). These forms reflect community values and reinforce them in a reciprocal way (Schryer, 1994). Devitt (1993) explained this connection between language and values when she wrote “understanding the group’s values, assumptions and beliefs is enhanced by understanding the set of genres they use, their appropriate situations and formal traits, and what those genres meant to them” (p. 584). The more formal traits are used in recurring situations, the more they are needed. As Devitt (2004) explained, “language users first respond in fitting ways and hence similarly to recurring situations, then the similarities among those appropriate responses become established as generic conventions” (p. 14). The influence of social values on writing practices can be seen in inkshedding. As Chapter 5 explains, one of the values of the Inkshed community that pulls the members together is a passion for learning and exploring writing as a social act. This interest and driving force to learn more both about writing and from each other has established annual conferences (a recurring situation) in which participants can learn from each other. Importantly, the recurring situations (i.e., conferences—which themselves comprise recurring situations from inkshedding to talent night) are never identical, but enough commonalities exist that they can be called

recurring situations. For instance, although the Inkshed conference may overlap in membership and themes with other Canadian organizations concerned with composition studies, such as CATTW¹⁰ or CSSR¹¹, they would never be confused one for the other. The focus on teaching and learning together through inkshedding is particular to Inkshed conferences. The social values have instilled particular aspects that are consistent. For example, all sessions are concurrent, the conference site is isolated with little distraction, meals are eaten together, participants write after conference sessions, and so on. In turn, these consistent features both facilitate and reinforce an environment of learning.

These social values and recurring situations have led to a standardized writing in the Inkshed community known as inkshedding. As my data suggest, inkshedding has standard features, which both reflect and reinforce community values (see Chapter 5). For example, inkshedding is a place to try new ideas. The safety that the activity provides (through, for instance, anonymity) for this experimentation allows for further innovation outside writing—in things like conference presentations or discussions around dining-room tables. This encouragement of new ideas is then fed back into the inkshedding activity and it becomes a reciprocal cycle. Thus, understanding inkshedding's genre-type characteristics as a researcher offers important insights in understanding how the writing process informed my participation and hence identity in Inkshed.

In short, genre is the result of a drive for meaningful and timely communication and shared understanding that recurs when situations recur and vice versa. The responses or actions within social situations are based on the values of the community in which they

¹⁰ Canadian Association of Teachers of Technical Writing

¹¹ Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric

occur. As they continue to recur, they reinforce the knowledge and values of the community in which they take place. Repeated rhetorical strategies produce stability both in social relations and knowledge construction. To borrow from Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), genres are “dynamic rhetorical forms that are developed from actors’ responses to recurrent situations and that serve to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning” (p. 4).

Thus, genre theory provides useful perspectives in studying the inkshedding activity and the Inkshed community because genre theory facilitates an exploration of the interrelationship between text and the community in which it occurs. It also provides a perspective from which to look at and understand the values of the community.

Summary

In this chapter, I have described the theories that have been most influential in my exploration of what it means to be an Inkshedder, the process of becoming an Inkshedder, and the role of writing in that process. Of primary importance is the work in CoPs because of the perspective that it gives for understanding communities and gaining membership in communities. Also important is the role of language in both maintaining a collective membership and joining that membership. Theories from literacy studies and genre help to elaborate the ways language contributes to communities.

This theoretical framework depends on a position of social constructionism—in other words, it requires an understanding that knowledge is a result of social interactions in communities of likeminded peers. Therefore, it is logical that the realization of this study should also draw on social constructionist notions. The following chapter explains the methodological or research framework that I used to study inkshedding and Inkshed.

Like the theoretical notions that drive the study, the methodological approaches are also situated within a framework of social constructionist ideas.

Chapter 4

Methodology

In Chapters 1 and 2, I contextualized my research by explaining my personal interest in inkshedding and the academic/intellectual context in which it developed. In Chapter 3, I introduced the theories that have helped to inform my study of inkshedding and Inkshed. In this chapter, I briefly describe the research framework that I have used to pursue my questions. In other words, in this chapter I present my methodology—a reflection of the kinds of questions I ask. Thus, to briefly recap my aim in studying inkshedding and Inkshed, I seek to understand the ways that inkshedding facilitates membership in the Inkshed community. Implicit in this goal is an attempt to understand the experience of becoming an Inkshedder in addition to understanding the community itself. These two aspects of my research follow three lines of inquiry. They include:

- The process of joining a community: What are the defining characteristics of the community? How do these characteristics shape the process of membership? What does membership mean? What processes facilitate membership?
- The role of writing in the membership process: What role does writing have in the community and in gaining membership? What writing processes are practiced in the community and to what end?
- The role of writing in communities: How does writing define and give life to the community? How does writing both inform practice and, in turn, reinforce collective values?

I believe that these lines of inquiry resonate not only with my experiences in Inkshed, but also with other experiences of community membership. For that reason, I

have stated them in more general terms that can, in the future, be used to look at other communities. However, in this study, it is important to note that I have pursued these questions through my own experiences of membership in Inkshed, verifying them with the experiences of other Inkshedders. Thus, the term community in each of the questions could be replaced with Inkshed, and the word “writing” preceded by “my” as a way of understanding these lines of inquiry through my experiences. Thus, because this research is a self-study, I draw on qualitative methodology to explain my perspectives.

This chapter begins with a general and brief explanation of qualitative research and why it serves as an appropriate approach to my research questions. I then identify some of the key approaches to qualitative research that have been most useful to this study. I have not limited myself to one pure approach. Rather, I have drawn from a variety of approaches and sources in order to build a rich set of data from which to understand the inkshedding experience in light of CoPs and genre theory¹². All of the methods I draw from address and shed light on my research questions. In addition, my methods bring perspectives that fit naturally with my line of inquiry. I have chosen methods that fall under the purview of qualitative research because theories of qualitative research share similar philosophies with Inkshed, that is, they are both built on notions of social constructionism and the collective creation of knowledge. In other words, like

¹² The conundrum, of course, in including the methodologies that I do, is that I leave others out. That I do not list other methodologies does not mean I have not explored them, or that they have not influenced me. In particular, questions of gender have come up during my study leading to the idea of a feminist perspective. I have consciously chosen not to pursue this perspective at this time in this study. While this could be seen as a weakness in my methodology, I felt, as I saw issues of gender arising in my data, that a feminist perspective would unlock so much that it deserves a study in and of itself. In addition, it would take my study beyond the scope of exploring the Inkshed experience and into deep critical perspectives. I felt strongly that before engaging in critical perspectives on power differentials, I needed to have a more basic conception of Inkshed and inkshedding. (I also questioned my own abilities as a researcher to be able to examine inkshedding from a feminist perspective.) Ultimately, my goal was not to deconstruct Inkshed power structures—rather, it was to understand how people learn to participate in communities through collective writing practices, and in part, how they negotiate inherent power structures in their writing.

current conceptions of qualitative research (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Denzin, 2006; Patton, 2002), both the Inkshed community and the inkshedding activity grew out of the idea that knowledge is socially generated, and that writing is a way of learning together.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research embodies a philosophical perspective that incorporates social constructs as a fundamental characteristic of research. I briefly explained the basis of social constructionism in Chapter 2 when I introduced the concept of social process writing. The same principles serve as the foundation for qualitative research. That is, individuals take part in communities. Within communities, they use language and practices to negotiate meaning and construct knowledge (Bruffee, 1984). Knowledge constructs depend on the context in which they occur and the language that is used. When applied to research, this means that researchers do not seek a clearly defined empirical truth that exists independently from human input. They see “the individual and his or her world as co-constituted” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 3). With social constructionism at its foundation, qualitative research recognizes that truth is neither external nor absolute. Rather, truth and knowledge are negotiated between both the research participant and the researcher (also a participant).

To explain the idea of constructing knowledge, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) described the role of a qualitative researcher as a bricoleur or quilt maker. Like the artisan, the qualitative researcher must pull pieces of experience together into a meaningful pattern or a design—much like a montage in film. They asserted that:

The interpretive bricoleur produces a *bricolage* [italics theirs]—that is, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. (p. 5)

Thus, a qualitative researcher must incorporate different voices, different perspectives, different points of view, and different angles of vision in a comprehensive and meaningful way. From methods, to theories, to data analysis, qualitative “research is an interactive process shaped by [the researcher’s] personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 9).

Within this framework, many approaches to research exist. Rather than adhering strictly to any one methodological approach, I draw, like the quilter or bricoleur, on several overlapping approaches in order to address the various perspectives that my questions raise. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) advocated a multimethodological approach of this nature when they wrote:

Objective reality can never be captured. We can know a thing only through its representations.... The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry. (p. 8)

The following sections briefly present the different methodological perspectives that I have employed in this research in order to put together a rich and multilayered study.

Phenomenology

Because my fundamental goal is to understand the experience of becoming a member of Inkshed and the role of writing in that experience, a logical approach to my study is one that explores experience. Like a phenomenologist, who seeks specifically to understand a shared human experience (Patton, 2002), I want to understand the lived experience of becoming an Inkshedder. According to Patton (2002) a phenomenological approach seeks “to know what people experience and how they interpret the world” (p. 106). Similarly, my study seeks to explore experiences of inkshedding and how these experiences shape an Inkshed membership.

In addition, Patton (2002) explained that, “the only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon directly for ourselves” (p. 106). My experiences with inkshedding are the basis for my research and I draw heavily on them as a source of data. Similarly, Van Manen (1997) suggested the need for “investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it” (p. 30). This calls for an understanding of, and participation in, a setting in which inkshedding naturally occurs (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In other words, researchers should be, “in the midst of the world of living relations and shared situations” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 32). As well, they should “actively explore the category of lived experience in all its modalities and aspects” (1997, p. 32). This was an important perspective to me as I began my research. I did not just sit back and observe. Rather, I participated fully in the experiences that lead to my identity as an Inkshedder, and I draw heavily on those experiences throughout this document. This position of participating in the experience

being studied overlaps with ethnography and participant observation as described in the following section.

Although phenomenology both values and seeks to understand lived experience, its goal is also to arrive at the essence of an experience, that is, what makes the experience unique and defines it. My goal is not necessarily to arrive at a describable or definable essence of an inkshedding experience. Instead, my goal is to understand an experience or process of joining the Inkshed community by drawing on my own experience and that of other participants. In addition, I seek specifically to understand the place of writing as a tool of membership—a phenomenological concern with experience does not necessarily address this kind of systematic question. Therefore, a phenomenological approach, while useful in exploring experience, does not satisfactorily address my research questions. Drawing on other methodologies will provide a richer framework.

Ethnography

Ethnography, traditionally used by anthropologists to study and understand the *other*, has laid the groundwork for qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Seeking to answer the fundamental question: “what is the culture of this group of people?” (Patton, 2002, p. 81), ethnography assumes that a group of people who share common practices will develop a culture. Ethnographers seek to understand that culture (Patton, 2002). They do so by “demonstrating the relationship between forms of heterogeneous action” (Baszanger & Dodier, 2004, p. 9). In other words, they document their observations of the ways that people interact with their surroundings and each other. For this reason, this approach is useful as it helps to explore both the nature of the

Inkshed community, and the relationships between individuals and collectives, and activities and the community.

One approach to ethnography is known as participant observation (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Trying to suspend or account for her beliefs, values, and interpretations, the researcher lives in a culture and tries to describe what is happening in the culture. Through the recording of observations, salient themes about the culture emerge. As Tedlock (2003) argued, the value of ethnography is in participation. She explained:

A key assumption has been that by entering into first hand interaction with people in their everyday lives, ethnographers can reach a better understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviours of their subjects than they can by using any other methods. (p. 190)

In addition, as a participant observer, the researcher can “simultaneously combine document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants” (Denzin, 1978, p. 103), as well as observe and introspect. Thus, participant observation provides the means for a rich variety of data, which I discuss later in this chapter.

By approaching the Inkshed community as a participant observer rather than as a traditional¹³ ethnographer, I address the criticism that I am looking at the culture as a marginal other. Conceptions of ethnography (like participant observation) recognize the problem of supposed objectivity and being removed from the culture through participation. In order to understand a culture, a researcher must participate (Baszanger & Dodier, 2004).

¹³ Denzin and Lincoln (2003) postulate seven stages of ethnography. The first, they argue, is traditional ethnography in which anthropologists studied the “noble savage.” The problematic of marginalized other forced ethnographers to reconceptualize their role in the cultures they studied.

While I began this research with the idea that I would attend conferences, inkshed as part of sessions, and observe as much as I could, I was unprepared for the ways in which I would participate in the community. Like the trajectory that LPP describes, my participation moved quickly from simply attending and inkshedding at conferences, to a participation that reached far into my self—to the extent that my general perspectives of the world altered. In fact, it changed my research approach, which originally sought to examine only the activity. I felt the need to make sense of my own experience. Therefore, I began to focus on the process of becoming a member of the community and the role writing had in that. As a result, I have also incorporated aspects of autoethnography to be able to explore my observations and experiences.

Autoethnography

Drawing on the same fundamental ideas of ethnography that place the researcher in the field and in the culture, autoethnography expands the research experience to include personal experiences of the researcher as a way of understanding the culture being explored. As Patton (2002) explained, it seeks to answer the fundamental question:

How does my own experience of this culture connect with and offer insights about his culture, situation, event, and/or way of life? (p. 84)

This approach has also been called “new ethnography.” Goodall (2000) explained the perspective of this approach as:

creative narratives shaped out of a writer’s personal experiences within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences. (p. 9)

Like participant observation, autoethnography emerged as a way to expand traditional boundaries of ethnography¹⁴. As Ellis and Bochner (2000) explained, it is a way of exploring both collective and individual experiences by moving between personal and collective understandings and interpretations:

Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and the cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. (p. 739)

In other words, as an autoethnographer, I look from multiple perspectives in order to make sense of the experience. This concept of the change in perspective that moves inward and outward and works on multiple levels overlaps with work by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) on what they term narrative inquiry. Their work has also influenced my research.

Narrative Inquiry

As conceptualized by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the function of narrative inquiry is to understand experience. Understanding takes place collaboratively between researchers and participants. Clandinin and Connelly recognize that both the researcher-participant and participants are temporally located within the study, yet exist in broader social contexts that are not defined by the study. Researchers of narrative inquiry are

¹⁴ Autoethnography correlates with Denzin and Lincoln's (2003) sixth moment of qualitative research—postexperimental.

concerned with the stories of experiences. In the words of Clandinin and Connelly, “narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (p. 20). Telling the stories of the experiences is the closest that one can come to reliving the experience itself. The telling of the experience is the telling of the relationship of the subject of the story with her context—people, setting or otherwise.

In order to understand not just experiences, but also the relationships that experiences describe, narrative inquiry asks researchers to move between stances and positions (much like autoethnography). The researcher must be able to move between roles so that, for example, on the one hand they can engage in intimate discussions with participants, while on the other hand, take the role of a broader reflective analyzer. It is a highly personal approach to research and both acknowledges and incorporates the idea that “our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 121). Like my turn to autoethnography, my turn to narrative inquiry came from the realization that my experiences were shaping my line of inquiry and I wanted a way to understand that. Narrative inquiry values experience as told through story.

Thus, the added perspective that this framework brings to my study is a place for narrative or story. Throughout my research, I have both heard and participated in the creation of many stories as I have followed my own learning trajectory and heard those of others. Much of the cultural activities reside in stories of participation, anecdotes of experiences, and the attempt to recreate experience through the telling (often in the process of inkshedding).

Thus, narrative inquiry brings an attempt to recreate lived experience and I draw heavily on this in the following chapters through the use of vignettes. These stories, along with other forms of data, have had multiple sources. I explain this in the following section.

Design

Before data collection about a community can begin, ethnographers and narrative inquirers must first gain access to the community. Because this study recounts my journey of membership into Inkshed, the entire study reflects the ways in which I gained access to the Inkshed community. Although I draw on experiences of other Inkshedders to confirm and validate the kinds of experiences I had, my conclusions are based on my own experiences and how they resonated with others. This journey, however, began with a few preliminary steps, which I describe here. These are followed by a description of data collection methods and analysis.

Access

My initial access to the community came through my contact with some of my committee members who have a long history with the Inkshed community. When I first began to conceive this study, I understood inkshedding as a classroom activity. Doctoral committee members Ann Beer and Anthony Paré have both participated in Inkshed conferences for many years, and they helped me understand that there is an entire community and culture behind the activity. They are well-respected members of the community and I used my association with them to begin to make contacts with other community members—primarily, Russ Hunt. At their suggestion, I entered into email correspondence with Russ. In this way, by the time I attended my first conference, I

already had established relationships with community members who were aware of my intentions to study inkshedding and Inkshed.

When I attended my first conference, I did so with an open agenda. In other words, I made it clear from my first introductions to community members that my intentions were to study inkshedding and Inkshed. There was, I believe, some initial suspicion of my motives. One woman, on hearing of my intentions, asked if I was there to spy on them. Her comments sprang from the work of a graduate student a few years earlier who came to the conference and listened in on people's conversations, then asked if she could quote them. I tried from the outset to be transparent about my motives and to show that my process was an emergent one—that I was not trying to prove anything about inkshedding.

One challenge to my access was not the community, but instead, my own inhibitions and shyness. It was difficult for me to talk to people—and despite Anthony's assurances that everyone would be friendly (which they were), I was unsure of and uncomfortable in myself and unclear as to how to proceed. But again, this work is about gaining access to this community, so I will say no more about that for the time being. Rather, I will explain how I set about gathering data to explore my questions.

Data collection methods and procedure

Data collection took a variety of forms and drew from all of the methodologies mentioned earlier. For the purposes of organization, the terminology for the kinds of data collection I describe come from Clandinin and Connelly (2000). The actual practices overlap throughout the qualitative methods that I draw from.

i. Autobiographical writing

As Clandinin and Connelly explained, “autobiographical writing is a way to write about the whole context of a life” (p. 101). Early on in my research, as I found myself being drawn into the community, I felt the need to understand my position, that is, my role as a researcher of Inkshed juxtaposed to the rest of my life. As a result, I spent many months reflecting on my position in Inkshed as a participant and as a researcher, as well as my personal writing position. I examined the ways in which my outside life experiences impacted the experiences that I was having in the Inkshed community and inkshedding activity. I did this through multiple autobiographical explorations, pieces of which are included in the form of vignettes in subsequent chapters.

ii. Journal writing

Journal writing proved to be important in this study. At conferences and in between, I spent a great deal of time writing in a journal and describing not just the things that I was seeing and doing, but my reaction and feelings about these things (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While not every detail recorded in my journals became a significant piece of data in this research, the small details together helped me to begin to see patterns and themes. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained:

What may have appeared to be insignificant nothingness at the time they were composed as field texts may take on a pattern as they are interwoven with other field texts in the construction of research texts. (p. 104)

Indeed, as I brought the experiences I recorded in my journal into the other data I was looking at, I found that my recorded thoughts facilitated comprehension of the things I was trying to understand.

iii. Field notes

As I attended conferences, I took extensive field notes; I almost always had a pad of paper with me. This was, in fact, unobtrusive when I was in the conference room as many people at the conference take copious notes throughout presentations, or jot down thoughts as they come to them. At events such as the talent show, walks in the wood, or evening socializing at the bar when it seemed intrusive to carry a notebook, I made mental observations and recorded them in writing as soon as I could. I tried, as much as possible, to record the things that I saw and to be aware of how my interpretations influenced my notes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). My notes include diagrams of the set-up of the rooms, lists of speakers and themes, reactions of participants, accounts of spontaneous discussions, jokes, and so on. These notes were a constant reminder to me that I was working as a researcher. At times, when I found myself caught up in the conference as a participant—through the presentations, inkshedding, discussions, and so on—I would forget my role as researcher and fail to take notes. While this may have led to less comprehensive field notes, I believe that it led me to be able to explore a different aspect of the conference. The other data that I compiled helped to flesh out the kinds of things I was seeing in my notes.

iv. Letters

The Inkshed community is spread far and wide and they meet only once a year. Even then, not every Inkshedder goes to every conference. Therefore, a useful source of data collection for me was letters. Using virtual ethnography, a form of ethnography that uses technology to mediate interactions and challenges notions of face-to-face interactions (Hine, 2000), these were all sent and received via email. I frequently used

this forum to communicate with Inkshedders in order to get answers to questions—much like an interview. The advantage to working in written text, rather than a face-to-face interview is that the respondents had time to mull and ponder the questions before responding. As Davies (1996) explained:

The thing about letters is the fact that you can get in touch with your own thoughts and feelings, in your own time and space. It allows, I believe, for a deeper level of reflection on the part of the writers. (p. 176)

For example, some of my participants took weeks to respond to my queries and when they did they would answer with pages and pages of carefully thought out detail. Others responded quickly and sometimes followed up with second and third responses as more ideas came to them. Inkshedders are writers and communicators. Therefore, this was a rich source of data for me.

v. Conversation

Inkshed conferences are designed to promote discussion. The writing activity is a way of facilitating discussion so that ideas are constantly being reinserted into the ongoing dialogues. Meals, coffee breaks, entertainment, housing—all of these things happen together so that participants have as much opportunity as possible to engage in dialogic communication. Thus, I was able to engage in many casual conversations about Inkshed and inkshedding. Many people who knew that I was studying inkshedding approached me in a casual setting to be able to share their experiences with me without, for example, the pressure of a formal interview complete with tape recorder. These conversations helped me to get a feeling for the kinds of experiences that other people were having, but often did not feel comfortable sharing with the group at large.

In addition to face-to-face conversations, Inkshed hosts a listserv, which encourages on-line discussions. The advantage to this is that people from across Canada can participate in a conversation, and they have time to sort out their thoughts before jumping in. I occasionally started discussions this way, but most often lurked and listened in to hear what issues were most important, or what kinds of topics came up in discussions.

vi. Interviews

Following the work of Maykut and Morehouse (1994), Patton (1982) and Seidman (1991), I designed semi-structured, open-ended interviews. These interviews took place with members of the Inkshed community. I conducted interviews with both individuals and groups. Although I had general categories of questions that I hoped they would answer, I allowed the interviews to go on tangents and explored different areas as they arose. I felt that it was important to hear what these participants thought it was important to say, whether it was within the parameters of my questions or not, because as Patton (1982) explained, the purpose of an interview:

is not to put things in someone's mind, but rather, to access the perspective of the person being interviewed. We interview people to find out from them those things that we cannot directly observe. (p. 161)

Patton further expounded on the usefulness of interviewing by explaining that, as human instruments, it is impossible for a researcher to observe everything. Thus, by asking questions, new information becomes available; new perspectives emerge. I explored these perspectives by taking notes during interviews, recording and transcribing the interviews, and then carefully studying the transcriptions.

vii. Documents

Documents from the Inkshed community provided a rich resource for learning more about the community, its culture, its values and the way it functions. Included in the documents were historical texts, including access to all of the *Inkshed* newsletters, the archive for the listserv, and the CASLL constitution. These documents helped to shape my understanding of how the community has grown and changed over the years. They also helped to explain fundamental values of the community.

In addition to the historical documents, I was able to use documents produced at the conferences I attended. One of these was “The Wall.” This was the result of a twenty-year retrospective done at the Inkshed XX conference in 2002 by Nan Johnson and Sharron Wall. They lined the conference room with posters and asked everyone in attendance to contribute by writing their seminal Inkshed moments on post-it notes and sticking them to the posters. They included experiences, influential readings, and even talent show memories. I was able to use this document to get a sense of the community and the things that had shaped it. Often, small details emerged in the wall that did not emerge elsewhere, yet contributed in important ways to my study.

As well as “The Wall,” I was able to use inkshedding texts. At two conferences, I presented parts of my research and participants responded through their inkshedding. I was able to use these texts to verify the things I was seeing in my research as well as to refocus and generate new lines of questioning.

This broad variety of field texts provided multiple sources of data. By having such complex and multiple sets of data, I was able to compare different sets in order to

see and study emergent themes. The analysis of these data was messy, complex, and even now continues to emerge.

Analysis

Because this is an emergent and original work, the analysis of my experiences through the data proved challenging. In this section, I describe the tools that I used to make sense of the data. In Chapters 5-8, the analysis is evident through the subheadings that I use to describe different aspects of my inkshedding experiences.

i. Writing

My primary means of analyzing my data was to write about it. Advocates of process writing (Elbow, 1973; Emig, 1977; Faigley, 1986; Flower and Hayes, 1987; Murray, 1969) understand that through writing, ideas, knowledge and learning emerge. Van Manen (1997) argued the importance of writing in data analysis because it forces the researcher to at once reflect and introspect but still consider the world. Thus, it has been through the writing of interim texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that I have struggled to make sense of my data. As the name implies, interim texts are “texts situated in the spaces between field texts and final, published research texts” (p. 133). These texts provide a place to try out ideas. They are full of false starts, dead ends, emerging questions, and a struggle to make sense of and test out emergent themes and ideas. Often, I used these texts as a way of communicating to my supervisor where I was in my thinking. I would spend time writing, he would read, we would talk, and I would go back to write some more. Through these texts, I eventually came to the fundamental themes that I present in this document.

ii. Living with the data

As I struggled to make sense of my data and understand what to do with it, the methodologist on my committee told me I needed to live with the data. I needed to immerse myself in it and hear what it was telling me. “Listen to the voices,” he said. This meant reading, rereading, and rereading again without any preconceived interpretations. Much of this reading at the early stages was punctuated by interim writing that worked to make sense of what the data was telling me. Then I returned to the data again, reading and listening. As I did so, general themes and patterns began to emerge.

iii. Coding and questioning

Once clear themes began to emerge, I began to organize my data according to the patterns I saw. From here, I was able to ask additional questions to further deepen my understandings of what I was looking at. To facilitate this questioning, I used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), which is based on inductive analysis. I began by inductively organizing and then categorizing my data based on common themes. I frequently refined my categories as I explored the data. I then looked at relationships across my different categories and used these relationships to integrate data from multiple sources.

In addition to the constant comparative method, I also followed Strauss’ (1987) analytical approach that asks researchers to continually question the data in order to develop lines of hypothesis. Asking about the consequences of the themes that I saw emerging in the data led me to examine the data in diverse ways. These ideas were

complemented by Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) analysis scheme that helped me look for patterns and themes as well as contrasts and paradoxes.

Another form of analysis that proved useful was a narrative analysis that looked at forms and functions. Much of the data I collected contained stories and anecdotes. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explain, "individual narratives are situated within particular interactions and within specific social, cultural, and institutional discourses" (p. 62). Therefore, I was able to look at the forms and functions that emerged into themes through the narratives in the data. Throughout all of this coding and questioning, I continued to write—testing out my findings, attempting to explain them, taking up new perspectives on them.

Summary

By drawing on qualitative research positions and techniques, I have been able to conduct an emergent study, the process of which reflects Inkshed values. The methodologies I chose to incorporate overlap and share similar perspectives, but each helped to add depth and breadth to my study. These perspectives also provided a rich collection of data from which to draw.

In the following four chapters I present my data and my interpretation of them. I do so, in part, by drawing on the spirit of narrative inquiry that Clandinin and Connelly promote—the telling of stories. Eisner (1991) discusses the value of stories to communicate experience. He wrote:

One must be able to use language to reveal what, paradoxically, words can never say. This means that voice must be heard in the text, alliteration allowed, and cadences encouraged. Relevant allusions should be

employed, and a metaphor that adumbrates by suggestion used. All of these devices and more are as much a part of the tool kit of those conducting qualitative inquiry as analysis or variance is for those working in conventional quantitative research modes. (p. 3)

With Eisner's admonition in mind, in each chapter I include vignettes that tell my story through my interpretation. I have included these vignettes in order to try to share the experience in as real a way as possible of my process of becoming an Inkshedder. These vignettes help to introduce outstanding themes in my data that are important for understanding experience. I discuss the themes and experiences by drawing extensively from my multiple data sources, and as much as possible, incorporating pieces of others' stories with my own. The themes that emerged throughout the process of this research are presented as subsections within each chapter. They are the results of a messy and complex process of listening to the voices in the data.

In Chapter 5, I explore what it means to be an inkshedder. I chose to present this data first in order to illustrate the membership that the process moves toward. In Chapters 6, 7, and 8, I look at the process of becoming an Inkshedder by looking at the chronological stages of the inkshedding activity. As I will show, the process of inkshedding works in tandem with the process of becoming an Inkshedder so these chapters follow the literal process of inkshedding, along with a more metaphorical inkshedding process that sees the individual as a text that is circulated, written upon, and acknowledged.

Chapter 5

Perspectives from the data: Membership in the collective

At one of the Inkshed conferences I attended in the past few years, a colleague described some of the work going on at her institution and the struggles she was having with it. Some of the difficulties she was having resulted from a lack of understanding on an institutional level of the circumstances necessary to be able to help students develop their writing skills. As she described the circumstances in which she was expected to teach writing, she kept repeating, “but you don’t have to worry, I’m an Inkshedder” (Field notes, 5/9/2004).

At the time, I took her assertion to mean that as an Inkshedder she had “correct” notions about how to teach writing (i.e., similar to my own) and would not let the institution ruin her pedagogy. But in the time since that event, I have come to wonder what exactly she was trying to communicate when she continued to affirm her status as an Inkshedder. What does membership in the Inkshed community mean?

In this chapter, I seek to understand what it means to be an Inkshedder and to be a member of the Inkshed community. While I am aware that, like any human collective, there are aspects of the community that are uncomfortable, exclusive, difficult to negotiate, and at times, even painful, I do not address those darker issues in this chapter. Some of these are discussed elsewhere. For example, Chapter 6 talks about discomfort, vulnerability and exposure, and some of the challenging negotiations that take place, and in Chapter 7 I look at some of the more exclusive social dynamics that exist. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I draw on my experiences as an autoethnographer (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and on the narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of

community members to create a bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) describing the things that make the Inkshed community function. As a result, I discuss many of the positive aspects of Inkshed. Unfortunately, this runs the danger of sounding utopian. I do not mean to limit the darker side of the exploration, however, but leave it for later chapters.

I begin with a vignette that describes the personal impact of feeling like I had become a member of the Inkshed community. I include this narrative as an illustration of the concept that membership in this community has deep personal meaning to some members and is more than simply an academic affiliation. I follow the vignette with an exploration of what constitutes membership in Inkshed and what interests, values and practices constitute membership. The emergent themes from the data that speak to this topic are facilitated by theories of CoPs, and genre.

Vignette

It's Mother's Day. I just skipped out on the Inkshed AGM that comes at the end of the conference with the excuse that I'd like to be able to get home and have some time with my kids while it's still Mother's Day. They are not impressed that they didn't get to make me breakfast in bed (why they think they can only do it on this particular Sunday once a year, I'm not quite sure). But the promise of homemade cards and tissue paper flowers is not the real reason I left. No, I'm completely overwhelmed. I need time alone with my thoughts. And so I whisk down the 401 heading for home trying to figure out what has just happened to me.

Last night was the talent show. Most of the time I was roaring with laughter with everyone else. Red Green teaches writing, a poem about a parrot in class, even a

gymnastics routine—who knew academics could be so much fun? But then Susan Drain got up and did a recitation about war. Then she began to sing and by the end of her number had us all holding hands and singing anti-war songs. It wasn't just that I happen to strongly agree with the anti-war sentiment, or that she has a great voice—no, it was those things combined with something (what, I'm not sure) to induce a literally life-altering experience for me. For lack of a better explanation, something touched my core. I've had brief experiences like this over the years, rarely so deep and so profound as this one. I think the last time I felt this profound kind of connection to the universe that rocks my perspective of the world was on my stud- abroad trip to Israel and Madison Sowell shared some personal life experiences with us. I was so moved by the experience that I felt utterly speechless for the rest of the afternoon—to the point that Dr. Sowell, I think, was concerned and hung back to ask me how I was doing. But there it is, that's the problem that I'm wrestling with now—not that I've had this powerful experience (I wish I had words to better describe it, but it's one of those feelings that transcends the limits of language)—but where I've had it.

Any time I've had this feeling before, it's always been somehow church-related—even the intense musical experiences that share the power of reaching into my most intimate inner self have been with other Mormons. How is it possible that I could have, for lack of a better descriptor, a spiritual experience at an academic conference where most of the participants, if not exactly drunk, were at least well lubricated (a big taboo in my Mormon culture.) And yet, here it is, that feeling, that sense of meaning and purpose and connection right to the very center of my soul, and not a Mormon in sight.

When I get home my kids shower me with hugs and kisses and complaints and their arguments. I am drawn back to the present, the here and now. But in the back of my head simmer questions for my foundations. A month later my friend from my days as a Mormon missionary calls. We have been through a lot together and so, when she asks what's new, I try to describe a little of my experience. "Pum," she exclaims using her favorite nickname for me, "you've found your people!" Yes, I reflect, so I have.

This vignette frames the focus of this chapter with the assumption that membership in the Inkshed community means more than being a due-paying conference attendee. People who identify with the community and call themselves Inksheddors have a personal commitment that goes beyond professional connections. In the rest of this chapter, I seek to understand more about what shapes membership in the Inkshed collective. Nan Johnson, an original Inkshedder, once explained:

I'm not Nan Johnson when I come to this conference. You're not who you are, but you're an Inkshedder. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

In the following pages I explore what it means to be called an Inkshedder. I do so through three lines of inquiry, which I have categorized as shared interests, reinforcing values, and collective practices or reification of values. These categories emerged through a comparative analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1998) of the data in which I inductively looked for patterns and themes that emerged from data sets and then compared them against each other.

Shared interests

People who attend Inkshed conferences do so because they are interested in writing (and, as this section will show, the teaching of writing in Canada¹⁵.) However, those who become Inkshedders not only share an academic interest in socially situated writing in Canada, but also an interest in collaboration and friendship. This section explores the interest in teaching and facilitating language in a Canadian context, and the value of collaboration and friendships (including the roles of both trust and humour).

It should be noted that while these characteristics appear to be commonalities that draw the collective together, I am not implying the converse. That is, I am not suggesting that everyone who has an interest in socially situated explorations of writing, collaboration and friendship is an Inkshedder. Nor do Inkshedders have a monopoly on these characteristics (because, in fact, there are many scholars who share these characteristics but do not share in the Inkshed community). These are, rather, descriptions of shared characteristics that work together in this context to facilitate the functioning of the collective and the means through which individuals are, in a community of practice, able to mutually engage.

When asked to explain what it means to be an Inkshedder, self-proclaimed devotee and proselytizer of inkshedding Betsy Sargent responded to the open-ended virtual interview question (Hine, 2000; Seidman, 1991) as follows:

I guess I'd define the inkshed community as being pretty huge—it would include for me everyone who had ever attended an Inkshed conference or paid dues to receive the newsletter, everyone who had ever been on the

¹⁵ While people from other countries (including the United States, England and even the United Arab Emirates) attend the conference and are more concerned about writing in their own national contexts, my research show that the teaching of writing in Canada is an important theme in Inkshed.

listserv, and then every student of anyone in those preceding categories who had incorporated inkshedding into their teaching practices. And we should probably include as well people who don't use the term "inkshed" but who practice public, focused freewriting as a form of writing-to-learn in their classrooms, (as long as the students know ahead of time that the writing isn't going to be private). Once you include that last group, you probably have to include almost everyone who has gone through the National Writing Project in the States and all of their students.... [ellipsis hers] (CASLL Listserv, 12/13/2006)

As Betsy admits, this description is huge, and I am not entirely sure that I feel a connection with every student who has ever been through the National Writing Project the way I did at the talent night I described (nor they me). However, Betsy's description does raise some interesting perspectives that reflect at least one of the shared interests or commonalities that bring people to Inkshed—beyond the dues and listserv. Implicit in her description is the importance of teaching—not just any teaching, but the teaching of writing, or how to use language. This concern with teaching typifies a common interest of those who describe themselves as Inkshedders.

Teaching/language

As a Master's student at McGill in the early 1990s, I had many interesting courses whose subject matter challenged and invigorated thought and discussion. Some of the courses that stand out in my memory, however, are the courses that challenged me as a writer. I was encouraged to explore my depths as a writer, take risks, examine my values, write for a real audience, and otherwise become a better writer. Those courses were

taught by Ann Beer, Patrick Dias, and Anthony Paré—one long-time and two original Inkshedders. Their example to me as a student typified a common interest of Inkshedders.

While organizations like the Canadian Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (CATTW) or the Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric (CSSR)¹⁶ focus on scholarship and research, my experience suggests that Inkshed seems to have a fundamental concern with teaching, with facilitating learning, and with helping students to use language in socially meaningful ways (i.e., produce language expecting a real and meaningful response). As Anthony Paré observed:

Inkshedding was made to ‘free’ the student—to find a voice in the academic context. (Personal interview, 2/1/2007)

The original notion of the inkshedding practice was inspired by a desire to help students. This concern has also helped to shape the community. Many original Inkshedders share this conviction. For example, in an open-ended focus group discussion, Rick Coe explained what he feels people who come to the conference have in common:

I think somebody once identified it as caring about students, and caring about teaching—in relation to language. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

This comment provoked a similar point of view from veteran Inkshedders Doug Vipond, Russ Hunt and Nan Johnson who pointed out that people who participate in Inkshed do

¹⁶ As Roger Graves explained in identifying the various roles of the major academic communities concerned with writing in Canada, “CATTW offers an alternative identity, and for people specifically in technical/professional writing, that name may have a greater claim on them. Some belong to CSSR, and the new writing centre group [CWCA] offers a greater recognition for those who work that end of the field. So Inkshed is now one of a set of identities individuals may have, and that gives it less of a claim, perhaps”. (Listserv, 12/14/2006)

so because they choose to focus on teaching and language. They are not there by accident:

Doug: It's self-selected, partly. People are opting in or opting out.

Nan: And what's the means by which one does that selection? It is, we care about students and we care about teaching, yes--

Russ: And we care about language--

Nan: We come and spend four days and we talk about pedagogy and writing, and these ideas, right, for four days. And there's a certain self-selection I think. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

Thus, those who come to Inkshed conferences and participate in other Inkshed activities do so because they choose to pursue the study of language and learning by focusing on facilitating students. Those who do not share this focus as a primary concern find other communities to facilitate their scholarly work. While not everyone who feels passionately about academic writing instruction in Canada is an Inkshedder, those who call themselves Inksheddors care deeply about the study and teaching of writing. Thus the scholarly interest in writing, coupled with the interest in teaching writing, pulls people to the community. It also holds the community together.

Language and teaching in Canada

People who participate in the Inkshed community are not only concerned with teaching and language in general, but have a special interest in this role in Canada. During my data collection, in an effort to understand the role of Inkshed in writing studies in Canada, I took advantage of virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000) to generate an open-ended focus group interview (Seidman, 1991). The use of the listserv allowed

people to respond not only to me, but to each other as well. My post generated a lively and lengthy discussion. I wanted to explore themes I saw emerging in my data, so my post read as follows:

At some level, there seems to be a feeling that Inkshed, as a community, has served its purpose and may be losing its force as an academic institution. Just by way of example, one inkshedding text from Gimli (which you can find both in Russ's last Inkshed article, and the posted inksheds from the Gimli conference) says:

"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?"

I'm curious to know what your reactions are. Is the community on the wane? What is the future of the community and the activity? Is the activity being redefined by the immediate social writing being facilitated by the internet? What does it mean to be part of the Inkshed community, and has that identity changed over the years? (Listserv, 12/12/2006)

After several deep and carefully introspective responses, Brock MacDonald responded with an apparently whimsical observation about the discussion. He wrote:

One thing strikes me: how very Canadian this is! Are we a community? (Are we a nation?) Are we losing our identity? What IS our identity? --

etc, etc, etc. I suppose if we didn't fret over these things from time to time, being Canadians, that would be a sign that our community WAS in trouble....[ellipsis his] (Brock MacDonald, Listserv, 12/14/2007)

Brock's observation is more significant than he may have intended. While many Americans do attend the conference, there is a definite recognition that writing studies in Canada is slightly different from writing studies in the United States and Inkshed provides a forum to discuss writing specifically in Canada.

As explained in Chapter 2, Inkshed was born out of a need for a forum to discuss writing studies in Canada. This was reinforced in a contribution to "The Wall" (see Chapter 4) under the year 1982, that reminded participants of the origin of Inkshed. It said:

Inkshed starts with the assumption that there is a Canadian context for writing instruction.

Similarly, in the first newsletter, Jim Reither (October, 1982) emphasized the Canadian focus he hoped the newsletter would have. He explained that:

This newsletter is proffered to all educators in Canada interested in the processes and pedagogies of writing and reading. As a forum whose primary objective is to intensify the relationship between theory and practice, it will serve both informative and polemical functions. (p. 1)

Thus, although Americans attend the conference, there is definitely a Canadian focus to it. The value of this Canadian focus is articulated by several Inkshedders. Doug Brent observed:

I think what holds Inkshed together as a community is a common interest in language and learning from a Canadian perspective plus the indy [i.e. independent] feel of a conference not connected to a big gathering (eg. CATTW and the Congress.) (Listserv, 12/13/2007)

Being able to talk about teaching and writing in a specifically Canadian setting facilitates the functioning of Inkshed as a community. Stan Straw echoed this sentiment as he explained that even though Inkshedders are a diverse group of individuals from a variety of backgrounds, the Canadian nature of the community pulls the collective together and sets it apart from others. He wrote:

Inkshed is unique in that it invites English department people, writing center people, writing program people, even people from business and government, and /people from education/ [emphasis his] to be part if they choose. It is partly this cross-fertilization that makes Inkshed a community unlike others. Although CCCCs has an implicit invitation to educationalists (though we are all educationalists), I think Inkshed is more explicit (and smaller and Canadian—both good things). The name of the organization (Canadian Association for the Study of Language and /learning/ [emphasis his]—notice it's language, not writing) seems to me to capture the group because we are all interested in how people learn and use language. (Listserv, 12/14/2007)

Part of this emphasis on Canadianism has been realized through publications supported by Inkshed. For example, Inkshed XXIII started with a book launch celebrating the work done by Heather and Roger Graves in *Writing centers, Writing*

seminars, Writing culture: Writing instruction in Anglo Canadian universities. As the title suggests, this book looks at the way writing programs have developed in post-secondary institutions across Canada. The result of the book launch at the conference, whose theme was “Context is everything; Everything is context,” was that a recurring theme of the conference was how Canadian writing programs and the Canadian approach to writing differ from the work going on in the United States (Field notes, 5/7/2006).

The way that this focus on being Canadian may be important to the Inkshed collective is that by creating an “other” (i.e., American counterparts), Inkshed reinforces the “we.” As Brock’s earlier comment alluded to, Canadians define themselves as not American. This seems to resonate with the birth of Inkshed and the need to explore or, at the very least, address differences between writing studies in Canada and the United States—an emphasis that Canadian needs are not the same as American.

An important part of writing studies and pedagogy in Canada (and the driving force behind the creation of the *Inkshed* newsletter) is the opportunity to collaborate, network, and draw from resources of other Canadian practitioners. Thus, another common interest that Inksheddors share is the desire for interaction with others who share their teaching interests—whether, as Stan says, they come from English departments or government offices. The next section examines the role of peers in Inkshed membership.

Networking/friendships

Wenger (1998) explained that through mutual engagement, mutual relationships arise. He described how relationships may evolve in CoPs by explaining:

When it [mutual engagement] is sustained, it connects participants in ways that can become deeper than more abstract similarities in terms of personal

features or social categories. In this sense, a community of practice can become a very tight node of interpersonal relationships. (p. 76)

Thus, according to Wenger, relationships in CoPs work on a functional level to further the realization of the joint enterprise, but may also become more personal and deep. Inkshed encourages both of these kinds of relationships. In the same way that all professional conferences and organizations facilitate networking, the exchange of ideas, and collaboration between peers, Inkshed also recognizes and values professional networking, advice, and other forms of peer support. Explaining her reason for being part of Inkshed, one participant wrote:

I value the possibility for professional networking. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Networking, however, is not limited to knowing the field and what is going on, it also means turning to colleagues for professional support. As Roger Graves explained:

In some sense it [being an inkshedder] means knowing people or knowing of people; another sense is feeling that you could email or even phone one of those people, which I have done. (Listserv, 12/14/2006)

In other words, it is important to know people in the field, but Inkshed also provides an opportunity to draw on others' expertise, experience, background and so on. Inkshedders both expect and appreciate being a resource for their colleagues. This kind of collaboration has been encouraged since the inception of the newsletter in the early 1980s. In the first few months of its existence, Jim Reither (November, 1982) sought to establish lists of experts in various aspects of reading and writing that other people could draw on for help, assistance, and so on. He wrote:

As an initial project for this Newsletter, I am compiling a list of educators in Canada who are sufficiently expert in matters of theory or practice that they can offer their services as consultants. If you have that kind of expertise, please send me your name, address, and a list of topics (the more precisely defined the better) on which you are sufficiently expert to act as a consultant. Alternatively, recommend someone else, providing me with the same information. (p. 7)

The conscientious effort to draw on expertise in the community has continued to grow over the years. While it began with Jim Reither's call for volunteers, it has moved from a list of experts in specific areas to a state where members volunteer their expertise on demand. Some of this volunteering is evident in recent discussions on the listserv. Inkshedders across Canada have happily offered their insights into the difference between writing instruction in the United States and Canada, plagiarism, writing centres in Canada (including their history, development, use, and operation) and so on. One lengthy discussion centered on national cliché day. My own research has been greatly facilitated by this electronic networking. I have been able to reach an audience of Inkshedders at once to ask questions, clarify, and gain input into my research.

As my earlier quote from Wenger explained, however, relationships in CoPs can become deeply interpersonal. Relationships in Inkshed illustrate the ways in which they may go beyond professional collaboration and networking. They extend to personal support and friendship. For example, when colleague Natasha Artemeva received the award for "Outstanding dissertation in technical communication" from the Conference for College Communication and Composition (CCCC), Anthony Paré sent out an

announcement on the listserv to this effect celebrating her success. There were no fewer than fourteen responses praising, congratulating and supporting Natasha. By way of comparison, he sent a similar post to the CATTW listserv, which had no responses¹⁷. The responses that were sent to Natasha via the CASLL listserv were not only about professional support, but also good will and friendship. These kinds of relationships are common in Inkshed. Another example can be seen in the unlikely case of vacation plans. One summer, when driving from Montreal to Cape Breton, I needed a halfway point to spend the night with my family. Learning of this in a side note to a different conversation, Russ Hunt invited us to stay with him. We did so and he and his wife Anne spent many hours entertaining and hosting me and my three young children. The kids still tell “remember when” stories of our day at their home and wonder when we can visit again.

Friendships like this emerge between Inkshedders because they care about their work and they care about each other. As one person explained when describing her introduction to Inkshed:

I found people who talked my language, though they often disagreed with my—and others’—words. They were passionate about the word, utterly non-stuffy, took risks, wanted to find out rather than score points, and knew how to laugh and play. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

This writer described a high level of commitment to the teaching and study of writing (they were passionate about the “word”), but juxtaposed this with an image of fun

¹⁷ This may, in part, be explained by the overlap of membership on the two lists, although the posts came out at the same time. Those who responded did so on the Inkshed listserv.

through “laugh and play.” Thus she described how she was able to establish relationships in the community, both professionally and socially.

Tania Smith explained this phenomenon in a slightly different way, but explicitly pointed not just to opportunities to network, but also to build friendships. She wrote:

I go to Inkshed and participate in its listserv for the sense of community and unity of a single-session conference (no concurrent sessions) where you get to know new people and reconnect with old friends, and of course for the practical advice and ideas that accompany the deep insights and theories. (Listserv, 12/13/2007)

As these two examples illustrate, friendship in Inkshed is highly valued and this shapes the nature of interactions and the way the community has emerged. As one person explained:

At one time about 10 years ago or so, we old-timers started getting messages that Inkshed was getting to be a sort of club of old friends and new people were having trouble breaking in. This may have been a phase of cultural growth—we were not aware of shutting anyone out, but we really were a bunch of old friends and tended to run into corners and catch up on what had happened in our lives. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

As this excerpt suggests, conferences (primarily) facilitate friendships and these are important for Inkshed participants. Even though these friendships may make newcomers uncomfortable, they keep others coming back. The importance of these friendships is reflected in comments like “Inkshed is my family” (Personal conversations with long-time Inkshedders, 5/8/2004; 5/6/2006). For people who make this comparison, Inkshed

has filled a role of supporter, nurturer, and caregiver by giving individuals a safe and encouraging place to belong¹⁸. Thus, as my opening vignette describes, relationships in Inkshed extend beyond professional networking and collaboration. They are, rather, profound, personal, and strong relationships. These relationships help to form the kind of identity that Wenger (1998) described when he explained that, “building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities” (p. 145). Developing relationships with community members facilitates identification with those members and therefore with the community. As Inkshedders develop relationships with each other in an Inkshed context, they strengthen an Inkshed identity, or membership in the Inkshed community.

Trust

One of the things that emerges from these deeper, more caring and personal relationships is a sense of trust. Trust typifies another value that those who call themselves Inkshedders share—a sense of safety. Through a collegial setting, Inkshedders encourage risk taking. This happens at all levels of interaction. For example, one reminiscence on “the Wall” said simply of one conference, “There was a hot tub.” This simple statement is loaded with meaning. Sitting in a close intimate space clad in minimal clothing suggests a setting in which trust is essential—trust that no one will laugh at you in your bathing suit; trust that you will expose yourselves together.

Risk taking is also encouraged in presentation formats. Traditional talking head presentations are more the exception than the rule. The call for papers typically includes

¹⁸ While I recognize the problematic use of the term “family” as it fails to account for families that are not supportive, nurturing, and so on, I report on this sentiment because the idea of having such a strong support group resonates with many Inkshedders, like the ones who, themselves, identify Inkshed as their family.

some form of caveat encouraging nontraditional formats. For example, the 2007 call for papers explained:

Inkshed has always been a “working” conference that encourages alternative, if not completely transgressive, presentations. We encourage group presentations; demonstrations; activities; and imaginative or creative readings. Participants are strongly encouraged to “Inkshed” or respond in writing to presentations and to share these responses. (accessed 3/9/2007, <http://publish.uwo.ca/~rgraves3/inkshed24/index.htm>)

In the years I have attended the conference, I have seen plays, skits, role-plays, videos, problem solving, discussions and so on. People are able to do these non-traditional kinds of presentations because the sense of trust allows them to try out new ideas. The result is that people feel more comfortable taking risks. Describing this phenomenon, an original Inkshedder wrote:

It’s being free to be wrong, take the risk of saying something stupid, just plain taking the risk. It’s not a risk I feel comfortable to take in other contexts, other large groups of people. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

In the Inkshed context, this individual trusts her colleagues and knows that she will still be accepted as part of the collective regardless of mistakes she might make. Roger Graves echoed the importance of this when he expressed that:

It all depends on the sense of vulnerability and whether you feel you’re going to be treated right. And I think you have to make it that. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

While, due to the human nature of the collective, exceptions and examples of not being treated right exist, for the most part, Inkshedders make a conscientious effort to be supportive and mutually engage through success or failure. That trust and effort at friendship also facilitated this research so that in focus group interviews participants felt free to interact with and respond to each other. Additionally, people were willing to share personal (if not always positive) narratives with me. Thus, trust appears to play an essential role in qualitative research.

Humour

Collegiality, friendship, and trust are all facilitated by a good sense of humour. In my experience, humour does not typically describe a defining characteristic of academic communities. However, since its inception, humour, lightheartedness, and an ability to laugh at oneself have been characteristic of Inkshed.

One of the more entertaining ways that Reither attempted to engage the geographically scattered community was through the title of the newsletter. In the first official newsletter, Reither (October, 1982) introduced a “let’s-have-an-end-to-unwieldy-titles contest”—the purpose of which was to find a name other than the *Newsletter for educators in Canada interested in writing and reading / theory and practice*¹⁹ that named the first newsletter to go out. The call came at the end of the first newsletter following business and scholarly discussions. Reither presented the call for a new name for the newsletter in a lengthy adjective—the “let’s–have-an-end-to-unwieldy-names contest”—thus reflecting a sillier, more lighthearted side of the community. Reither built on the absurdity of the title of the contest with the prize which consisted of:

¹⁹ The following month this title was shortened to W&R/T&P (Writing & Reading/ Theory & Practice) and maintained this form until December, 1983 when the title switched to Inkshed.

a set of six—no, make it eight—coasters (advertising an assortment of genuine German beers and stolen from genuine Gasthausen all over West Germany) and a brand new disposable BIC razor. (p. 5)

This kind of lightheartedness introduced the value of humour to the community, which remains entrenched in the value system today. Reither repeated the call for submissions the following month after only two people responded to the call. By issue number 4 (January, 1983), the competition came to a close. With titles ranging from “TEXT: A Canadian journal of writing and reading theory and practice” to “WordTap” the winner was identified, tongue in cheek, as one with a more “sober” perspective. His entries included:

The sociosemiopsychological review; Wurds; Word Trip; The Reither Report; Reading, Eh? (‘real Canadian’); The unwieldy titled newsletter; Writation; AWAKE!; PMLAC; The Alexander Haig letter; Communi--.”
(p. 10)

In describing the winning title submission and submitter, Reither wrote:

The winner? On the basis of quantity and quality both—although not necessarily for decourousness and appropriate gravity: Rick Monaghan. Congratulations Rick. Rarely do we see such creative, sustained, fertile fluency. And, as a special, fitting bonus, the judges have decided to award not eight but eleven coasters—one for each title; *some of them previously used*—are to be awarded. With that judgment I am pleased to comply.
(January, 1983, p. 10)

It was, in fact, some time after that competition before the newsletter took on the name by which it is currently known, *Inkshed*²⁰. But for the community, Reither's and the other respondent's comments reflect the ability of community members to laugh and joke, to not take themselves too seriously, and to know that even in serious academia there is a place for humour, for levity, and for fun.

In summary, the passion for teaching and language in a Canadian context, and the passion for collegial interaction that moves into the sphere of friendship, trust and fun, characterize shared interests of those who participate in Inkshed. This group has been purposeful in its drive to facilitate teaching of reading and writing in Canadian settings and to do so in a collaborative manner. In the following section, I look at the ways these common interests are facilitated.

Reinforcing values

As I explained in Chapter 3, genre theorists (Bazerman, 1994; Devitt, 1993; Paré, 2002; Schryer, 1994) link community values with community practices. However, the relationship between community values and practices is not one way. Practices serve to reinforce community values. In this next section, I briefly introduce some of the practices that reinforce the common values of teaching and language, and networking and friendship in a Canadian context. I do not go into great detail describing these practices in this section because the following chapters describe the importance of these practices

²⁰ Reither described the name change in the following way:

One weekend a few months ago I decided this newsletter had been stuck for long enough with a title that (although it did a good job of abstracting what we were about) was unpronounceable and only barely recollectable. The title *Inkshed* resulted from a weekend's worth of looking, of research. First, I dug up the word *inkshed* (in Roget's thesaurus by the way), and then I looked through various dictionaries—the OED among them, of course—and concordances for definitions and quotations using the word. (Reither, May 1984, p. 4)

in gaining membership. I do, however, briefly explain the newsletter/listserv, the format of the conference and the ways that these reinforce the values of the collective.

Newsletter/Listserv

As the previous section explained, the Inkshed community values teaching and language (writing and reading) in a Canadian context, and networking and friendships. One of the main ways these values are both sustained and reinforced is first, through the newsletter, and, more recently (thanks to modern technology), through the listserv. As explained earlier in this chapter, the explicit purpose in creating the newsletter was to provide a forum in which to discuss issues of reading and writing in a Canadian context. The newsletter did this through its content. For example, “provincial reports” reported on teaching and research being done at different universities across Canada. These described a range of discussions about writing from a description of writing courses being offered at the University of Alberta as well as the research projects in writing being undertaken by graduate students (Bullock, December, 1982) to Rick Coe’s description of the development of writing curricula in B.C. schools (January, 1983). The newsletter also included reviews of scholarly articles, as well as conference reports/reviews, personal reflections and so on. These kinds of things focused on some aspect of teaching and studying reading and writing in Canada. As Jim Reither (September, 1983) summarized as he started the second year of the newsletter:

W&R/T&P has made some modest progress toward achieving one of its objectives—helping to build a sense of community among those of us working in a Canadian academic environment who are interested in writing and reading theory and practice.

But we accomplished more than that too. W&R/T&P published some nice little articles, notices and reviews. Some examples: Russ Hunt's "Two energizing articles" and "Litmanship through the ages: Stephan Potter as literary historian"; Chris Bullock's, Rick Coe's, and Murray Evans' "News from the provinces reports"; Andrea Lunsford's review of several inexpensive journals and two bargain conferences; Anthony Paré's commentary on the need for accountability in the writing courses we teach, and his review of Linda Flower's *Problem Solving Strategies for Writing*; and a batch of valuable cohort reports. (p. 3)

Susan Drain, an original Inkshedder, illustrated the effectiveness of the newsletter on a personal level for networking, collaborating, and building community. Having been commissioned by her school to look into a writing competence test, Susan used the February 1984 newsletter to petition her Canadian colleagues for their help and expertise. In a follow up in September 1984, she wrote:

Last winter I requested, through *Inkshed*, the help of colleagues in my need for information about writing testing competency in universities in Canada. Several of you took the time and trouble to send me most useful materials, and I use *Inkshed* again to thank you all most warmly. My experience proves that this newsletter indeed serves its professional function of linking members of a community in a two-way communication. (p. 2)

This example shows how the newsletter facilitates collaboration and community by acknowledging the role of writing in mutually engaged communication.

From the beginning, the newsletter has facilitated community. It has drawn together a geographically diverse set of individuals and provided a forum, through writing, for promoting the teaching of language in Canada, an opportunity to network, and even some occasional fun. As technology has progressed, the Inkshed newsletter has become less part of the glue that holds Inkshedders together (as it did in the early years when members eagerly awaited each installment of the newsletter), and more a place for the occasional critique, or thoughtful rumination. Now, it is published only three or four times a year and often with pleading for contributions (a pleading which seems to have been around since the newsletter's inception). One reason it may no longer serve the same role in providing news is new technology. Moving to the forefront, the listserv has become the primary means of communication for the community. Its immediacy means that Inkshedders do not need to wait months between issues for news. It has become a means through which Inkshedders can show their support for colleagues, turn to colleagues for help, pass on information, or even share in a good laugh. This continues to reinforce the values that the community shares.

My own experience on the listserv illustrates the support that can exist. In my desire to understand the nature of the Inkshed community, I posted a question on the listserv with Seidman's (1991) notions of interviewing in mind. I intertwined this with Hine's 2000 (work) on virtual ethnography so that I was essentially conducting an on-line open-ended focus group interview. My question resulted in many impassioned responses both on the listserv—in which respondents began responding directly to each other, rather than directly to me—and a few which came only to me. The responses reflected the expertise and variety of feelings that Inkshedders have. They reflected a sense of

support for the community as Inkshedders, during one of the busiest times of the year (just before Christmas), took time to affirm that indeed there is a place for Inkshed and inkshedding in Canadian academia.

Others have also reflected on the way the listserv reinforces community values. Betsy Sargent offered the following:

I think the listserv and the website are incredibly valuable in my work—the community exists there as much as or even more than it does at the yearly meeting. (Personal communication, 12/14/2006)

In other words, the listserv provides professional support in teaching and research of writing studies in Canada. Another insight came from a participant who dislikes the conference, but values the listserv. He explained:

I have come to appreciate the virtual community represented in the list. And it isn't the rigor that matters there, it is the community -- people who share objectives, understandings, and to some extent values (at least pedagogical). (Personal communication, 12/14/2006)

Thus, by pointing to the shared objectives and values in addition to participation on the listserv, this individual described the listserv as an embodiment of the mutual engagement and joint enterprise of the Inkshed community. These insights also suggest that technology is a positive force in Inkshed.

Conferences

In short, the print and electronic media supported by the community provide a forum in which to both realize and reinforce academic and social values of the collective. For some, it is the most important tool. While the newsletter and listserv are the means

for keeping the community together over a broad geographic expanse throughout the year, a highlight for many and a critical tool for the reinforcing collective values is the conference. Describing the conference and the values that resonated with her, one person explained:

The informality, diversity of presentation and non-judgmental, constructive spirit—and the people and the fun—kept me coming back.

(Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Part of the way that this kind of attitude is facilitated is through the conference format. Typically, conferences are held in isolated settings away from the distractions of museums, shopping, or other sightseeing opportunities. This means Inkshedders have nothing to do but participate in the conference. Furthermore, there are no concurrent sessions. Everyone hears the same presentations, so everyone has the same input for conversations, references, and so on. The dialogic engagement is also facilitated by the fact that meals are taken together, everyone is lodged in the same building, and a bar is usually present. This leads to late night talks, walks, laughter and so on which feed into friendships and networking on a deeper level. Recalling his Inkshed experience and the role of the bar, one person noted:

The phenomenon of the "pub" as centre of a town's social life is very ancient. (Personal communication, 6/10/2007)

Thus he alludes to the importance of alcohol in community building in general. Activities like eating, walking, talking and drinking together in the Inkshed context facilitate knowing people. One person explained this when he wrote:

I found the small retreat setting highly congenial, and found that the ideas of many people there...resonated strongly with my own. (Inkshedding, text, 5/9/2004)

The unique conference setting and format allows people to connect and engage in meaningful ways. This engagement contributes to building and maintaining friendships. This was affirmed in an inkshedding text that said:

The conference has become part old friends and part a way to invite new people, often graduate students, into the idea that there IS a community around writing instruction in Canada, however widely spread that community may be. (Inkshedding text 5/9/2004)

When I worried about attending my first Inkshed conference, my supervisor, Anthony Paré, tried to reassure me that I would enjoy the experience by telling me I would go for walks in the woods with other Inkshedders, sit by the fireplace in my slippers, and otherwise bond in meaningful ways with Inkshedders. While I had no doubt that he had done these things, I remained skeptical that I would have similar experiences. And yet, because so much of what happens at the conference is recurring, I did find that there were woods in which to go for walks—not only did I walk, but I walked with other Inkshedders. I also sat by the fire, and, though not in my slippers, engaged with fellow Inkshedder there as well. These kinds of activities happened repeatedly over the years I attended conferences, reinforcing again and again the values of the collective. As genre theorists (Devitt, 2002; Miller, 1984; Paré 2002; Schryer, 1994) explained, social values of a community lead to recurring situations. The consistencies from one conference to

the next illustrate this phenomenon. Although not all newcomers share the same positive kind of integration that I had and many leave for a variety of reasons, more than any other conference I have attended, this one seeks to reinforce values of language and pedagogy, and collaboration and friendship.

One of the recurring aspects of the conference that contributes to humour, trust, friendship and therefore collegiality (and even the Canadian concern with teaching and language) is the talent show. On the last night of the conference, Inkshedders pool and share their talents (a term used loosely) with the whole. The tradition started at the first conference in 1983 when, egged on by Nan Johnson, Susan Drain sang “Over the Rainbow,” but I would never have really understood the importance of the talent show to community membership without—as advocated by phenomenologists (Van Manen, 1998)—attending and experiencing it for myself. As the opening vignette to this chapter described, my first talent show was a transformative experience for me and one that woke me up to the phenomenon that is the Inkshed community.

On the one hand, talent night includes real talent—singing, poetry, short stories, readings, the occasional actor and so on. Sometimes this “real” talent is reflective of the kinds of issues that writing teachers struggle with in Canada—like the woman who shared poems inspired by the struggles she had with her writing students, or a poetry writing activity from a conference session that was then displayed at the talent night. These represented, in a new perspective, some of the issues that resonate with Inkshedders who struggle to make writing meaningful for their students.

On the other hand, most of what goes into talent night is silly, fun, and lighthearted. But these crazier acts (like rapping about writing, or Red Green and his

nephew Harold instructing students on the finer points of writing with duct tape) bring humour, trust, and long-lasting friendships.

“The Wall” helps to give some indication of how important the talent night is in the community. During its creation, “The Wall” (see Chapter 4) was divided into three main categories to which participants were invited to contribute—the goal being a twenty-year retrospective of seminal Inkshed moments. The first category was scholarly influences; the second, where, when, and how individuals joined the collective; and the last category was talent night. That talent night took such a major role in the retrospective and was filled with memories speaks to the significant role that this activity has in continuing to build the community.

Practice/Reification of values

Through the practices of the collective, like the newsletter, listserv, and conference, the values that Inksheddors share become entrenched or reified in the community. Wenger (1998) explained the way values become reified in a community in the following way:

I will use the concept of reification very generally to refer to the process of giving form to our experiences by producing objects that congeal this experience into “thingness.” In doing so we create points of focus around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organized. (p. 58)

In other words, reification (like mutually constitutive reciprocity in genre theory in which practices reinforce values, and values reinforce practices—see Chapter 3) describes processes in which an abstract idea becomes a thing—something more tangible. In the case of the Inkshed community, the values that members share in pedagogy,

research and exchange, along with relationships are wrapped up, or reified, in the inkshedding activity itself. It has become a culmination of collective values and therefore reinforces these same values. As one person explained:

Inkshedding as an activity encapsulates this community's values of collaboration and writing for an audience. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Or, as Amanda Goldrick-Jones explained:

Inkshedding [is] the unique, often fruitful, sometimes angsty face-to-face experience at the annual conference. Here, inkshedding morphs into cultural activity, which consolidates community, which gives rise to institutionalization of tacit and explicit practices and expectations.

Newbies must be inculcated. Inculcatees and frequent users find and provide invaluable support. (Listserv, 12/14/2006)

Or, as Doug Brent explained:

It [inkshedding] is symbolic of a set of attitudes to text, discourse and students that goes well beyond the Inkshed community, but is particularly shared by that community: that is, text as interactive doing of some kind.

(Listserv, 12/14/2006)

Thus, inkshedding is a defining characteristic of the collective. Although Doug Brent (longtime Inkshedder) believes that the collective would live on without the activity:

Inkshedding is important to the community, but I don't think that the community would go away or even change radically if we decided one day not to do it at the conference any more. (Listserv, 12/15/2006)

This research suggests that the activity and the community co-exist. Changing one changes the other. Nan Johnson confirmed this when she said:

Without it [inkshedding], it [Inkshed] would just be one more, another small conference. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

Because the activity and community are co-constituted, it is through the activity that one can gain access to the collective. One Inkshedder described this when she said:

The writing plus the responses made me feel a member of the community.
(Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

In addition to this, however, through the community, one gains access to the activity. The following chapter explores this phenomenon more closely.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explore what it means to be a member of the Inkshed collective. I have done this by using stories and experiences to look at the values that draw members together, the ways these values are reinforced, and the resulting products of these values that members use. While this may result in a more idealized bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) of the community with fewer acknowledgements of some of the more challenging issues, these aspects of the collective help to describe what it means to be a member of the community. Russ Hunt encapsulated the values, their reinforcement, and the role of inkshedding when he said:

The crucial thing about inkshedding is its social embeddedness—that is, that the writing carries immediate, felt rhetorical force: it's read, read for what it says, and is written with the knowledge that that's going to happen.
(Listserv, 12/14/2006)

This description of inkshedding also describes participation in the collective. Everything that the community values reinforces Russ's assertion and works towards its accomplishment. The community values the teaching of and research into language as a social act (i.e., as meaningful communication); it values collaboration and friendship. These values are reinforced and facilitated through meaningful dialogic interactions that Russ described as inkshedding. Thus, participation in Inkshed means being embedded in the collective through the newsletter, listserv and conferences so that interactions have real rhetorical force. They are meaningful and purposeful. What does it mean to be an Inkshedder? It means, as Roger Graves said:

Reading the list postings, maybe the newsletter, maybe attending the conference, maybe recognizing who else in your geographical area does work like you do. I think it means you aren't alone others have had to justify class sizes, too, and they will help you find the resources to help you make your case. I guess it means you will help others and you feel you can also ask for help or ideas if you need them. (Listserv, 12/14/2006)

But Inkshed membership means doing these things with the intent that participation will have meaning for the community; with the understanding that language and action have consequences; and with the expectation of mutual engagement through language for the very purpose of being able to use language to engage.

This understanding of what it means to be an Inkshedder helps not only to inform the following chapters in which I describe the process of gaining access, learning practices and values, and how to participate, but this discussion of identity also reinforces some of the theories that helped to focus this study. Wenger (1998) explained that a CoP

is more than simply a geographic organization because members mutually engage in practices that lead to a common goal. He argued that, “collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations” (Wenger, 1998, p. 45). The way the Inkshed community has emerged with a focus on the teaching of writing (primarily in Canada) and collaboration and friendship reinforces Wenger’s argument. The values are reinforced through practices and the practices are then reified as the embodiment of these values. This also reinforces theories of genre that suggest that values and practices are mutually constitutive. The writing practice of inkshedding embodies the values of the community of writing to learn, collaboration, and so on.

Language has also taken an important role in this discussion. Barton and Tusting (2005) argued that literacy events (i.e., communicative moments based on a text) are often central to the kinds of practices that communities generate. The ways that the Inkshed community has reified values through practices supports this argument. In valuing writing and collaboration, community practices have emerged in which writing is central to the functioning of the community. The use of the newsletter and listserv, the conference presentations about writing, talent night acts about conference or teaching highlights, and of course, inkshedding, provide multiple textual events that provide the basis for rich on going conversations.

Thus, the examples and discussion that I presented in this chapter illustrate common practices of the Inkshed community and how these are both shaped by and reinforce common values. In order to gain access to the community, newcomers face a variety of practices reflective of community culture and identity. In the following three

chapters, I detail the experience of participating in some of these practices. Throughout is the common theme that learning and participating in these practices allows access to and membership in the community.

Chapter 6

Perspectives from the data: The Periphery

In the following three chapters, I explore the process of becoming an Inkshedder and the role that writing plays in helping newcomers join the collective, or move to a place of full participation. One of the challenges of ethnographic research can be gaining access to the research participants. These chapters describe the ways I was able to access the Inkshed community as well as the challenges I faced doing so. The chapters are organized to describe the chronological steps of inkshedding as a framework for a process of becoming a community member—and, as I will discuss in the final chapter, have broader implications for learning in academia and transition into the broad community of academia. Within each of these stages are issues that both hinder and help the transformation to membership. I explore not just the stages of writing, but also parallel these stages to those of becoming an Inkshedder. Each of these stages serve to illustrate significant practices in the Inkshed community that engage its members and hence help to define it as a community of practice. They also reinforce notions that writing is socially situated and support theories of genre (Bazerman, 1994, 2004; Devitt, 2004; Miller, 1984) that argue an interconnectedness between writing practices and the communities that use them. Chapter 6 describes the initial stages of inkshedding and community participation. Particularly strong at this stage are feelings of vulnerability. Chapter 6 also examines where these feelings come from and the impact they may have on participation in the collective. Chapter 7 examines the reading and marking stage of inkshedding. This stage opens up questions about democracy and power and the ways in which social roles contribute to participation. Finally, in Chapter 8, I look at the process

of excerpting and publishing highlighted texts and how this process helps community members feel like they belong.

In this chapter, I do several things. I begin with a vignette that describes my first time attending an Inkshed conference and participating in the inkshedding activity. This is in keeping with theories of autoethnography that seek to join personal with collective experiences (Patton, 2002). I share this experience in an effort to communicate the intensity of attending an Inkshed conference and inkshedding at the conference and have chosen to do so in a narrative form (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I also attempt to illustrate the anxiety that permeates inkshedding which a more linguistic, content, or discourse type of analysis of my data would not so effectively communicate. However, this vignette also contributes to an introduction of the initial stage of inkshedding and Inkshed enculturation—or, in other words, the first stages of an Inkshed conference when the process of membership may begin. The activity and conference culture are intricately intertwined. Thus, the data I present in this chapter reflect the initial stages newcomers go through in joining the Inkshed collective by participating in inkshedding. I look first at the sense of vulnerability or exposure that exists in inkshedding. Second, I look at how these feelings of anxiety, which are a predictable element of the practice of inkshedding, are tied to relationships with the community and knowledge of the audience. Finally, I discuss the challenge inherent in the paradox that, in order to know the community, one must participate, but in order to participate, one must feel part of the community. This conundrum provides the potential for facilitating membership. Thus, this chapter is about recognizing the peripheral position of newcomers and the initial participation that facilitates knowing the collective and its values and practices.

Vignette

It's late. At least it feels late to me. 8:20 in the evening after a six-hour drive to Toronto, the subsequent hour driving the back highways of Ontario trying to find the isolated inn, and the sheer exhaustion of the stress of coming to Inkshed for the first time—meeting all these people...I'm exhausted. I would like very much to creep back to my room and go to sleep. Instead, I find myself in a large conference room filled with eight round tables, each with eight chairs. The walls are made from cinder blocks painted a light cream colour in an apparent attempt to brighten an otherwise drab room. The tables are covered with white table clothes and each has a pitcher of water with eight glasses surrounding it. Pads of paper and pens lie in a loose pile near the water. At the front of the room, Roger and Heather Graves (keynote speakers) stand behind a long table (also with the requisite white conference room table cloth) negotiating transparencies for the overhead projector as they talk. And I sit at this corner table working very hard to look like I belong here.

Beside me, Torie²¹ is carefully taking notes on everything that Roger and Heather Graves are saying. I met Torie in line for the dinner buffet. I turned around to introduce myself as we were waiting our turn, and her immediate response was, "Oh, you're the one doing your PhD on inkshedding." I was surprised by her comment. I admitted that I was, but was a little taken aback that this graduate student from Ontario would have heard of me after only an hour of, on my part, unimpressive socializing before dinner.

I was nervous about coming to the conference, and when I first went down to the lounge before supper for the appointed hour of socializing, my stomach was in knots. I'm not great in social situations to begin with. I'm far too shy. I paced my room manically

²¹ Pseudonym

and practically inhaled a large chunk of chocolate to calm my nerves and bolster my courage before I could leave my room. The idea that I was going to walk into this conference as a researcher of the key element of the conference seemed presumptuous. What would people think? How would I get them to accept me?

When I got down to the lounge, I really had to force myself out of my shell and talk to people. I saw Russ Hunt talking animatedly with a group of people—I certainly didn't jump into that conversation. I was far too intimidated by the academic weight and intelligence surrounding me. It was hard too because most people seemed to travel in twos or small groups and on my own I found it difficult to jump into those conversations as well. But every now and then I spotted someone youngish like myself—inevitably a graduate student, or a first-timer at the conference—not hard to spot since we were the ones looking uncomfortable. I forced myself to be friendly and was able to start up a conversation or two that weren't too painful.

I suppose that's why it's easy to talk to Torie. It's her first time at the conference too, and she's also a grad student. But I can't figure out how she can follow Roger and Heather as they talk. Maybe it's because I'm so tired, or because I'm still so new to the field, but I feel as if they're speaking a foreign language. I try to concentrate, but I can't understand a word they're saying. I don't belong here. My mind wanders...

“And so, we'd like to take a few minutes right now to do some inkshedding on that.” What? Inkshed right now in the middle of the session? Inkshed about contexts for language use? I don't get it. I don't know what to say. Kenna Manos, an original Inkshedder who introduced herself to me earlier, interrupts both Roger and the complete panic I am feeling about inkshedding.

“Maybe for those who are new, we need to explain what inkshedding is.” Roger looks expectantly to Russ to take the lead.

Russ takes the cue, stands and begins to explain. He tells us that inkshedding is a bit like freewriting. Write down whatever thoughts we have. Use writing to make connections, try out new ideas. The important thing, he points out, is that much of what gets written in inkshedding turns out to be garbage and disappears “like the wind.” But occasionally, some “gem” will come out of it. Someone from the audience interrupts him to remind him that it’s not necessary to sign inksheds. Russ nods and concedes that this writing may remain anonymous. I let a sigh of relief escape—at least if I write something really stupid, no one will know it’s me. Russ goes on to explain that after we write we read each other’s texts and draw a line in the margin by anything that stands out to us in order to highlight something that others might find worthwhile.

I am new to inkshedding in this context, but I am more or less aware of how it works. It was my introduction to inkshedding in Anthony Paré’s WAC class so many years ago that planted the seed for this whole PhD endeavor. Even so, I feel my stomach knotting up and my pulse quickening at the prospect of inkshedding now. If I hadn’t known it was coming, the suggestion that we write then and there might have been enough to send me packing. What can I possibly write that might interest this room full of strangers? I remind myself that this is what I’m here for, so I sit at my table and try to look knowledgeable and confident to those around me.

Torie, feeling unsure as well, leans over and whispers to me, “So we just write whatever we want?”

“Basically, yah.” I respond. I can see from the look of discomfort on her face that this idea does not sit well with her. She seems to take a long time looking for the pen that had been in her hand, finding a fresh sheet of paper, and carefully labeling it with the date, time, names of the speakers, and the title of their presentation.

Slowly we all start to write. I suspect that I am not the only one at the table feigning confidence. Three of us at the table are graduate students and have had the chance to talk over dinner. Two other people sit at the table writing with us. They introduced themselves as they sat down, but I have no idea who they are or what their relationship to the Inkshed community is. As we write, two other women slip into the room, negotiate their way to our table, and begin to write as well. They seem confident as they take up pen and paper and not at all stymied by the task they have walked in on. I assume they have been here before.

I’ve come to appreciate a lot of things about inkshedding, but I’m not sure I’ll ever enjoy the anxiety of writing something intelligent on the spot. And in this context, I am hyper-aware of having to write something intelligent that makes me appear to have something worthwhile to contribute to this community. I try to remind myself of what Russ said—that much of what we write is garbage, that I don’t have to come up with anything brilliant. That momentarily takes away some of the anxiety and I am able to start writing. I am somehow also aware that if we are all new at the table and we all hang back, then the inkshedding won’t work. Someone has to take the lead and jump in. So I write, drawing confidence from the fact that I’ve done this before and survived. I pass my paper to the center of the table to be read.

I chose to begin this chapter with a vignette describing my first time attending an Inkshed conference and inkshedding there for several reasons. Primarily, I wanted to bring the reader into the Inkshed experience by recreating, through this vignette, the thoughts, feelings, and activities that many people, who attend the Inkshed conference for the first time, experience. I included the first time inkshedding and first time attending a conference together, because I believe that the activity and conference are interconnected (as was described in Chapter 5 and will be illustrated in more depth in this and coming chapters.) Because of the values reciprocated through them, the activity facilitates the conference and the conference facilitates the activity. By presenting the practice and context through personal narrative, I hope to evoke a sense of resonance. As in all descriptions of qualitative research, the real confirmation of the data comes when readers can find something in the description that strikes a chord from a shared experience.

In this chapter, I examine the feelings of anxiety and vulnerability that haunt many newcomers who find themselves on the periphery of a community, unsure of how to participate. I begin by looking at feelings that newcomers experience in order to illustrate the depth and profundity of the angst that they may feel. I then explore some of the social reasons for this angst. Drawing on theories of genre that help to explain the way writing practices are dependant on social context, and theories of CoPs that explain collective practices, I present data suggesting that feelings of anxiety and vulnerability are connected to newcomers' desire to respond in a way that will enable mutual engagement with the collective. While some may recognize the exigence of the rhetorical moment (i.e., the need for a particular response at a particular moment), they may lack confidence in their literacy practices and question their ability to appropriately

participate. Some of the challenges newcomers face in their attempt to engage include: learning unwritten rules and understanding community members and their values. The anxiety and vulnerability that accompany a position of peripherality have various consequences. On the one hand, they can lead to such intense fear that a newcomer simply does not participate, or, on the other hand, as newcomers recognize how the activity puts everyone in a potentially vulnerable position, this can be a catalyst for moving to a position of more active participation.

Vulnerability

As newcomers engage in inkshedding, they draw on what Barton and Hamilton (2005) described as common literacy practices (ways of using language symbols in particular situations) to facilitate their participation. Typically, newcomers have generalized practices that they can draw on to function in inkshedding, such as familiarity with freewriting, language of the discourse of composition studies, and so on. For some, however, inkshedding may be so foreign that background knowledge of practices is insufficient. Thus, unsure of how to engage or respond, newcomers may feel vulnerable. This was true of both my first time inkshedding and my first time attending an Inkshed conference. Unfamiliar with both situations, I worried about the outcomes, or how my writing and I would be accepted.

In the years since my initial participation, I have used autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to ponder and write about my extreme anxiety (Horne, 2004). I wanted to know if I was alone in these feelings of trepidation, or if others could relate to what I was feeling and had also experienced vulnerability. I explored this question through interim writing (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000) in which I used writing as discovery. I took my ruminations to participants of an Inkshed conference and found that my experiences resonated in a powerful way with what other participants had gone through. I was struck by the force of the language that others used to describe their initial inkshedding experiences. In this section, I share the results of working between my experiences and the narratives shared by Inkshedders. The following excerpts from inkshedding texts illustrate the common feeling of vulnerability. I have added italics to the words describing vulnerability in order to highlight the extremity of the feelings:

I reacted with *fear* and *trepidation*, assuming critical eyes would fall on my writing. I seriously *doubted* my ability to write anything significant, anything of value to those I was sharing my writing with. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

I remember being *nervous* about having others [read] my work—I'm not used to sharing my thoughts. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

I was out there, *vulnerable, naked*... (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

...I felt very *nervous*—the notion of “publication” and the making public of my “writing” created real *anxiety*. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

I didn't like it—I felt *pressure* to say something intelligent. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

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. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Discomfort. Fear that I had nothing to say that anyone would want to hear. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

As a newcomer to the Inkshed community I also *worried* about my ability to respond intelligently to the issues being presented. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

I felt *uncomfortable* (kind of *exposed* without any desire to do so). (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

I remember feeling *vulnerable*. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

...for many writing is *exposure, vulnerability, danger*. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

I experienced some *discomfort, fear of exposure*...[ellipsis his/hers] (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

I was totally *intimidated*, felt like an outsider who had been extended a polite but weak invitation to join an exclusive club. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Fear, trepidation, intimidated, inadequate, vulnerable—these descriptors illustrate and express the intense feelings associated with inkshedding. The examples are important because they acknowledge and describe a shared experience—discomfort in being asked

to fully participate even though newcomers are still in a peripheral position. As Lave and Wenger (1991) pointed out, learning and participation is a process that requires a gradual increase in responsibility. It is also typically facilitated by a mentoring program that helps newcomers negotiate expectations and responsibility. However, at Inkshed, newcomers are asked to fully participate in inkshedding²² immediately and despite its usefulness, rarely have the benefit of mentoring. For example, one veteran Inkshedder contributed to “the Wall” a description of her first inkshedding experience and the importance of having extra explanations through a seasoned Inkshedder. She said:

Jim Reither + Pat Dias did keynote (I think!) that was my first formal intro to inkshedding. However, I didn’t grasp how to do it until Rick Coe explained at our “small group” table.

This example illustrates the importance of a mentor, but, as my own experience described in the vignette that opened this chapter, one does not always have the benefit of a mentor. As a result, insecurities surface as newcomers negotiate expectations for participation on their own. Only the opportunity for anonymity lessens the weight of participation.

Anonymity

One of the ways that the creators of inkshedding and conference organizers try to facilitate newcomer participation in inkshedding is by allowing inkshedding texts to be circulated anonymously. That is, writers are not required to identify their writing with their name. Lave and Wenger (1991), in their explanation of LPP, described how participation in the community must be real and meaningful. However, the activities in which newcomers participate have less responsibility, or fewer consequences. Allowing

²² As data in Chapters 7 and 8 indicate, newcomers to Inkshed have a variety of ways in which they can participate—from presentations to talent night to even simply socializing. Inkshedding, however, is expected of everyone. It is the way that everyone participates.

participants to take part in inkshedding without signing their text allows them to take risks and open themselves to vulnerability in a way that would not otherwise be possible. It allows participants to take risks without fear of personal reprisal.

In a personal interview, I explored this perspective with Anthony Paré. He explained the opportunities and potential that anonymity affords:

Anthony: The anonymity for me, I remember it forcing me to think beyond what I might have thought ordinarily—it pushed me to write about things, to think about things, that were not just typical or knee jerk, or bland, or cliché. It forced you to say, to say something that might be unusual, or might be a different way of looking at it. Or brought up perspective that maybe nobody else could write.

Miriam: That came out because of the anonymity?

Anthony: I think so. Well, it came out because of the invitation. An invitation does that. Anonymity may give you the freedom or the security to do it where you might not do it elsewhere. The invitation to speak is always the invitation to say something that is worth hearing. Someone says, “Well what do you think?” And you’ve got an opening to say something that might or might not be worth hearing or listening to, but then if someone says “what do you think?” and you don’t know who **you** are, then it gives you not only the invitation to speak, but possibly the invitation to go way out on a limb, to take a chance, to try some ideas on that if they knew who was speaking you might be less willing to try on.

(12/5/2006)

To paraphrase, anonymity allows participants to advance ideas and participate in a meaningful way with the rest of the community without worrying that they will not be taken seriously because they may be new to the community, graduate students, or in other ways on the periphery. It is a way of democratizing the experience so that everyone has the opportunity to be heard. While anonymity in inkshedding continues to be a topic of debate (some feel that unauthored discourse is never appropriate and may in fact lead to personal attacks, which I discuss in the next section), it does provide a way for newcomers to participate in the activity without taking on the same kind of responsibility in the activity as someone like Russ Hunt, original Inkshedder, who always signs his name. For some, anonymity provides the security newcomers need to be able to engage.

Despite the opportunities that anonymity may provide, it does not necessarily entirely take away that anxiety and vulnerability of the experience. The following section of this chapter explores how newcomers negotiate their participation by measuring themselves against the collective and trying to understand the collective.

Responding to the collective

As Barton and Hamilton (2005) argued, literacy events are embedded within social dynamics. In this study, the inkshedding activity takes place within a rich cultural context of values and practices—some explicit, some implicit. I described these values in the previous chapter as caring about teaching, research, and use of language in a Canadian setting, and forming personal relationships with colleagues in the pursuit of these values. This concept of the social dynamics surrounding literacy events is also similar to understanding rhetorical context as understood by genre theorists because

language use is dependent on things like goals, audience, rationale and so on. In addition, as I explained in Chapter 3, in my discussion of CoPs and LPP, in order to gain membership in a community, newcomers must have opportunities to participate in meaningful ways. My data suggest that lack of familiarity with the social structures or rhetorical context (namely, the audience, purposes, and exigence for writing) within which inkshedding is embedded contributes to anxiety and vulnerability.

As Wenger (1998) pointed out, for newcomers to become full participants in the community and the activity, their participation must be mutually engaging, lead to joint enterprise and engage in shared repertoire in a collaborative way. Thus, in the collective inkshedding activity, participation must be mutually engaging for both the writer and the collective, and lead to a common purpose to further the discussion of teaching and language. The challenge for the newcomer then is in finding appropriate ways to engage with the collective or audience by finding appropriate ways to respond to the common prompt (the initial stage of inkshedding).

In this section, I describe the importance of knowing the community and the audience for whom one is writing in order to begin to engage with the collective. I do so by exploring the challenges newcomers face when learning the nature of the collective and in engaging with the collective.

Learning the collective

Because newcomers have chosen to attend an academic conference on writing, there is an assumption that they share, at the very least, common background knowledge about academic writing. However, the Inkshed collective embodies much more than this. As discussed in Chapter 5, it is concerned not just with background knowledge of

scholarly work in writing studies or composition pedagogy, but also with reflective practices that create knowledge. Community practices like inkshedding reflect this, but these are characteristics of the collective that newcomers must learn. On arrival, many newcomers quickly learn that Inkshed is a culture; it is a set of values, beliefs and practices.

One Inkshedder, now well established in the community, reflected on the nature of the community as he described his first time inkshedding as trying to carry on a conversation with someone whose culture or background he did not know. He explained it in the following way:

I guess my first experience inkshedding was that it resembled other written conversations I had been engaged in, mostly personal, sometimes professional. The only difference is that it was a hybrid of personal/private writing, and writing for a small society whose members and ethos and values I did not yet know. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

This excerpt shows a recognition that the community has a unique set of beliefs that is unknown to the newcomer. He makes sense of this new literacy event by drawing parallels to another identity's literacy practices, both personal and professional, but acknowledges something new to learn.

Another participant also recognized the distinct nature of Inkshed—learning new values made manifest through writing. She described the experience as having to learn a new genre. She explained:

First experience of inkshedding occurred for me at Inkshed last year. As is usual in using a new genre, I did not have much idea of what an

“inkshed” would look like, nor did I really know why the inkshedding process worked. As a newcomer to the Inkshed community, I also worried about my ability to respond intelligently to the issues being presented.

(Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Part of this excerpt describes how not knowing the genre of inkshedding (i.e., the collective values and practices that have led to the relative stability of this writing activity at conferences) contributed to an anxiety about identifying with the community. In other words, learning a new genre requires learning a new set of values and beliefs and how to incorporate those in writing. Lack of familiarity with the social context led to insecurity in the writing task.

The experience of learning to inkshed can be frustrated if the writer does not know the audience for whom s/he is writing. This awareness of not knowing exactly who the audience is, or what the audience values, permeates many anxiety-filled experiences. It impacts the way participants feel about inkshedding and therefore their participation in the inkshedding activity.

Consider again some of the passages I used earlier to illustrate the vulnerable feelings associated with inkshedding. Each of the writers in these excerpts qualified how they felt about their inkshedding experience by referencing the community, and reflecting a concern with the ability to identify with the collective. One writer described the first time inkshedding in the following way:

Discomfort. Fear that I had nothing to say that anyone would want to hear. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

In this example the writer expressed a fear not that he or she would remain mute or would not have the ability to express him/herself, but that no one would want to listen to his or her ideas. The fear, therefore, is not that there is nothing to say, but rather, whether or not it is worth paying attention to in this particular setting. In other words, the writer wants to be able to identify with the community, but because s/he does not know enough about the ways in which others will respond, worries that s/he may remain on the periphery of, or even outside of, the collective. If s/he is unable to meaningfully engage with the audience, then s/he cannot move to a place of full participation. (This is why publication, as described in Chapter 8, is such an important part of the process.) Other Inkshedders reflected a similar attempt to find a way to engage with the community. One person wrote:

I reacted with fear and trepidation, assuming critical eyes would fall on my writing. I seriously doubted my ability to write anything significant, anything of value to those I was sharing my writing with. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Another wrote:

I was aware, in some ways of trying to please my readers, to write something significant or meaningful, something that would pique the interest (laughter, philosophical pondering, etc.) of my readers. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

The first of these two examples echoed the feelings of vulnerability described previously. The participants, driven by anxiety, feared a negative reception by the community, or an inability to engage. The writers in both of these excerpts went on to

question their ability to function in a meaningful way within the community. The language reflects this. The sentences do not end with “significant” or “meaningful.” Instead, both qualified what they meant by the word “significant.” They redefined it for this context to mean something valuable or worthwhile to the audience. Thus, the writers were not concerned with having an idea to write about, but rather, how that idea would resonate with the collective.

One final example illustrates the experience of worrying about meaningful engagement of the writer with the community:

I felt a desire to write something impressive that would confirm my ability to function within this academic community that was new to me.

(Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Instead of using the word “significant” like the previous two examples, this writer explained the desire to write something “impressive.” The writer followed the same pattern as the previous two examples and redefined “impressive” to reflect how the writer has negotiated her or himself into the community. The writer wanted to write something that would help him/her belong in the community. Thus, the fear and vulnerability that some individuals experience in inkshedding is not a result of a complete mental blank or inability to express oneself. Instead, it reflects a writer’s concern with audience—in this case, the Inkshed community—and whether or not the writing will resonate and have meaning for the audience. It reflects a fear of being left on the periphery as newcomers try to engage with the collective.

Challenges to engagement

The difficult experience that newcomers face as they try to make connections with the collective are not entirely self-generated. Rather, some aspects of the collective contribute to the challenge newcomers face when they attempt to engage. These include implicit rules, the complex multi-disciplinary make-up of the community, and resulting conversations.

i. Rules

A challenge that faces newcomers as they try to identify with the collective are all the unwritten rules associated with inkshedding. As Rick Coe explained:

There's a sense of, not so much that there's a right way to do it, as there are wrong ways to do it, that there are things that people might do to make it not work. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

Anthony Paré confirmed the existence of implicit rules. He said:

There is a right way of going about doing this [inkshedding] and there is a wrong way. (Personal interview, 12/5/2006)

At each conference, when participants receive initial instructions, they never hear what NOT to do. Instead, cursory instructions tell them to write whatever they wish. Only through trial and error, writers come to understand what things work in inkshedding and what things do not²³.

²³ It is worth mentioning, however, that it is also through trial and error that the community itself learns what works and does not work. For example, no time frame has ever been established for producing published inkshedding texts after they have been circulated. However, at one conference, when these texts were not produced until the following day when the presentations they reflected on were no longer fresh, it became clear that an immediate turnaround is necessary if the inkshedding activity is going to be dialogic and reinvest the published ideas into ongoing conversations. This, in fact, led Russ Hunt to revise his article "What is inkshedding?" (2004).

Russ Hunt described one problem that occurs in inkshedding as people writing their texts as a personal letter to the presenter. Misunderstanding the literacy event, they draw on inappropriate literacy practices to participate. Russ explained that by inkshedding as a personal letter, writers do not understand the larger context of what they are doing (although this larger context is rarely expressed, let alone explained). While the purpose of inkshedding is to further discussions (something that newcomers often do not understand until they have seen the published texts), writing a personal letter effectively closes a discussion by blocking out other participants. In addition, accolades for a job well done also end the conversation. Hunt explained:

“Thanks Dorothy, I liked it” is goodbye. And many of the kinds of inksheds that I’m talking about are evaluative and final. The problem with them...is that they exclude other people, it’s that they...don’t have built into them a kind of further invitation to respond either from that person or from somebody else. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

Thus, newcomers face the challenge of interpreting the rhetorical context and responding appropriately even though rules are not explicit. They must carefully read the setting and guess at the appropriacy of their responses. They do so with varied degrees of success (as will be discussed in Chapter 8).

ii. Multidisciplinary

Another one of the challenges to newcomer’s appropriate participation is the diverse make up of the community. Inkshed tends to be multi-disciplinary. While trying to describe the Inkshed community, Russ Hunt described this multidisciplinary by saying:

We don't come from the same disciplinary context. One of the things about Inkshed from the beginning...is that...we've got people from psych departments, we've got people from English departments, we've got people from education faculties, we've got people from writing centers, we've got high school teachers... (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

While Hunt sees this variety as a positive characteristic of the community because it allows for multiple viewpoints, it can also be disconcerting for a newcomer trying to understand the audience for whom s/he is writing. In the vignette that opened this chapter, I described my experience inkshedding at an Inkshed conference for the first time. In that situation, I was very much aware that I did not know all the other people who were going to read what I wrote. I knew the two other graduate students with whom I was sitting and so initially had them in mind as my audience as I wrote. However, because I knew the process, and that others in the room might eventually read my writing, I had to try to imagine the rest of the audience. The only other person I knew in the room was Ann Beer, a professor at McGill who has been influential in my graduate work. I used her, and my background relationship with her, as a model for the rest of the community and kept her at the back of my head as my imagined audience as I wrote. However, by using her as my focus, I did not account for the people who were high school teachers, from psychology departments, or even writing center people. The challenge is finding some common ground that will resonate with all of the different backgrounds represented at the conference.

Clearly, newcomers to Inkshed must work through many complexities in order to understand the community for whom they write. It is not surprising that

so many feel exposed and vulnerable as they try to negotiate through these various unknowns.

iii. Conversations

Despite the fact that Inkshedders come from a variety of backgrounds, the conversations that go on at Inkshed are relatively focused, and highly academic. Some people never manage to engage in the kinds of discussions taking place in Inkshed simply because they are part of other academic conversations that do not overlap with the Inkshed conversation. One long time Inkshedder explained this phenomenon as it occurred with people he brought to the conference. He said:

I think one of the problems that we had, is that the level of conversation we have, I think, is relatively academic. And I know that I have brought [elementary] teachers and high school teachers a couple of times to conferences and they've never come back. And the reason they've never come back, is because we're not having the same conversation that they're having. And never will have the same conversations. I don't quite know why not. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

Russ Hunt confirmed this observation with his own description of an occasional conference-goer. He explained:

[She] has a lot of problems with inkshedding because she feels like an impostor at it, and it's partly because we're having a conversation that [she's] right on the edge of. She has other conversations—equally valuable, equally important. But I mean, I'll say, 'Well, are you going to come this year?' and, 'Well, no, I don't think so.' Sometimes she'll come

and enjoy it, and learn stuff, but it's not really her conversation. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

This Inkshed conversation is best described through the Burkean parlour metaphor. In describing the way knowledge is created in disciplinary communities, Burke (1941) envisioned the following scene:

Imagine that you enter a parlour. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (pp. 110-111)

Thus, like Burke's parlour, the Inkshed conversation is ongoing and located within its own parlour or unique set of cultural and social circumstances. Some, like the previous example, recognize the uniqueness of the conversation and try to explain newcomers' lack of participation by suggesting that the conversation is uninteresting to them because of its academic level. Others interpret the conversation differently and criticize it as

being too “exclusive and lacking in intellectual rigor -- almost superficial” (personal communication, 12/15/2006), or as being “boring...ingrown and insular” (personal communication, 12/14/2006). Regardless of the interpretation one gives to the kind of conversation Inkshedders are having, it is clear that the nature of the conversation either excites or engages some, but not others.

Despite the fact that some people either fail to learn or choose to ignore implicit rules, adapt to the multidisciplinary nature of the community, engage in the overarching discourse of the group, or otherwise interpret the Inkshed audience, others have successfully come to know the audience for whom they write through trial and error. Knowing the audience facilitates the inkshedding process and hence participation in the entire collective. Having a clearer understanding of the rhetorical context, a participant is able to write more appropriately and therefore engage with the collective. The ability to engage with the collective facilitates membership because, as Wenger (1998) explained, communities result from mutually engaged-in practices. A long-time Inkshedder helped to illustrate the importance of knowing the audience for whom you write in inkshedding. He explained that for him, although he does not particularly enjoy the inkshedding activity, he is able to do it because he knows his audience. He pointed to people like Russ Hunt, Kenna Manos, Nan Johnson, Rick Coe, and others who have been attending for many years as the audience for whom he writes. He explained:

Part of the problem that I’ve gotten better at, is that I now have a sense of audience that I never had before. And that sense of audience is the other people around this table in many ways. They’re not the initiates there.

And so, you know, we've developed a kind of community. And so when I write, I write to that community. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

The experience that this Inkshedder described represents what many have come to learn. Knowing the Inkshed community facilitates the inkshedding process. However, it is not always easy to know the audience. Sometimes, learning what the community values must come through trial and error in the inkshedding practice and other interactions with the community.

Consequences

One of the great ironies of Inkshed is that in order to be able to fully, or successfully, participate in the community and the activity, individuals must understand the nature of the collective and the unwritten rules. However, that understanding comes through the act of participation. The anxiety that occurs as a result of lack of familiarity with these challenges has a range of consequences from complete non-participation on the one hand, to total participation on the other, and everything in between.

Non-participation

I was struck by the story of one graduate student who described her introduction to inkshedding not at a conference, but in a graduate course. She explained that she was so intimidated by sharing her writing that she carefully folded up her inkshedding text and hid it in her pocket when it came time to share what she had written. She explained:

1st Inkshed experience was part of a language studies course, led by an instructor who is part of the Inkshed community. At the time, it felt awkward as I didn't see the value of this exercise, but even more telling, I didn't want my classmates to read my [emphasis hers] writing. So while I

did inkshed, I didn't tape my paper on the wall. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

In the situation this student described, inkshedding was enacted in one of the ways common in the early days of inkshedding. Rather than circulating writing around small groups, all inkshedding texts were taped to the wall around the classroom so that everyone could read them²⁴. Although the student participated by reading her classmates' inkshedding, she did not experience the full potential of inkshedding because her own text was not circulated. She did not fully participate and thus was unable to learn what she could have about the collective in which she was participating, or contribute to the collective in any significant way. This kind of experience is reminiscent of what happens in classrooms. When students feel uncomfortable or threatened they may simply miss class or not do an assignment. One student I had in a writing class confessed that she always skipped the classes the previous semester in which she had to do peer reviews.

This lack of participation is not limited to students in a classroom. I have watched individuals at conferences conveniently slip out of the door of the conference room when it came time to inkshed—some with the excuse that they could not wait any longer for their cigarette or bathroom break, others, more blatant, that they did not want to inkshed.

By not participating, individuals not only fail to learn more about the collective, but they also fail to engage in the community in a way that is meaningful to the collective. As discussed in Chapter 5, inkshedding is the embodiment of collective

²⁴ In describing this method of circulating texts, Anthony Paré wrote, "I remember that the image used as a comparison... was on Chinese newspapers that were posted publicly, and that attracted crowds" (Feedback on draft, 4/1/2007).

values. Non-participation suggests a disconnect with those values²⁵, and therefore, a separation from membership²⁶.

Limited participation

Similar to people who simply refuse to participate are those who are so anxious when they write that they write something that is so safe it borders on boring. Anthony Paré explained that fear leads people to uninteresting responses. He said:

If you were too timid you couldn't write or would write bland stuff

(Personal interview, 12/5/2006)

Bland writing (like no writing) fails to engage the collective. Like the student who does not participate, this also resonates with classroom experiences where students hand in writing assignments that meet technical requirements, but fail to push ideas or take ownership for new or unique thinking. As Lave and Wenger (1991) pointed out in their discussion of LPP, without meaningful engagement, learning does not take place and the newcomer cannot move to a position of fuller participation.

While some excuse themselves from participation, or participate blandly, others will engage, but do so with resistance and unhappily. Consider the following comment:

I comply with this experience that is forced on me, but it is certainly

uncomfortable. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

²⁵ I want to make it clear that the non-participation I refer to is not just the occasional removal from the activity because of a tired hand, mental exhaustion (as is common at the end of conferences), replacement with oral discussion, or other common happenings among many Inkshedders. I am referring to those who come for the first time and refuse to participate, or those who come periodically to conferences, but fail to engage with the collective.

²⁶ While the language I use here may allude to some deficiency on the part of one who does not participate, I am aware that many are aware of the audience and the values and make a conscious choice not to participate. But even if they do deliberately make this choice, the result is the same. They are not members of the collective.

Because this particular inkshedding text was submitted to me anonymously, I was unable to follow up with the individual who expressed these feelings. However, the language of the comment implies that the writer did not willingly participate in inkshedding, and that the experience was unpleasant. Thus, like the student who did not participate, or a newcomer who responds in clichés or vagaries, I believe that the attitude of this writer also precludes full participation in the inkshedding activity, and therefore in the collective. By that I mean that the writer is unlikely to take risks, advance edgy ideas, or really engage in meaningful dialogic interaction. Again, Lave and Wenger's (1991) ideas are appropriate here. Participation must be meaningful.

Like the writer who complies but is unhappy doing so, there are other people in the community who consider themselves Inkshedders but do not particularly enjoy the activity. One long-time Inkshedder expressed his feelings about inkshedding in the following way:

I didn't—and still 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. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Although this Inkshedder can see potential merit in the activity, and participates without argument, he is unmoved by the experience. In further discussions with this individual, it was clear that he felt that the Inkshed community would continue to grow even if inkshedding were not a part of it.

Inappropriate participation

One of the potential problems of feeling vulnerable or exposed in a situation like inkshedding is the potential for abuse as a defensive mechanism. As one original Inkshedder explained:

One of the things that I think happens in [this] 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, they can be threatened, and that's when the trashing comes in.

(Focus group interview, 5/9/2005)

In the early years of inkshedding as people had to grapple with the new medium and way of thinking that inkshedding required, this insecurity and lack of understanding sometimes led to uncomfortable situations in which people were “trashed,” criticized, or otherwise felt the brunt of disparagement. As one original Inkshedder explained:

Trashing came when an idea that questioned some solid assumptions was advanced. (Personal communication, 2/28/2006)

Or as Russ Hunt explained:

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 (à 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. (Personal email, 2/5/2006)

As Russ described, people lacked the literacy practices necessary to engage in the inkshedding practice and responded with other literacy practices. They failed to understand the rhetorical exigence. Thus, although “trashing” is not considered acceptable in the current Inkshed environment, it has existed in the past and seems to always remain a concern because the underlying conditions that fostered “trashing” in early years may yet emerge from those unfamiliar with the genre.

Participation as engagement

While there appear to be many negative consequences of feeling anxious or vulnerable in inkshedding, there are also more positive outcomes. For some who begin their Inkshed experience feeling fearful, they are able to persevere and eventually move beyond that initial discomfort. In my own experience inkshedding, although I occasionally feel some discomfort when it comes time to write, I am able to write without fear of what the community will think of me. Similarly, I feel confident participating in the conference as a presenter, talent night participant and so on. While the reasons for this will be explained in more depth in the following two chapters, I attribute it to a willingness to continue through the initial discomfort of the inkshedding and Inkshed experience. While the community is willing to engage with newcomers, the newcomer must be equally willing to engage with the collective. By participating in inkshedding, newcomers are potentially able to engage in meaningful ways with the collective. Nonparticipation or reluctant participation will not facilitate the same meaningful engagement.

Other participants share this perspective. In a similar account, another Inkshed participant explained that initially s/he felt intimidated and uncomfortable with the inkshedding process that s/he was exposed to for the first time at an Inkshed conference. The participant then went on to explain, however, that by the end of the weekend, those feelings of vulnerability had disappeared. S/he wrote:

I went to Inkshed 19 in PEI in 2002 and knew very little about the Inkshed process. I remember being nervous about having others [read] my work—I'm not used to sharing my thoughts. However, I did find I enjoyed the process and any vulnerability I felt at the start was gone by the end of the conference. Now I don't feel any hesitation about writing at all and truly enjoy reading what others have to say. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

This example illustrates how after going through the process of inkshedding throughout an entire weekend, the writer got over the feelings of vulnerability and was able to enjoy participating. One other participant shared a similar experience:

My first experience of inkshedding was to prepare a piece of writing that reflected a change in discourse. As I'm not teaching English, I used a personal experience of writing. I was very excited about the insights the writing produced, but, at the same time, nervous that the writing might not be appropriate for the group. My fears were to diminish over the three days however as I realized that I did have ideas to share. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

These participants came to understand, through their inkshedding experience, that the community was accepting of them and that their ideas were validated. As a result,

they lost their feelings of fear and vulnerability and engaged enthusiastically in participation.

One final example provides a rich metaphor for describing the ways that participating, despite discomfort, helps Inkshedders engage with the collective. Brock MacDonald, a well-established Inkshedder, described his process of learning to inkshed in the following way:

1st time inkshedding—the horror! The horror! I was not keen, to put it mildly. I was used to the conventional conference paper aftermath, i.e. the situation in which one has the option of speaking up and posing a question or raising an issue, and one also has the option of remaining silent. Writing my responses on the spot and sharing them made me feel naked, essentially defenseless, vulnerable.

Initiation into the inkshedding community followed almost immediately on the sense of vulnerability I just described. “hmm—everyone else is in the same boat—it’s ok!” Feeling of horror gave way rapidly to a feeling of liberation. 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. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Brock’s analogy of nakedness reflects the fears that others I have discussed in this chapter also express. It also shows how those who are able to let go of their fears and participate are able to engage with the collective—to move beyond their own insecurities.

By recognizing discomfort, but participating anyway, Brock described how participants are able to move to a position of more meaningful participation in inkshedding.

Although the scope of this research was not to look at the personality traits of those who attend Inkshed conferences, the variety of responses that this data evokes suggests that participants have a huge range of interests, abilities, beliefs and so on. As Bourdieu's (1990) work on habitus explained, knowledge, skills, values and so on are the result of conditioning or experience. The variety here implies that some people are more predisposed than others to engage in the Inkshed community. Everyone has the same context for the experience, and yet, each individual reacts in a different way. This suggests that background experience plays a role in how well newcomers are able to integrate into the collective. This opens up questions for future research.

Summary

In summary, this chapter has described the ways in which inkshedding and joining the Inkshed collective can be a vulnerable experience. Participants feel exposed and fearful because they are unsure how they will be able to engage with the collective. This experience serves to test the theory of CoPs as described by Wenger (1998) to acknowledge personal anxieties and insecurities that newcomers face in joining a CoP. Although Wenger accounts for social interactions, he fails to incorporate the ways in which feelings of insecurity may influence participation in a community. These data suggest that although not universal, feelings of vulnerability are common and the ways individuals deal with these feelings will have repercussions for the ways that they interact and engage with community members, and therefore, ultimately, with community membership.

In addition, engagement is made more complicated by unwritten rules, a multi-disciplinary community, and a relatively focused kind of conversation that takes place. Thus, mutual engagement may be more difficult to achieve than Wenger's (1998) model might suggest. While Wenger seems to imply that common goals and practices will naturally lead to mutual engagement, this experience suggests that understanding not just the goals, but the culture and values that drive those goals influence participation. In this case, cultural values hidden in unwritten rules, for example, frustrate an individual's ability to mutually engage. This observation is perhaps better understood through genre theory that links writing practices to social values. The ability to recognize social values and when and how to respond appropriately in an inkshedding text, exemplifies the exigence that genre theorists (Bazerman, 1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Miller, 1994) described. Part of the appropriacy of response lies in using correct or appropriate language. Again, as Barton and Tusting (2005) pointed out, Wenger's lack of attention to language is a weakness in his theory. The description of how language can or should be used in this discussion of vulnerability highlights the importance of literacy events in the social dynamics of CoPs.

Vulnerability can have a multitude of consequences—from non-participation to full participation. As a researcher, I recognized immediately the need to participate. Although it was uncomfortable for me and filled me with dread, I did participate both in the inkshedding activity and the Inkshed community. Without that participation, I would have failed to arrive at the membership I now claim. In the following chapter, I explain how I participated, that is, I draw the metaphor that my participation in the community was like an inkshed text circulating during the inkshedding activity. Thus, recognizing

that some people feel unable to participate, I explore the position that Brock MacDonald described. I look at the ways that those who are able to push through the vulnerability are able to participate and how that participation helps them move towards a position of membership in the collective.

Chapter 7

Perspectives from the data: Circulation

As the previous chapter described, in the first step of the inkshedding process participants quickly write in response to a common prompt. To some (particularly newcomers), writing this way is an exposure of the self that makes some people feel uncomfortable because they do not know the audience for whom they are writing. Therefore, they worry about how readers will respond to the text. This phenomenon supports genre theory by illustrating the socially situated nature of writing. It also helps to exemplify the ways that learning takes place through practice as described by legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Newcomers are asked to participate in a meaningful way by inkshedding with the community. Participating in this way provides one kind of opportunity to learn community values and engage in common goals with the collective (however challenging that may be). In this chapter, keeping in mind the socially situated use of writing that I described in the previous chapters, I examine the next stage of inkshedding—the reading and marking of the text in which the writing becomes public, and in which the imagined reader is real.

The set-up of the conference room facilitates public reading of inkshedding texts. At the conference, typically groups of about eight people sit at round tables. Depending on the size of the conference, anywhere from five to ten tables fill the conference room—though it is not always full. When the writers at each table finish their text, they put it in the center of the table and take someone else's text to read. As individuals read the text, they draw a line in the margin, bracket, or otherwise highlight whatever part of the text stood out to them as significant. (See Appendix A for a sample of what an inkshedding

text looks like.) Some people will even write the occasional comment in the margin as a response to what they have read, so that the text becomes a kind of written conversation. The process is repeated with as many of the texts as time permits. Sometimes, if time allows, groups at different tables exchange their inkshedding piles in an effort to get more circulation²⁷.

Inkshedders argue that one benefit of this public reading is that it gives all participants an equal chance to express themselves and be heard. The reading stage in inkshedding describes the way that people's voices are heard. In this chapter, I critically examine the perspective of equality as I look at how people read and mark texts, and how this reading contributes to membership in the collective. The texts that I use to approach this discussion include not just the tangible pen on paper texts created in the process of inkshedding, but also the human text that is read and circulated through participation in the conference.

Like words on a page passed from one reader to the next, participants at an Inkshed conference are written texts, and texts in development of values, ideas, experiences and so on. An individual arrives at a conference as a text in progress, a text already written upon by education, experience, relationships and so on. Just as the inkshedding text is circulated and marked by readers, the human text is circulated through discussions, presentations and other forms of participation. And like the inkshedding text, as other inkshedders read the human text, they leave their mark, highlighting valuable sections to be published, thus altering the text.

²⁷ At early conferences, the set-up of the conference room was slightly different than what has become standard today. Smaller numbers of participants allowed for one large square in which everyone faced the centre of the square instead of working in small groups. Inkshed texts were taped to the walls and participants walked around the room in order to read what had been written.

While individual agency helps determine who will touch it, the human text is shaped and transformed by the social interactions that it encounters. Human texts are marked by the events of their lives. They arrive at Inkshed conferences, already written and marked upon, to be read and marked again.

Texts, as Bakhtin explained, are socially situated and are the culmination of a myriad of background experiences. He wrote:

Any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances—his own and others’—with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another...Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances. (p. 69)

Like print or visual texts, humans are also socially situated and enter any conversation as a product of past experiences, ready to take on parts of new conversations. They are like Bakhtin’s “utterance,” imbued with meaning, depth, and complexity as a result of previous and current experiences. Thus, this chapter explores the literacy practice that is the circulation, reading and marking of both print and human texts as part of the Inkshed experience and as a way of understanding the trajectory from peripheral to full participation.

To begin my discussion of reading and circulation of human and paper texts, I present two short vignettes that illustrate some of the ways that inkshedding equalizes. Although neither of these two vignettes describes the reading process in the actual

inkshedding activity, they speak to the ways that individuals and their opinions are valued and are given voice in conference settings. They reflect the fundamental values behind reading in inkshedding. I follow these vignettes with a discussion of the theoretical perspective explaining why inkshedding has the potential to equalize, and the ways that it does so with both written and human texts. However, my data (as implied by the intensity of the feelings of vulnerability described in the previous chapter) suggest that to assume that inkshedding is an activity in which everyone feels equal is altruistic and unreflective of many peoples' experiences. Therefore, I present two more short vignettes that illustrate the suggestion that not all inkshedding is equally valued. The first illustrates the way in which I was marked as a text at the first Inkshed conference I attended. The second describes one way that texts are read. I use these vignettes to launch a discussion of how inkshedding marginalizes some groups of people and favours others. This, I argue, impacts the opportunities that participants have to participate in meaningful and legitimate ways, and therefore, membership in the collective. However, it should be noted that because I am primarily interested in the ways that inkshedding facilitates membership, my data are not sufficient to examine extensively the more negative side of inkshedding. I touch on things that may detract from membership, but do not dwell on them in detail. I do so with an awareness that I am presenting only one of many possible perspectives.

Vignette 1

CATTW²⁸ 2006—the conference room is full to overflowing. Latecomers sit on the stairs that lead to the center of the room where Ken Hyland has just finished his keynote presentation. Intellectual enthusiasm and energy permeate the room. Even I feel caught

²⁸ Canadian Association for Teachers of Technical Writing

*up by the research he has presented. Many hands are in the air as people wait their turn to ask questions and make comments. A woman below me and to my left is drawing parallels between Hyland's work and someone else's. Someone behind me asks a question about methods. Someone across the room asks questions about implications. The moderator of the session tries to make sure the less vocal people in the room have the opportunity to speak and tries to cut off the questions to keep the session within its time frame. I find myself wishing for a way to expand on some of my own thoughts but realize that, with the lack of time and intimidating audience, I will keep my mouth shut. We need a forum, I think to myself, where everyone can participate in this discussion, it doesn't work when only one person can have the floor at once. And suddenly, I **finally** make the connection. Inkshedding isn't an activity designed to make people feel uncomfortable (although that may be what happens). It's designed for situations exactly like this, where so many people do have something to say, where people want to pursue and explore ideas together. I finally understand it is a way of letting everyone speak. I find myself a little sad that CATTW doesn't inkshed.*

Vignette 2

Inkshed XX Friday morning, I momentarily indulge in the decadence of being alone—no children jumping on my bed, no one demanding breakfast. I languish for a moment, but all too soon, the familiar anxiety of yesterday returns. I am excited to see what the day will offer, but still worry about fitting in. A quick shower, some clean clothes, and I am ready to face the dining room for breakfast. I wonder who will be there. Will I know anyone? Who will I sit with? What will I talk about? The halls are empty as I emerge from my room. I surmise that breakfast, or at least a leisurely

breakfast, is not a priority for most Inkshedders who I imagine still clinging to their last vestiges of sleep for the day. Somewhere ahead of me I hear a solitary door open and close. I make my way to the outer door of the complex that will take me to the road to the main building where the dining room and conference room are both housed. It's a gray-looking morning, and I pull on my sweater before stepping out the door. As I round the edge of the parking lot I see someone already out ahead of me. She is half-way down the hill. Far enough away, I assume, that we don't need to worry about morning small talk. But as she hears my footsteps behind her, she glances back. I see it is Margaret Procter, one of the conference organizers. Rather than continuing on, she stops, and waits for me to catch up. I am pleasantly surprised by this display of amity from such a busy and important woman. I quicken my pace so she doesn't have too long to wait. Later that morning when she begins the session, she does so with the proclamation that, "we need to do lots of inkshedding so Miriam can see how it's done."

Equality

The written text

One of the things that Inkshedders celebrate about inkshedding is the way that it equalizes participants. Regardless of educational background or affiliation, everyone is given the opportunity to share thoughts and contribute to an ongoing discussion.

Anthony Paré, in many mentoring discussions with me, has described how, in academia, students are typically relegated to eavesdropping on the proverbial Burkean conversation²⁹. While the learned knowledge makers (well-established figures in the

²⁹ See description of Burke's parlour metaphor in Chapter 5 where he describes disciplinary knowledge as an ongoing conversation.

discipline) engage in debates, negotiations, and otherwise construct knowledge, newcomers to academia (students) listen in at the parlour door and attempt to summarize and draw connections between the most significant voices. When they become graduate students, the door is thrown open and they are suddenly expected, through the negotiation of a supervisor, to participate in the parlour conversation. This metaphor helps to describe an imbalance in the distribution of power typical in academia. However, what inkshedding does, in an academic setting, is to allow everyone who participates—regardless of status or workplace—the same opportunity to be heard. In other words, it allows everyone to take part in the conversation. It ignores power differentials that may exist in other settings based on status or experience such as institutional affiliation, publications, and so on. This is because no single voice is allowed to dominate. While an ordinary conversation (like the exchange I described at CATTW) allows only one voice to speak at a time (and then, the more self-assured and articulate ones), in inkshedding, everyone can “speak.” In other words, everyone contributes to the broader conversation through their writing—it is not the loudest or most aggressive people who take over the conversation because that opportunity does not exist. Everyone writes and everyone circulates what they have written before any oral voices take over or monopolize the discussion. This opportunity for self-expression is seen as positive and valuable. As one long-time Inkshedder explained:

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, or getting my words in—some people have no trouble, that's to me, why inkshedding is so valuable. It's

the one place where you can do that stuff. (Focus group interview,
5/13/2005)

As this excerpt illustrates, not everyone feels comfortable speaking out loud. Oral conversations tend to favor dominant and articulate personality types. In inkshedding, however, it is possible to join a conversation without fighting to be heard over the experts or highly verbal people because everyone's voice goes on paper to be circulated for others to read.

Russ Hunt (2004) explained how, in the creation of inkshedding, he and Jim Reither tried to create something that promoted participation and dialogue. He explained how, in his opinion, the writing activity facilitates a democratic process, or a process in which everyone has equal opportunity to be heard:

It's also important that ideas, positions, and questions which would not otherwise attain a hearing have a better opportunity to get "on the floor" than they would in an oral discussion. A significant force in the original impetus for using inkshedding in classrooms was the perception that classroom discussions tend to be dominated by a few voices. This is natural, as the "bandwidth" for classroom discussion—at least for whole class discussions—is very narrow. Only one voice can be heard at any one time: for what everyone thought about an event to be articulated and discussed is not only practically difficult, even in a small class, but socially constraining: the first few utterances tend very strongly to determine and focus the range of discussion, and constrain the kinds of questions or issues which will be raised. Anthony Paré, in a comment on

an earlier draft of this piece, says, "I've always felt that inkshedding allowed for the individual exploration of a top-of-the-head response before that response is deflected, diminished, or destroyed by the first question or comment spoken out loud. Inkshedding allows each member of the group to 'gather' her/his thoughts before they are scattered by that first, articulate, confident person who gets up to say what you weren't even thinking about." (par 6, <http://www.stthomasu.ca/~hunt/dialogic/inkshed.htm>)

In this excerpt, Russ articulated the dichotomy between a traditional one-voice-at-a-time conversation, and an Inkshed conversation in which everyone participates at once. He pointed out the value of letting participants express themselves before they can be influenced by other ideas. Thus, through inkshedding, participants have the opportunity to express their initial thoughts and ideas before they can be hijacked and carried away with the dominant voice.

One of the benefits of facilitating general participation the way inkshedding does is the multiplicity of perspectives that it provides. By encouraging multiple voices to participate at once, inkshedding values a dynamic interchange with multiple perspectives. A variety of viewpoints and ideas provide more depth than might be had in a traditional conversation in which one idea is expressed at a time. A comment by Rick Coe, an original Inkshedder, supports this idea, and explains the value of multiple interactions:

The best thing about this, as distinguished from what normally happens, is that you get to hear all these people who you wouldn't get to hear. And it turns out that lots of them are thinking really interesting and insightful

things. And that happens here, and it doesn't happen at oral discussions.

(Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

In other words, inkshedding provides a forum in which otherwise quiet voices can be heard. The variety of these voices provides interesting and valuable contributions. The vignette I used earlier describing CATTW illustrates Coe's point of view. Many perspectives went unheard because of the constraints of oral discourse. Thus, by using writing as a medium for discussion, more voices and therefore more ideas come forward during the reading stage. More opportunity is given for meaningful participation leading to fuller participation in general. This, in turn, provides for a rich exchange and dialogue because the conversation is not limited to those who are loudest. Instead, the community engages together, thus strengthening membership.

The human text

Valuing multiple voices and opportunities for meaningful participation characterizes both the inkshedding activity and the community that uses it. For this reason, many people talk not just about inkshedding as a democratizing activity in which everyone participates, but about Inkshed as a community that equalizes. The inkshedder attitude is that everyone has something valuable to contribute. Despite diverse backgrounds, everyone, from expert scholars in the field to graduate students just beginning their career, is welcomed into the collective and no hierarchy is encouraged. One Inkshedder explained how the inkshedding activity is a reflection of how people are accepted at the conferences. He said:

We think, 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 a tendency to take over those conversations. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

In other words, like the inkshedding activity, all participants in the community have the chance to participate without worrying about pre-existing social hierarchies and so on. This kind of equalizing is purposeful and conscientious and exists because of the nature of the community. The community values dialogic interaction and collaboration. Thus, in the same way that everyone's voice is valued in the activity, many Inksheddors work hard to make sure this same equality exists in the community at large. Just as a written text is circulated so everyone can read it, individuals are like texts as they circulate through the community and there is considerable effort to ensure that participants have a wide circulation and reading.

The vignette, in which I describe how Margaret Procter waited for me, describes one of the ways that I was made to feel part of the community. Margaret, a busy conference organizer, could easily have continued on her way ahead of me without needing to make excuses. Instead, she chose to wait for me. She knew I was just a graduate student, and not even contributing in the form of a presentation to the conference, and yet, she waited and then walked and talked with me. Margaret did not "read" me as just another graduate student unworthy of her time. On the contrary, she seemed sincerely interested in what I had to say. She treated me as an equal.

Like Margaret most Inkshedders make a conscious effort to make people feel comfortable and equal in the community. They make an effort to “sign onto that collaborative medial [communicative] social model” (Nan Johnson, focus group interview, 5/13/2005)—i.e., a collective effort to mutually and equally engage—and learn from each other. One of the ways that this kind of collaboration is both facilitated and encouraged (as I described in Chapter 5) is through the isolated settings of the conferences. Participants are always together—single-session presentations, meals, talent night, and so on. Through this constant interaction, every opportunity is given for people to circulate, read and be read. Anthony Paré once pointed out in a supervisory session that it is possible to go to other conferences and never know the name of the person sitting beside you. At Inkshed, this does not happen. Instead, multiple opportunities exist to read other texts, and to be read by others. The wider the circulation, in general, the more individuals come to feel part of the collective.

Many original and long-time Inkshedders purposefully try to facilitate newcomer circulation. They make a special effort to read, or interact with, as many people as they can during the conference so that newcomers feel validated, important, and like they have something valuable to contribute (this touches on “highlighting” in which certain parts of the text stand out as worthwhile or resonant which I discuss in more detail in the next section). One Inkshedder who makes an extra effort to read as many texts (i.e., people) as she can and was particularly influential in my circulation in the Inkshed community is Kenna Manos. At my first conference, she surprised me by inviting me for a walk in the woods with herself and another long-time Inkshedder. I suspected they were planning their talent night act, and, fearful of being roped in, declined the invitation. The

genuineness of the offer struck me, however, and somehow that simple acknowledgment of my presence helped me feel “highlighted”—i.e., in resonance with the collective. At subsequent conferences Kenna has always engaged with me as a long-time trusted colleague. Every time I have attended a conference with her, I have been struck by the way she appears to have a genuine interest in everyone there, and mingles with as many people as she can. Many others, like Kenna and Margaret Procter, engage in getting to know everyone. Kenna summarized her drive to be inclusive. She explained:

We want them [newcomers] to become part of the culture, to feel comfortable in the culture. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

Inkshedders want newcomers to feel like they can participate, like they are valued, and like they are part of the collective. This effort at inclusion, by people like Kenna, contributes to a culture of equality where newcomers and old-timers alike are invited to participate. The result of this inclusivity and sense of equality is that like the inkshedding texts, human texts get a wide distribution and circulation. Through the set-up of the conference, people have multiple opportunities to mingle and put names to faces, but also interact in more meaningful ways. Conversations carry from conference tables to lunch tables. Connections are made in the evening over drinks in the bar. Talent night strips away pride and shows not just a goofy side of Inkshedders, but also, sometimes, a deeper and more personal part of a person’s being—like the woman who shared a short story she had written that detailed some of her childhood experiences coming to grips with religion, or the woman who spoke of her mother’s death. Each of these opportunities for contact or interaction provides opportunity for a text to be read, be marked by the

interaction with the reader, and leave a mark in return. Individuals both read and are read and thus they participate in meaningful ways in the community.

This participation leads to a feeling of engagement and therefore membership in the collective. Comments by newcomers reflect the impact of this inclusive effort. One person, describing his/her first time at Inkshed, wrote:

I attend my first Inkshed and immediately feel the support of a national community. (The Wall)

Another wrote:

I land in Nfld not knowing a soul; I leave a member of a community that extends to this day. (The Wall)

Although not universal, these excerpts echo my own experience of inclusion, welcome and participation in Inkshed. Thus, in the same way the activity seeks to equalize participation, the Inkshed community values participation and tries to help everyone feel comfortable and part of the collective. Efforts to value all participants often result in newcomers being able to gain confidence participating in the community and thus feel that they are community members. This perspective of Inkshed serves to illustrate Wenger's description of a CoP. Because power structures and hierarchies do not appear in Wenger's description, this very positive perspective of the Inkshed community serves to show how a CoP might function if, no power differentials existed.

However, in spite of efforts by the community to make everyone feel welcome and included, not everyone does. In the same way that some written texts resonate well and stand out to the reader, some individuals stand out as well. Like mine, their experiences tend to be positive and inclusive, while others, whether through their writing

or other interactions, are left feeling marginalized. LPP (Lave & Wenger, 1991) suggests that newcomers should learn to participate in similar ways. That is, given consistent circumstances in which to participate, newcomers will learn the same way. The learning experience or participation will not vary. However, my data suggest that this tenet of LPP is problematic. In the same way that newcomers dealt with feelings of anxiety in different ways (as discussed in the previous chapter), individual attitudes, beliefs, values, and so on impact the ways that individuals participate. As a result, newcomers have a variety of responses to the Inkshed experience. Some connect and thrive the way I did. Others feel left out, marginalized, isolated and even resentful. The following vignettes describe the way that my personal characteristics influenced both who read me and how I was read. Highlighting parts of Miriam as a text ensured a wider reading, circulation and therefore participation in the community for me. I share these vignettes because they are easily accessible while others are more reticent to share their stories in this form. However, by including this vignette, I am not implying that everyone shares in such positive interactions. Rather, I share this in order to highlight that my case was exceptional and that few people get the same reception I did.

Vignette 3

Thursday Evening, Inkshed XX. As I sit on the deck with the other inkshedders feeling awkward because I don't know anyone here, I see Ann Beer arrive. I am surprised to see her, but happy to see a familiar face. Ann is one of my professors at McGill who has shown enthusiasm for a research project on inkshedding. I see her greet a few people as she comes in. She spots me as she is in mid-embrace with Kenna Manos.

“Kenna,” she says turning Kenna towards me, “have you met Miriam yet? She’s doing her PhD on inkshedding with Anthony.”

“Really?” Says Kenna. “Are you here to spy on us?”

“Oh no no,” I quickly respond, “nothing like that.”

“Well, let me know if I can help at all. I’ve been here since the beginning and I’d be happy to talk with you.”

“Thanks,” I answer, “that’s great, I’ll keep it in mind.”

And then Kenna and Ann are swept away in catching up and talking with others.

I next encounter Ann in the dining room as I am heading for a table with my loaded plate of food. She seems engaged in conversations between two tables. As I pass she says, “Oh Miriam, have you met Russ yet?” And turning to Russ at the table behind her she says, “Russ, this is Miriam, she’s doing her PhD on inkshedding with Anthony, isn’t that marvelous!”

“Yes,” answers Russ, “I’m really looking forward to it.”

And so she continues. The following morning she introduces me to Nan Johnson. During the coffee break she announces me to Sharron Wall. And by lunch time it seems that everyone knows that I am doing a PhD on inkshedding with Anthony.

Vignette 4

Friday morning, Inkshed XXII. I am one of the first ones into the conference room after breakfast. I position myself at a table in the middle of the back of the room and glance over the schedule for the morning. I am happy to see that more than just recognizing some of the names on the schedule I have memories and connections with

many of them as well. I see that Brock and Barbara-Rose are starting off the morning and I smile knowing that it is bound to be an interesting presentation.

I find myself thinking back to my first Inkshed conference and how uncomfortable I was. The contrast is drastic. I know people now; I have developed relationships with them. I am surprised at how happy I am to be here. The academic year has not gone well. I am frustrated and ready to give up on school all together—too many conflicting demands on my time and I don't seem to be getting anywhere with research. I promised myself I would at least attend one more conference (this one) before I give it up. I have to give it one more chance.

Sharron Wall comes into the room and comes to sit with me. We haven't had a chance to visit yet. We are both at McGill, but I think I see more of her at conferences than I do in Montreal. I know her enough to have a polite conversation, but not much more than that. We chat, and then comes the inevitable question, "How's the research?" I am evasive in my answer. I am trying to prepare my comprehensive exams, but... Sharron probes. She asks pointed questions, and soon, as the room is filling up around us, I find myself venting all my recent frustrations. At some point Nan Johnson joins our table and Sharron brings her into the discussion. I am surprised by the intensity of their support, by their frankness, and by their understanding.

Eventually, the room is full and the first session starts, but I am distracted by our conversation and it stays hovering and replaying in my head for the rest of the conference.

It doesn't take long before we arrive at the inevitable inkshedding. It doesn't bother me today. I've been paying enough attention to the speakers—listening for the

thought that strikes me; the thought that I can expand on in my inkshedding. We are given leave to begin writing and so I do. The activity goes quickly. I add my paper to the growing pile in the middle of the table and pull out another one to read.

Beside me, I see that Sharron is reading mine. I find myself aware of this, but not too bothered. I've just finished pouring my heart out about my PhD woes and had nothing but support. It's ok if Sharron reads the thoughts inspired by the presentation—even if there's nothing to them. "Whose is this?" She asks.

"Mine," I tell her. "What's wrong, can't you read my writing?"

"Oh it's yours!" She says. "Well now that I know it's yours I'm going to go back and read it again."

"What, are you giving me special treatment or something?"

"Well I want to know what you have to say."

"Wait a minute! You mean it makes a difference to you who wrote it?" I ask, intrigued that an inkshed could be valued not just for what it said, but for who said it.

"Of course," she answers.

"Well give that here then," I say as I take the page from her. I sign my name at the bottom of the page, and never write an anonymous inkshed again.

Highlighting

In the second stage of inkshedding, not only are texts circulated and read, but they are also marked, highlighting the ways in which they resonate with the reader, or the way the reader has become mutually engaged with the writer. The two vignettes I have just shared reflect a fundamental problem with the notion of equality in Inkshed and in inkshedding: despite efforts to the contrary, some inkshedding is more valued than

others. Texts, human or written, are not all read in the same way. In the case of my first Inkshed conference, it was as if every time Ann introduced me to someone and said I was studying inkshedding with Anthony, she was highlighting a particular part of the text of Miriam. Inksheddors say that when they read the inkshedding texts, they look for something they think will resonate with other Inksheddors that will be meaningful to them, and mark the text accordingly. In describing how he reads and marks an inkshedding text, Rick Coe explained:

There's something in that and you say other people would find this interesting or find this funny or useful or insightful....I'm saying this thing is something that should go to the group because it will have some value, in my opinion. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

In other words, when something resonates and he thinks it will also resonate with the group, he marks it up to call attention to it for the next reader and as something worth engagement. Another Inkshedder explained:

I would hope that what those publications do...should continue the conversation. I mean there are certainly inksheds that don't invite you to continue the conversation, and there are things that do. And I have a tendency to mark those things that I think will be provocative, and will provoke people to think more about it. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

Like Rick Coe, this reader highlights texts that will have some kind of engagement with others.

Thus, the way that Ann introduced me to other Inksheddors highlighted me in the same way that these Inksheddors described highlighting an inkshedding text. She

highlighted something she thought was valuable to the community and would inspire conversation—not only that I was studying inkshedding, but that I was doing it under the supervision of long-time and well-respected inkshedder Anthony Paré. She highlighted the things about me that would resonate with the collective. In the years since that initial experience I have learned to connect in other meaningful ways with the community (as I discuss in more detail in the following chapter.) However, that initial experience highlighted important things that would grab the attention of the collective immediately. As a result, Ann’s enthusiastic introductions ensured a wide circulation and interaction for Miriam the text.

Contrast my experience at my first Inkshed conference to the experience of a first-time Inkshedder a few years earlier. Instead of my experience in which I felt widely circulated, he shared how his personal text was virtually ignored. He wrote:

The conference began on the first evening with a large circle in which people went around and stated "My first Inkshed..." and recounted tales of the previous Inkshed conferences and their favourite memories. For those of us there for the first time (and we made up perhaps 20% of the group) that was very, very excluding. (Personal communication, 6/10/2007)

This example points to the ways that some human texts are valued over others. This participant describes one way in which veteran Inkshedders were valued over newcomers and the subsequent feelings of marginalization that ensued.

The vignette, in which Sharron read my text more carefully once she knew it was mine, shows how important readings of people texts are to the inkshedding activity. In the previous example, the writer did not have an opportunity to be read, and as a result of

this and other experiences which left him feeling marginalized, did not return to Inkshed. However, the other Inkshedders present in his account were given opportunity to strengthen the existing relationships through their memories. Like my experience with Sharron, this kind of emphasis on relationships may contribute to the way the conference has emerged where (as I described in the previous section) participants are given multiple opportunities to interact and engage. Sharron took the time to read me and know me before ever reading my written text. Had she not, she would have quickly dismissed my messy handwriting as not worth the effort to decipher (something she was about to do, but chose to ask for clarification instead). Unfortunately, the participant who felt marginalized while others shared their memories did not have a chance to be read and thus did not share the same feelings of value that I experienced.

Other Inkshedders admit to the importance of knowing who you are reading. In one of many conversations I had with him, Russ Hunt admitted that he has taken to moving from table to table during the reading stage because he wants to know what particular people have written (Field notes, 5/13/2005). Similarly, Tania Smith (2000) in an ethnographic study of Inkshed, noted that because many Inkshedders have been working together for many years and know each other very well, they value what each other has to say. As a result, they search for specific texts in order to know what certain people have to say on the topic. Tania quoted one of the participants of her study who said:

Overall, the process seems quite interesting but not all VOICES or INKSHEDS are heard... there is a certain problem with that... for example, my INKSHEDS were never selected and often, they were not read on

the table...where I was sitting. Quite often, more experienced INKSHEDDERS read the writings of their peers and not of newcomers like myself. Also, my comments probably did not correspond to the majority's cultural viewpoint so I did not benefit from feedback such as "I think the same way" or "similar to the point I made" . . . rather, my comments were for the most part never read or commented on by my peers...I think the process of INKSHEDDING is quite interesting but perhaps the issue of EQUITY needs to be addressed to ensure that more VOICES are heard and picked up and that newcomers are also read and commented etc. (<http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed/shed2000/tsethnog.htm>)

As this example illustrates, despite the fact that extra attention given to me worked positively in my case, the converse also happens and the same conundrum that I raised in the previous chapter is reinforced. That is, it is difficult to participate without knowing the audience or being known, but it is equally challenging to know the audience, or become known without participating. As some of these examples suggest, things happen that, instead of valuing a personal or written text in the community, leave individuals feeling marginalized and outside the general reading.

Marginalization

Notwithstanding the efforts of Inkshedders and the values of inclusivity and equality in inkshedding, individuals will always respond in individual ways. In the same way that I responded positively to the Inkshed setting, others do not, nor do others share my positive welcome. I connected to the values, beliefs and practices of the community

because the community opened to me. Others, however, remain on the periphery for too long and therefore do not share in the ideals of Inkshed togetherness. Some find the community too self-promoting and weak in theory (Personal communication, 12/15/2006) to the point that they even find it boring (Personal communication, 12/14/2006). Thus, despite sometimes great efforts, and sometimes not so great, efforts of the community to ensure that everyone feels welcome, or equal, individuals react differently. And despite an effort to “check baggage” and other identities at the door (a metaphor generated by a focus group discussion used to refer to the way that everyone shares common interests and is equal when at the conference, 5/13/2005) participants remain individuals, and as such, react differently to the situation. As a result, some individuals feel marginalized. This feeling exists with (but is not limited to) both individuals as texts and written texts as a result of background experiences and writing styles.

Background experiences

In the previous chapter, I described how Russ Hunt sees the multidisciplinary nature of the community as positive. He feels that it brings richness to the community. However, this multidisciplinary nature is also cause for at least one person feeling marginalized. One person who is less involved in academic discussions of writing described his feelings in the following way:

I have always felt a bit of an outsider at Inkshed conferences. Simply because all other members are academically affiliated and I don't share all of their concerns. I feel welcome and comfortable, but a wee bit alien—sometimes as if I'm an emblem of writing in the workplace, an emblem of “otherness.” Thus I feel a member of a community I very much value, but

there resides a little frisson of being different, being half a step “outside.”

(Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Thus, despite feeling welcome, this writer felt marginal because he does not take part in the same academic discourses as other Inkshedders³⁰.

Another source of marginalization comes in the form of nationality. One of the people I met my first year at Inkshed was also there for her first time. She was an American living and teaching in Canada. When I encountered her a few years later at another conference, she swore she would never go back to Inkshed. She felt they were unfriendly and unwelcoming, and, most insulting, had sung anti-war songs during the talent night in response to George W. Bush’s decision to go to war in Iraq. She explained that because she was American, she felt like the whole room had been singing against her and was furious that politics would have any place at an academic conference. She also felt that Canadians in general were much less friendly and supportive than their American counterparts. She described the difference between CATTW and ATTW (the Association for Teachers of Technical writing), for example, as night and day—relating far more positively to the American conference (Personal communication, 5/27/2006). Because Inkshedders value discussions of their teaching and research in Canadian settings, it is not surprising that some people working in other countries may feel marginalized.

Ideological discrepancies also exist. One Canadian researcher in the field, who focuses on the exploration of theoretical perspectives, told me that she finds the

³⁰ Ironically, I remember eating breakfast with this individual and some graduate students at a recent conference. After the individual left the table one of the first timers turned to me and asked, “Is that so-and-so?” I confirmed that it was, and she explained how she had had to read one of this person’s articles in class, and had used it to prepare an assignment. So although the individual in question did not feel academically involved, those in the academy perceive the situation quite differently.

conference too introspective and self-indulgent. Although she values some of the things that the community has to offer (like the listserv and Inkshed publications), she prefers to attend CATTW, which she feels is more research-oriented (Field notes, 5/27/2006).

Similarly, another participant explained that although he valued the listserv community for the information it provided, he was unimpressed with the conferences. Like the woman who finds Inkshed too inwardly focused, this participant finds the conference weak on theory and too introspective. He also prefers to attend CATTW conferences.

These three areas of background experience illustrate the ways in which people may either find it difficult to or choose not to participate in the conferences. Thus, full participation becomes a challenge at best.

Style

In terms of the actual inkshedding activity itself, certain aspects of the process may privilege some and marginalize others, such as the ability to write quickly and effectively on the spot. While some do this easily, others do not. They require time to think and revise. Anthony Paré described this in the following way:

There are people who have a real facility. They have a flare. They have a nice turn of phrase, quickly. Not everybody does. And that's the French expression "pensées des escaliers"...[thoughts on the stairs] the thoughts you have after you have left whatever situation you were in. And I think, I should have said "Oh! Oh!" And I should have said that. Well, I have those all the time. I sit through situations in which I am struck dumb, and then afterwards I think, "Why didn't I say blah, blah, blah?" It was the right thing to say. Somebody should have said it, but no one did. It was

so obvious, but I didn't think about it at that time. And I think that is true.

I think that inkshedding favours a particular kind of thinker, not necessarily the best kind of thinker, but someone who comes up with quick thoughts and responses. It doesn't leave room for much reflection.

(Personal interview, 12/5/2006)

While some people can think and write quickly on the spot and can come up with something that sounds intelligent and articulate, others have a harder time with the immediacy of the response and, only once the moment has passed, think of the clever and appropriate words that might resonate with others. Without that quick facility for words, participants struggle, feel awkward, and, as described in Chapter 6, vulnerable.

Thus, the inkshedding process privileges those writers who are quick thinking, non-planning, and non-revising. Russ Hunt explored this issue with another Inkshedder. They explained this privilege in the following way:

Terry³¹: So in a sense, you're still privileging the people who can think faster...and articulate faster

Russ: But it privileges a different cut...it privileges a different slice of the population than a normal conference format... (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

Thus, by privileging a particular style, an inherent disadvantage exists. Those who cannot think quickly or write quickly are disadvantaged. This disadvantage may affect participants' abilities to participate in the activity and therefore marginalize their participation. Because of their predisposition, they are never truly in a position to participate equally. For example, an original Inkshedder explained that because he was

³¹ pseudonym

unable to write quickly and effectively, many years went by before any of his inkshedding was “published.” (I will spend more time in the next chapter talking about publication, but Nan Johnson’s comments reflect how important publication is to feeling good about the community when she says “People feel bad when nothing they’ve written gets marked or gets published. People feel bad.”—Focus group interview, 5/13/2005).

He explained:

it damages the writer who is an inveterate planner, and you know...for ten, twelve years, I never got anything published. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

This same kind of privilege seems to affect not just the written text, but the human text as well. Those who do not take risks by joining in dinner conversations, making an effort to meet new people, and so on, or are not allowed to take risks because activities are exclusive to those who have participated in previous conferences, will not have the same kind of experience as those who are confident, socialize easily, or, like myself, were given quick entrance to the community. While some people find Inkshed friendly and welcoming, others find it insular and difficult to take part in. One person compared going to an Inkshed conference to being invited into someone’s living room and then ignored. Another person said:

The attitudes of "veteran" Inkshedders toward younger scholars were dismissive and cliquish. (Personal communication, 6/8/2007)

He continued describing his problem with the Inkshed community by writing:

I think that there is a terrible cliquishness about Inkshed that stems from a kind of moral superiority about particular practices. (Personal communication, 6/8/2007)

He went on to express that at least three other scholars had the same kinds of feelings that he did and have cut themselves off from Inkshed, thus pointing to the role of privilege in membership. Others articulate their experiences in other ways. Consider, for example, the experience that one individual had when she attended the conference for the first time. Like the other examples, her experience describes a feeling of having not been appropriately circulated or read as a text. She wrote:

I don't feel like I've become a member of the inkshed community yet—for two reasons. 1) This is my first Inkshed conference and 2) the opportunity for discussion never came. Hence, I don't feel like I've gotten to know the whole group or it me. (Inkshedding text, 5/4/2004)

Her perception that “the opportunity for discussion never came” is revealing of the kind of experience she had, and, like so many other aspects of Inkshed and inkshedding that I have pointed out, suggests a predisposition to participation in the community. Whether the collective never provided opportunities for engagement, or the writer did not engage in the opportunities, or both, this writer did not circulate his/her text in the on going dialogue. This excerpt along with the previous ones highlights the different kinds of experiences that people can have. While I was able to find many opportunities for discussion, this individual was unable to find those opportunities to connect with others—to read and highlight others, or to be read and highlighted herself. The variance between my own experience and others' seems to reflect Bourdieu's (1990) notions of

social and cultural capital as a way of explaining differences in experiences (see Chapter 3). In other words, background is one way of accounting for the diverse ways that people experience inkshedding as well as the ways that Inkshedders experience new members (like myself).

Another way that texts may appear to be marginalized and thus unequal in the inkshedding process is through handwriting. Quite simply, neat handwriting is privileged over messy handwriting. In other words, handwriting that is neat and easy to read is more likely to be read, and therefore be marked and even published. Like a speaker with an accent too thick to be understood, poor handwriting will be passed over in favour of that which is quick and easy to read in a short time period—regardless of who has written it. During a conference presentation at Kamloops, I led a discussion about how people feel like members of the community. The issue was raised of being “published.” One woman complained that she didn’t write the “right” things and was therefore never published. (I discuss this issue in detail in the following chapter.) In response, another woman—a long time member of the community—explained that in her whole inkshed career she had been “published” less than five times. The explanation—her handwriting, which is agreed by the community to be virtually illegible, made her inkshedding far too difficult to read even though she had valuable things to say. In my own experience, if the handwriting is difficult to read, I tend to skim over it very quickly and not give it the time and attention that it may deserve.

Thus, although many aspects of Inkshed and inkshedding do equalize and democratize, many people find it difficult to find opportunities to engage, and, as a result, feel marginalized. The converse is also true. Some are able to engage more than others

(like I was because of Ann's highlighting) and therefore move to a position of full participation.

Summary

In summary, both the inkshedding activity and Inkshed community (particularly through the conference) facilitate a kind of democratic or equal interaction. This is a result of the way that texts, both human and written are circulated. In theory, everyone has equal opportunity to express themselves and be heard. The reality, however, is somewhat different. Some texts may get more or less attention depending on their author, the relationships already there, the perceived contribution, and so on. Thus, although some people and texts are favoured in a positive way through circulation and participation, others are not. Those who are unable to find themselves in a position in which they feel equal or like they belong in the community often never come back to the conference. However, some, who share inkshedding values, manage to throw themselves into the process for circulation (both figuratively and literally), and manage to find a place of belonging and contribute to the membership.

These data point to a weakness of the theory of CoPs that I raised in Chapter 3—the failure to acknowledge power differentials. As my experiences and those of others illustrate, social dynamic and hierarchies (formal or perceived) impact the ways in which people are able to engage. In addition, the individuality that people have while functioning within a CoP will also impact the kind of experience people may have. In a broader academic context, this helps to explain the variety of experiences that students may have even within the same class. It also points to the challenge of teaching such a variety of individuals.

Miraculously, however, despite all these different reactions, chaos does not ensue; the community goes on; the institution goes on; even the genre goes on. This seems to be because people choose not to participate in a community. In Inkshed, this is as easy as not returning to a conference. This will likely have minimal impact. But what of a student who selects out of an academic community? The impacts there seem particularly more significant.

In terms of genre, the idea of selection or standardization helps to explain the ways in which standardized texts emerge—those that do not work are cast off; those that do, continue on, reinforcing the norm.

The following chapter looks at the final step in inkshedding—publication—and how this stage manifests the success with which individuals have integrated into the community. It is the final stage in Inkshed membership.

Chapter 8

Perspectives from the data: Publication

In the previous three chapters, I described the values characteristic of the Inkshed community and inkshedding activity in an effort to explain the ways that writing practices both facilitate and frustrate membership. I described the process of membership, or the process of becoming an Inkshedder, by examining the stages of inkshedding for both the literal writing process and as a way of understanding human dynamics at conferences. I did so by drawing on notions of phenomenology (Van Manen, 1998), ethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), and narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) in an effort to understand and explore the experience of inkshedding and the process of membership. In this chapter, I describe the final stage of inkshedding—publication, and look at the published texts both as a tool for and a symbol of membership.

The publication stage works something like this: after the inkshedding texts have circulated as much as time allows, they are whisked away to another room where there is a computer and a printer. Each set of conference organizers manages this stage slightly differently. Sometimes, Inksheddors volunteer or are recruited to edit (i.e., select which passages will be typed up) and type. Other times, graduate students are hired to transcribe the highlighted sections. At one conference I attended, a secretary (who I never actually saw), came with the conference organizers and spent the entire conference locked in a room typing up highlighted inkshed texts so that we had them within an hour or two of the presentations (Field notes, 5/9/2006). Sometimes difficulties arise in transcribing highlighted sections of texts because meaningful passages are not clearly marked. In one

difficult case, the graduate students assigned to transcribe the texts printed off inkshedding excerpts that began or ended midsentence. Since the original text was highlighted with lines in the margin, linguistic boundaries had not been delineated. The students assigned to edit and type had not attended the conference sessions in question, and the texts were decontextualized for them. Thus they were unable to make meaningful editorial interpretations or judgments about excerpts. As a result, instructions come back to Inksheddors to clarify what they marked (Field notes, 5/8/2004). Sometimes, when the typists are Inksheddors, they act as an editorial board. Early in the conference, when they are still energetic, anything with two or more lines gets published. Later as energy wanes, only sections with three or four lines are typed up. Sometimes, if passages from two texts are similar, only one of them will be typed up (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

Once the highlighted texts have been typed up, they are photocopied and distributed to conference members. The purpose of this stage is to reinsert significant ideas back into the ongoing dialogue during the conference. Because the texts are edited and typed by a separate body and then distributed to the public (as happens with academic publications³²) I call this stage publication.

Although this chapter explores the literal process of publication as I have described above, it also looks at the public aspect of publication. That is, the root word for publication is public. For my purposes here, I describe publication as making a text public. While I focus primarily on inkshedding texts being made public and the ramifications for that, I also look (as I did in Chapter 7) at the human text and the making

³² I describe the similarities between publication in Inkshed and publication in academia in more detail later in this chapter.

public of a human text. In this case, I describe the human text as an individual, but also apply the role of the text to the Inkshed community. Like an inkshedding text or a human text participating in Inkshed, the Inkshed collective has a public face in the broader discipline of Canadian writing studies. Hence, when I talk about movement to a public place, or about a text being public, I use it to refer to the ways that single entities (written text, individual, or the community) are exposed to and interact with a broader collective. That may range, for example, from the transaction between an individual's excerpted inkshedding text and another individual reading it to the interaction between Inkshed and the rest of the scholarly community in Canada. Thus, I look at interactions and implications of those interactions as instances of being public, or publication.

I begin this discussion of publication by discussing the concept of what it means to be public, or the kinds of reactions that being public evokes. This is important because it helps to describe the experience of publication. The whole concept of publication is significant as a way of understanding the process described by Lave and Wenger (1991) of situated learning through legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). The data in this chapter illustrate how movement to full participation requires movement to a more public sphere. The more one participates in the community, the more public one becomes. I illustrate this point, as I have in other chapters, with a vignette. In this scene, I describe my publication experience—i.e., the ways in which I was made public. By describing my publication as a human text, I reintroduce and make a connection between the issues of writing and membership. Whereas in Chapter 5 I looked at membership from the perspective of the collective (i.e., the shared characteristics), in this chapter I look at it from the perspective of an individual undergoing the process of becoming a member

through textual interactions (both paper and human). I look at how interactions between individuals, and individuals and inkshedding texts, reflect membership. I follow this vignette with an exploration of inkshedding publication as a microcosm of publication in academia. This is important because it has implications for the way that membership develops in academic communities. In Inkshed, an academic community, tools or shared repertoire emerge as a result of interactions and engagement. When taking a written form, these tools might sometimes be described as genres. In the final section of this chapter, I examine shared repertoire or tools for achieving joint enterprise. In other words, I look at the published inkshedding texts as a representation or embodiment of the mutual engagement and joint enterprise of the collective. Thus, I discuss the ways in which these published texts typify the shared repertoire of the collective.

Being public

The first time that I, as a member of a disciplinary field, had a written text published for the rest of the field to read was an article in *Inkshed*, the community's newsletter (Horne, 2004). The day that the newsletter came out, I had several emails from Inkshedders telling me how much they had enjoyed my article. It was, not surprisingly, a great feeling to have members of the Inkshed community acknowledging my contribution. It made me feel like my piece was worthwhile, which, in turn, raised my personal feelings of worth and strengthened my feeling of connection with the community. As I will discuss later in this chapter, these feelings of success mirror some of the same kinds of feelings that take place in the inkshedding stage of publication. Just as I felt positive and encouraged by my first publication in academia, my ability to publish in inkshedding activities also made me feel like I had something valuable to

contribute and it made me feel good about what I was doing. In describing the positive side of going public in the inkshedding process, Anthony Paré described one kind of encouraging reaction to publishing an Inkshed text. He said:

It's always the same right? I mean, "Hey that sounds pretty good." It turns out actually to have a pretty nice ring to it. Or somebody picks it up and says, "Somebody wrote this morning—," and reads your piece, and that's wow, that's fame in the Inkshed universe. (Personal interview, 12/5/2006)

As Anthony's comment illustrates, positive feelings accompany a sense of having been able to connect with the readership. Publishing in inkshedding can be a marker of the ways that individuals manage to engage with the collective. I explore this concept in more detail in the last section of this chapter. I raise the point now, however, to illustrate the positive kinds of feelings that publication typically evokes. The individual response is likely to be positive, self-congratulatory, and building of self-esteem. However, not all publishing evokes positive feelings. My first publishing experience was not limited to positive feelings about my accomplishment. It was also punctuated with feelings of exposure and lack of privacy.

The same day my article appeared, I received an email from an Inkshed listserv member who I had never met. He was working in Utah and asked if he could quote part of my article in a chapter he was writing that dealt with spirituality and religion in composition processes. His request took me by surprise. Although not Mormon himself, he was living, working, and writing in a community that was largely Mormon. Two identities, that I typically work hard to keep separate, were spinning together—Mormon

and academic (an issue I discuss in more detail in my final chapter). Although my article (which described the spiritual nature of the experience I had at my first Inkshed talent show) said nothing wrong about Mormons, it also did not promote traditional Mormon values. It was not a paper I shared with my family or friends at church. And yet, through this connection, my academic self was being made public among Mormons, and there was nothing I could do about it. I had never considered the implications of the root word for publication—public. I was out there, and there was no turning back.

I had another public experience as a result of the same article a few months later when I attended a graduate course at McGill University. I was surprised by the way I had become public—i.e., known. The first evening of class we all went around the room and introduced ourselves. The course was multidisciplinary with students from a broad variety of faculties, so when it was my turn I said, “I’m Miriam and I’m working on a PhD here in the Faculty of Education and I’m studying writing.” The professor, who I had never met, interrupted to ask if I was Miriam Horne. Taken aback that I was not anonymous, I said that I was, and she responded that she had enjoyed reading my article. I was staggered. Normally a private person, I was unprepared for the ways that my article had made me public and I found it made me uncomfortable.

Similarly, a few months after that, I attended a lecture in the series presented by the McGill Centre for the Study and Teaching of Writing. I was invited to join the organizer, speaker and another professor for lunch. As introductions were made, the professor said, “Miriam Horne, oh yes, I’ve heard of you.” Like the other professor, she had heard of me because of my article in *Inkshed*.

These experiences taught me that publishing is not simply about having a contribution to the discipline recognized and feeling great that other members of a discipline think that you have something worthwhile to say. It is also, as I have described in my experiences above, a movement to a public place where personal boundaries and ideas about privacy are reexamined.

Once my first article was published, I was out there. I could not go back and unpublish the article and slip back into privacy and anonymity. Similarly, in inkshedding, once a text is published, there is no way of taking it back. Sometimes this means feeling dissatisfied with what you have written and wish that you could clarify what you said. In a discussion I had with one newcomer to Inkshed, she lamented the fact that the discussion had to take place on paper because she was unable to explain what she had been writing and felt that the excerpted section had been so decontextualized as to misconstrue what she had been trying to say (Field notes, 8/5/2004). Anthony Paré also described this discomfort by explaining:

You may even go, “God that is so stupid. What was I thinking!” And you may want to explain what you meant. But you can’t. It’s out there. And again, it’s very similar to writing in the world, right. It’s a broader world. You’ve got it out there now. You can’t walk around behind the people reading, saying “what I really meant was—.” (Personal interview, 12/5/2006)

In addition to discomfort arising from misinterpretation or a sense of perfectionism that makes individuals unhappy with what they have written, an even worse feeling comes from not being published. Despite Russ Hunt’s annual explanation

of how to Inkshed, in which he claims it does not matter what you write, the academic nature of the community values publication. Failure to perform in this way means failure, and failure feels bad. As Nan Johnson pointed out:

If they feel bad, that's one of the down sides [of inkshedding]. It really is. People feel bad when nothing they've written gets marked or gets published. People feel bad.... You have to think about the human level of it. You know, people do feel bad. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

Thus, publication is a complex stage full of conflicting emotions. It is a highly charged emotional experience regardless of the outcome. In the following vignette, I describe the ways in which publication of different kinds of texts took place—the text of Miriam and the text of a presentation I did at the 2006 Inkshed conference—and how this impacted my membership in the community.

Vignette

February 2006, I receive an email from the organizer of this year's Inkshed conference following up my proposal for a presentation with an invitation to speak for 30-40 minutes. The following week I receive another email—this one with a tentative conference schedule. I am taken aback to see my presentation scheduled first thing Friday morning of the conference with a time allotment of an hour and fifteen minutes. I check with the organizing committee on this to make sure it's not a misprint. I am assured it is correct—a 45-minute presentation with 30 minutes for inkshedding and discussion. I feel a pressure of responsibility weighing down on me. I have promised to speak about historical contexts for inkshedding.

When I arrive in Winnipeg a few months later, I am happy to be there. I am happy to reconnect with old acquaintances. As soon as I see Russ and Ann come into the dining room at suppertime, I jump up and greet them in an exchange of hugs. I make new acquaintances too—some new to Inkshed, others who have been around but I haven't had the chance to meet yet. I am comfortable and confident and enjoy the opening night book launch and socializing.

Friday morning my heart rate is a little faster than I would like as I feel some nervousness about how my presentation will be received. I am the first presenter. I spend breakfast recruiting people to participate. I have prepared my presentation as a dialogue with voices from the past and want audience members to read the different parts. I am hopeful that by giving the words of Inkshedders like Russ Hunt and Jim Reither to different voices in a different context, that I can evoke new perspectives on the history of Inkshed and inkshedding.

I think the presentation goes smoothly. Everyone gets their cues, and there are no major mishaps. After the inkshedding we have a discussion and I have the first feedback on how the presentation has been received. One woman, in preface to her question, tells me I have given “a quintessential Inkshed presentation.” That is, I have given her a headache because of the self-reflection I've required of the audience.

Throughout the weekend, I continue to get bits of feedback here and there. Lines from the presentation weave into other conversations, become inside jokes, circulate. By lunchtime on Friday Janice Freeman is rallying a group of Inkshedders to prepare “Inkshed: the opera” for the talent show—inspired by the tensions alluded to in my presentation. As a result, I find myself on stage Saturday night with several other brave

(and somewhat intoxicated) Inkshedders clad in gold and velvet hastily acquired at the dollar store along with a plastic Viking helmet and singing the Inkshed version of “Ride of the Valkieries” (“Listen to Russ, Listen to Russ, Listen to Russ, Listen to Russ...”). Our opera ends with a dramatic death scene the libretto for which comes directly from my presentation. We bow to roaring applause.

Sunday morning we prepare to wrap up the conference. Russ has been assigned to “pull it all together.” When he begins to speak, he makes an allusion first to the wonderful job that Nan Johnson did the year before in her summary discussion of that conference. Russ explains that he is unable to do what Nan did so eloquently and didn’t know quite how to go about doing this. So he decided “to take a page out of Miriam’s book.” He has typed up some of the published Inksheds from the weekend and incorporated them in an overview of the conference. He gives us each a part to read, just as I did in my presentation.

My ideas have fed back into the larger conversation. I have no doubt that I belong. I am an Inkshedder.

In the preceding vignette, I described the way that pieces of my presentation were published, or made public. In much the same way that pieces of inkshedding texts are excerpted and recirculated in the discussion, aspects of my presentation (both content and form) were picked up and reinserted into the ongoing dialogue of the conference. This happened through interactions like conversations over coffee and meals, but also through the talent show and Russ Hunt’s choice of approach for his wrap-up presentation.

As I pointed out in Chapter 6, newcomers who feel vulnerable feel anxious because they are in a peripheral position in the community and are trying to connect in meaningful ways with the collective. This vignette illustrates the ways that my public text resonated with the audience and was therefore successful. Those texts that are published (textual and human) gain successful public status because they connect in some meaningful way (as my presentation did) with the collective.

In addition to the ways that bits of my presentation continued to be public even after I finished, I also felt like bits of the text of Miriam were also being made public, circulated, and reinserted into the dialogue: Miriam, the researcher of inkshedding—opening speaker, 45-minute presentation; Miriam the performer—stand in front of people and present an academic presentation as easily as perform in a silly and light-hearted opera; Miriam the mother—“take these Viking helmets home to your kids.” And on goes the list. And although at my first Inkshed Ann Beer highlighted the Miriam as researcher of Inkshed (see Chapter 7), over the years of my participation, these aspects I have listed above, and more, have all become published texts—the ones that get fed back into the ongoing dialogue. In the Burkean parlour, through participation, I have become a full participant.

One of the important things about describing the publication experience in inkshedding, or in the Inkshed community, is the ways in which it mirrors the kinds of publication experiences that take place in academia. In the following section, I look at this mirror and the reflections it offers on the importance of writing and community membership.

Academic publication

The publication stage of the inkshedding process is, in many ways, a microcosm for the same kinds of publication experiences and processes that take place in the academy. This is important because it helps to describe the intensity of the final stage of inkshedding. In an interview, Anthony Paré explained that the Inkshed community and writing experience are a microcosm of the kinds of processes that academics go through in order to publish. He said:

I have always felt, from the very beginning, the great thing about Inkshed, in the little community settings, in the conference settings, is that it is an absolutely perfect microcosm of academic and scholarly work. There is a conversation ongoing; there is something to which other people are responding; you've heard more or less the same kinds of ideas; people write. A group of people sits and decides who's going to get to be published. It's so much like academic and scholarly life and it puts you in some of the same situations. You are going to side with people. You're going to go in—you have the whole kind of Burkean conversation. Someone says something; you side with them or you go against them; someone comes to your defense....And I think that was one of the other things about it that was so appealing to me because here was this kind of microcosm of the academic world. And you could get written up; you could get published or **not** [emphasis his]. And it was life or death in the sense that it was so much like the publish or perish kind of situation that we all found ourselves in. (Personal interview, 12/5/2006)

The inkshedding process reflects the publication process in academia. Just like an ongoing disciplinary conversation in academia, Inkshed facilitates a kind of conversation that people try to join into (knowing how to join that conversation and getting into it can be intimidating as described in Chapter 6, and the interactions and introductions that newcomers have can influence participation in that conversation as described in Chapter 7). In academia, writing is assessed and reviewed by knowledgeable peers and members who fully participate in their discipline. Success is seen when those peers agree to publish a document. Like a gatekeeper, they decide who can enter. Peers who agree to publish a document are allowing the writer participation the exclusive community of academia. Writers have been judged by their peers and accepted.

In inkshedding, comments that participants have contributed to the conversation are also assessed and evaluated by peers in the discipline. Their contributions, or written comments, are first presented to peers during the second stage of inkshedding (as described in Chapter 7), and then they are assessed or reviewed (usually) by peers to establish whether or not something is valuable enough to be made public to the collective. A mark in the margin is a mark of acceptance and determines who will be published.

The importance of publication in academia can be seen, for example, as graduate students finish their dissertations and attempt to join the academy as contributing members. One of the things that comes up as they try to establish themselves is how many presentations and how many publications they need to have before they can be considered established in the discipline (i.e., tenured.) While no one in Inkshed counts or expects a minimum number of inkshedding publications from others, it is clear that, like

academia, success is measured by one's ability to publish. Lack of publications is a sign of failure. As one Inkshedder explained:

I think that's where the real pressure lies with Inksheds as perhaps is also true with conference presentations generally is the need to elicit a response. Failure is measured by the lack of response. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

What this implies, then, is that in the same way publication is essential in gaining access to and maintaining membership in academic discourse communities, and is a marker of success, publication in Inkshed is an important part of membership. Although no record is kept of how many times a person publishes during a conference (indeed, the anonymity factor makes this impossible), individuals are well aware of their own publication record. Consider comments like:

In the ten years I've been coming I've been published less times than the number of fingers on one hand. (Field notes, 5/9/2004)

Or:

Probably, for years, ten, twelve years, I never got anything published.
(Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

The veteran Inkshedders who made these comments clearly counted their own number of publications. Similarly, it is not uncommon to skim the page of typed excerpts to see if one has "made it" before reading the other excerpts in detail (Field notes, 10/9/2004).

These examples of long-time Inkshedders, however, raise an interesting dilemma. I have been arguing that publication is a key element of membership. These examples of veteran Inkshedders imply that membership without publishing excerpted inkshedding

texts is possible. I would argue that these individuals have found other ways to publish within the community—and those not dissimilar to my own. Although their inkshedding texts were not published, their human texts have been, at the very least, through their participation in the talent show. Like the inkshedding activity that exposes and makes some people feel vulnerable, the talent show also puts people on the spot and requires risks. Like inkshedding, it requires trust.

Both of the individuals I cite above take major roles in the talent show and can always be relied on to perform and participate. Due to extenuating circumstances, I was unable to follow up with these individuals, but from my perspective, their participation in the community in ways beyond inkshedding has facilitated their membership. Participation and being public through the talent show has made them public—publications embodying the culture and values of the community. Membership in a collective does not come without being public in that collective.

Competition

In describing the inkshedding process, Russ Hunt explained:

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. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

In many ways, the collegiality that Russ described has been an important philosophy in the development and shaping of the community. Support and trust, as described in Chapter 5, pull community members together. However, while this may be a shared ideology, as I pointed out in my discussion of the trashing that emerges from feeling

vulnerable (see Chapter 6), and the hidden power structures at play in the process of reading (see Chapter 7), the reality is getting published in inkshedding has a competitive side.

Consider the following statements from Inkshedders:

At subsequent Inkshed conferences, where we were invited to sign our inksheds, I sensed a competition to be recognized. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

And I remember the very early inksheds we used to make jokes—that were half serious—about “did I get published this time?” (Rick Coe, Focus group interview, 5/13/2005)

I’m competitive I suppose. And that part of it is also, that competitiveness, you know, can you get published? Do you want to put yourself in a situation where you might not get published and have to live with the disappointment? (Personal interview, 12/5/2006)

I like the idea [of the publication process], but it seems to smack of competition, quality control, etc.. (Inkshed 2000, session 5, edited inksheds, <http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed/shed2000edsheds5.htm>)

These excerpts, from a variety of sources, point to the competitive nature of inkshedding³³. Although this perspective is contrary to the view that Russ Hunt embraces, the parallels to being successful in academia are clear—publish or perish, publish or remain on the periphery.

³³ It is not clear how much this competition is limited to Inkshed, but my feeling is that this competitiveness goes along with western ethnocentrism. It would be interesting to observe both inkshedding and competition for publication in academia in non-North American cultures.

One result of this competitive edge is that Inkshedders do not simply write whatever comes to mind (as initial instructions might suggest). Instead, they develop strategies that will help them to publish. For example, saying something that was new and that no one else has yet articulated is more likely to be published than something that everyone else is saying. As Anthony Paré explained:

If you could say something that nobody else was saying, your chances of being published were better. (Personal interview, 12/5/2006)

Until I actually began working on this chapter, I had never considered the possibility that there were certain strategies to inkshedding, but just like any genre, there are things that work and things that do not. With this perspective in mind, at the last conference I attended, I participated in inkshedding not with fear and anxiety, but with the specific intent to publish. Instead of beginning my responses with apologies or self-indulgent excuses about what I had to say, I wrote short, succinct, and to the point thoughts. My inkshedding was quick, legible, and focused on making connections with the theme of the conference in bite-size bits rather than commiserating with the general readership on how hard inkshedding is, or going off on long, wandering ruminations.

The result was that I found that I wrote only when I had something to say—I did not write out of obligation or to be polite to the presenter, nor did I write to figure out what I wanted to say as is typical in a freewriting activity. My thoughts came across with clarity and precision. The result? From every text I wrote, something was excerpted and published. For example, after the opening presentation by Peter Vandenburg (who talked about graffiti as an alternative discourse), I wrote:

What strikes me is the way graffiti is being used as a tool of communication—in some cases being used in dialogic ways as it is put forth as an utterance—a meaningful, powerful statement expecting a response. (Inkshedding text, 5/3/2007)

With the knowledge I have now, it is not surprising to me, as it was in my early years of participation, that this was published. I used discipline and community-specific language like “dialogic” and “utterance” and used the topic of graffiti from the presentation to comment on common values of the community—meaningful social interaction as shown in language like “communicate” and “meaningful.”

At our closing dinner, one of the people recruited to type excerpts surprised me by saying:

You really knew what you were saying—you really got it. Lots of people didn't, but every time I read yours, I was like, yah. (Fieldnotes, 5/5/2007)

As my data in Chapter 6 indicated, many newcomers are unaware of these kinds of strategies and as a result may be less successful—i.e., publish minimally. As they learn how to write the things that effectively resonate with the collective, however, they successfully publish and this leads to feeling of membership.

Shared repertoire and membership

Researching the membership process in Inkshed as a participant observer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) has given me a perspective on the process that I could not have gained as an outsider. It was only through participation that I came to understand that publication is a critical stage in inkshedding because it marks the success with which individuals have negotiated membership. Either their fears and anxieties (as described in Chapter 6)

are realized and their fears about making meaningful connections are justified, or, their fears are allayed and they discover that they have been able to share thoughts and ideas that resonate with the collective. Typically, this publication comes in the form of excerpted inkshedding texts that are then circulated and these particular texts are the focus of this section. However, as I pointed out with the veteran Inkshedders who did not publish inkshed texts, but who take major parts in the talent show, I am also mindful of other kinds of publication—the human text through a conference presentation, speaking out in discussions, performing in talent night or otherwise having a public interaction. In their own way, each of these instances is a reflection of Inkshed values and the ways that Inkshedders engage. In this section, however, I focus on inkshedding texts as tangible, conscientious and purposeful tools for engagement.

Published inkshedding texts are a tangible realization of successful interactions or the ways that individuals have engaged with the collective through the writing process. Engagement with the collective through inkshedding and the realization of that engagement through publication helps individuals identify with and feel part of the collective. Consider the following comments written by Inkshedders in response to a presentation I gave about joining the Inkshed collective. I shared some of my experiences and asked for their responses as a way of confirming the things I was seeing (Patton, 2002). Confirming my own experiences, some Inkshedders connected success in inkshedding with membership:

I appreciated it when people did respond to what I wrote—that gave me confidence to write in this setting. I am very happy and eager to write in my professional settings. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

And:

What happened was that my words were read and responded to, sometimes with agreement, sometimes with questions. And, in retrospect, I think it was the writing plus the responses that made me feel a member of the community. (Inkshedding text, 5/9/2004)

Both of these examples reflect the ways in which individuals have made connections between engagement with the collective through the writing process and membership. Without specifically using the term “membership,” the first comment talks about responses from the collective to his/her writing. The responses illustrate the way that the writer was able to make meaningful connections with others. The writer links this engagement with confidence in disciplinary discussions and thus emulates disciplinary identity or membership. The second example also reflects on the importance of responses to writing—again, an illustration of the way s/he was able to engage. S/he goes on to make a clear link between this engagement and membership in the Inkshed collective. Thus, as a representation of the ways that people have responded to texts, the published inksheds contribute to understanding how the inkshedding process facilitates membership. They are a public statement of the responses to the text and engagement with the author.

It is worth noting that this idea of publication seems to resonate with theories of genre. As I explained in Chapter 3, genre theorists argue that part of what typifies a genre is the way in which people respond to each other (Bakhtin, 1986; Freedman, 1994). Over time, as situations recur, responses take on typified forms according to the values of the community. Publication in Inkshed illustrates this idea because published texts are

responses that resonate with cultural values of the community and meet its expectations. While no published text is identical to another, common features (like resonance with the community) lead to standardized responses that appear as publications.

In addition, the centrality of these published texts to membership in the collective supports notions that Wenger (1998) used when describing characteristics of a community of practice. The texts are one example, of many³⁴, of shared repertoire—a term that Wenger (1998) used to describe the materials that emerge from and facilitate mutual engagement and the achievement of joint enterprise (see Chapter 3). According to Wenger, materials like these typed-up texts that have emerged from mutual engagement should be used to further the goal of the collective. In this case, the goal of the collective is to mutually engage (see Chapter 5), and the activity is specifically designed so that the text can be reinserted into the ongoing dialogue in order to stimulate more interactions. Thus, the text is only effective as a collective tool if it is reinserted into the ongoing discourse. The reinsertion of texts takes place in a variety of ways that, if done correctly, facilitates the realization of continued dialogic interactions.

Timeliness

Depending on conference organizers, excerpted texts are usually distributed at break or meal times. Several times, I have arrived at breakfast to find a freshly printed page of inkshedding excerpts at my place, or to have one handed to me as I was eating. It is not enough, however, in establishing practices that form a CoP, to simply redistribute the texts, or hand out the tools for mutual engagement. The tools must be used. The texts must find their way back into the ongoing conversation. Meal and break times

³⁴ Other examples of shared repertoire include the single-session conference format, the talent show, the circular tables in the conference room, the use of the listserv to communicate details about the conference, and so on.

facilitate discussion of texts because people have free time and are together to talk. Nan Johnson described the way that this can happen when she said:

This is one of the great things about it, right. People sat at breakfast and read those this morning, and more conversation happened. And I said, at my table, “you know, I always forget how good this part is.” Right? Because everybody reads and then everybody’s talking about it all over again. That’s very cool. That’s very cool when that happens. (Focus group interview, 5/13/2005).

Texts also get pulled in through presentations and other discussions. In an earlier example in this chapter, I quoted Anthony Paré and he alluded to how the texts get reinvested. He said:

Somebody picks it up and says, “somebody wrote this morning—.”
(Personal interview, 12/5/2006)

Similarly, in a personal conversation (Field notes, 5/8/2004), Kenna Manos explained to me that it is common to hear allusions to published texts throughout the conference through presentations, discussions, and so on. In other words, texts are often directly quoted or referred to as ways of supporting, challenging, or otherwise enhancing on-going dialogue.

As these examples describe, the texts are inserted in the conversation in virtually the same time and space in which they were written—removed from their creation by only an hour or two. Immediate and timely insertion of these texts is critical if they are going to facilitate joint enterprise. At one conference, the published texts did not arrive until the following day, and when they did, there were only single copies. People had to

mill around one large table to read them. It was so crowded that many did not read them at all. Others complained that they were unable to write on their own copies. Describing the problem, Kenna Manos observed:

the first set of Inksheds was not ready (I'm not entirely sure that I'm right here) until Sunday morning (or was it Saturday night?) and then there was only a single set of the things. There were multiple copies of the later ones, but many people had already left by that point. Unlike other years, the Inksheds did not feed into the rest of the conference. In fact, I didn't hear anyone refer to a previous Inkshed in subsequent sessions. (Personal communication, 5/15/2004)

Similarly, Russ Hunt (2004) explained the importance of timeliness when he wrote:

They [published inkshedding texts] need to be circulated immediately, and used. The older an inkshed is, the staler. It has a short shelf life. Serve it fresh or not at all. A good way to dramatize that inksheds are not quick ways to generate permanent texts, but are rather ways to render text conversational, is to throw them away when they've served their function - that is, when they've been read and had an effect on the social situation in which they arose. (par 29, <http://www.stthomasu.ca/~hunt/dialogic/whatshed.htm>)

In other words, if texts are not immediately used as tools for generating discussion and dialogic interactions, then they cease to be useful tools.

Thus, immediacy of time and place help to reinsert inkshedding texts into the ongoing dialogue. That being said, however, there are some exceptions. For example, in preparing the presentation that I described in the earlier vignette, I drew heavily on

inkshedding excerpts done in response to a presentation I did two years earlier. The texts were definitely taken out of their time, but they were written about inkshedding and I was using them to continue to talk about inkshedding and so they fed back into the presentation in meaningful ways. I have also used these excerpts liberally throughout this document, in conference presentations at CATTW³⁵ and CCCC³⁶, and even in job talks in an effort to insert inkshedding into a larger academic discussion about writing and membership.

Intertextuality

Thus far, my description of published texts being reinserted has been limited to the tangible paper and ink publications. However, as my vignette suggests, and as I have argued elsewhere in this paper (see Chapter 7), the human text follows the same processes as the inkshedding text in its circulation and publication. In a similar way, human interactions are also reinserted—some, as my vignette suggested, in the conference and the way that people contribute as members to the collective. However, also in the same way that I have used Inkshed texts to expand conversations outside the ones in which they were created, published human texts cross boundaries into other conversations as well creating an intertextuality between potentially different genres.

In the previous chapter I talked about how people as texts are marked. These highlighted sections of individuals reflect the way people have interacted and are a public statement of that interaction. The marking becomes part of individuals' identity and they carry it with them across boundaries. "Inkshed: the opera" provides a simple example of this. Although I contributed to the opera at the talent night, I participated with others

³⁵ Canadian Association for Teachers of Technical Writing

³⁶ Conference for College Composition and Communication

who marked me. The experience stood out and I came home talking about it. Extra Viking helmets were rounded up so that my kids could each have a helmet and now “Inkshed: the opera” has crossed the boundary of Inkshed the conference and been inserted into my family dialogue and lore of stories we tell. Because of my shared identity as an Inkshedder and mother and the links that join the two worlds, it was natural to insert the light side of “Inkshed: the opera” into family discussions, and even family practices as helmets were worn around the house. Two sets of values, two sets of practices, and two sets of language intertwined into one.

This crossing of boundaries, like the example I used in my vignette in Chapter 5 in which I described a blurring of borders between my intellectual and spiritual lives or my discussion earlier in this chapter of being public, suggests that learning influences people not just in the spaces in which they expect to learn, but also in a variety of aspects of their lives. This has implications for LPP (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which learning seems to be deliberate and purposeful.

One of the things that sets CASLL apart from CATTW or CSSR is the intimate way in which learning takes place. As Anthony Paré suggested:

Inkshed/CASLL, probably more than any other such communities, affects people intimately—that is, at a personal level usually not much considered in intellectual life. (Personal communication, 5/17/2007)

Although the example of “Inkshed: the opera” is a simple one, it serves to illustrate an important idea about humans as texts. People, unlike the Inkshed texts, which remain contextualized in the conference, continue to circulate and take part in a variety of conversations. The marks that they acquire in an Inkshed conference carry with them to

other conversations and influence understandings, interpretations, discussions and so on in other settings—and vice versa. Thus, a variety of memberships continue to shape and highlight aspects of individual identities.

Just as each stage of inkshedding is significant and important to membership, it also has a down side—a side that does not engage or achieve its goals. Thus, despite the successful ways that inkshedding texts are reinserted into ongoing dialogues and joint enterprise is achieved, just as often the texts go no further than the back of the file folder in the bottom of the Inkshed bag. This sometimes leads to questioning of tradition and the way that things are made public in Inkshed. However, my data suggest that although discussions arise, little change takes place.

Questioning

In the previous chapter I made an allusion to a woman who was frustrated by the fact that nothing she wrote ever got published. In her frustration, she wrote an inkshedding text asserting that only certain kinds of things were publishable and that writing “outside the box” of Inkshed made it impossible to publish (Field notes, 5/9/2004). According to her recollections of her first Inkshed conference, it was only after she wrote her text that pushed at or questioned Inkshed tradition that people responded to her writing. When the woman shared this anecdote in a larger group discussion, others immediately jumped in and tried to dispel this uncomfortable perspective by sharing anecdotes of their own lack of publication. Their anecdotes were not shared as a way of agreeing with her, but almost, it seemed, as if her concerns were unjustified. Often this was done in an almost humorous, self-deprecating way as if to suggest (without blatantly contradicting her) that she had over-reacted (Field notes,

5/9/2004). That is, by responding with anecdotes of, “I’ve been published less than five times in ten years!” (Field notes, 5/9/2004), those who defend inkshedding suggest that the woman’s concern with publication is overly sensitive and unwarranted.

What this example illustrates is that despite a sometimes idyllic self-promotion of the community, some participants find aspects of the activity and collective disturbing and questionable, but voicing of these feelings may not lead to change. Another example describes a cautious approach to questioning tradition. Describing his/her frustration with reading excerpted texts, one person wrote:

I don’t know about the inkshed we just got—everything seemed difficultly decontextualized—maybe we need to do more sharing in context in small groups. (Inkshed 2000, session 5, edited inksheds, <http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed/shed2000/edsheds5.htm>)

In this statement lies the suggestion that the inkshedding activity as it took place in this instance was not working effectively. Excerpted inksheds could not be reinserted into discussion because they were too decontextualized to be meaningful. The suggestion is that dialogue needs to happen through more discussion. However, the suggestion is couched in tentative, non-aggressive language—carefully inoffensive. That this sentiment resonated with others in the group is clear from the fact that this piece was excerpted and circulated³⁷. The tension between talking and writing continues to be an issue to varying degrees. Each conference I have attended has had some discussion of how much inkshedding to do, how much discussion to have, and so on, yet no resolution is ever reached.

³⁷ This illustrates again the importance of resonance and meaningful connection in publication as I mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Since published inkshedding texts do not move out of time and place, they are sometimes perceived as self-congratulatory, self-indulgent, self-promoting, and do not, in a spirit of critical inquiry, enact change. Many find this frustrating and choose not to participate in this kind of community. However, even though on some levels, as described above, the published inkshedding texts fail to enact change, or go beyond the boundaries of the conference, they should not be easily dismissed.

Published texts must be understood not just as a tool for facilitating conversation, or as functional, but as a symbol of something more. Barton (2000) described one aspect of a literacy event (a way of talking about interactions that take place around a text) as an artifact. The term artifact is especially appropriate here because it implies a kind of stasis in time and does not change—much like the inkshedding texts that lose their meaning when decontextualized. However, like an artifact dug up by archaeologists as a symbol, representation, and embodiment of cultures, values, and practices, the published inkshedding excerpts contribute to the community by what they represent. The text is an embodiment of the interactions that a text has undergone. It is a realization of the ways that an individual has successfully used language to engage with the collective. The published inkshedding text is a symbol of that engagement and therefore is a symbol of belonging.

Like the questions raised about the usefulness or purpose of inkshedding texts, the way Inkshed, as a Canadian academic association, publishes itself within Canada is questioned. However, it too is an important symbol. Some people believe that Inkshed does not do enough for publication in Canada—by publication I am referring to the ways that CASLL participates in and contributes to the broader disciplinary conversation of

writing studies in Canada. Although the community publishes the occasional book that makes a contribution to writing studies, some people feel that the community needs to do more and take a more active role in writing studies. For example, in 2000, Tania Smith did an ethnographic study of Inkshed. As part of her conclusion she raised the following questions about Inkshed's public presence:

My complaint is that it just doesn't seem to do things *as* a group in arenas *outside* the group. It's presently a very good club, a camp, an exciting and stimulating yearly experience, a shed devoted to the mutual encouragement of people working in discourse and education. It does this well for many members that return again and again. But can you join me for a moment in wishing that Inkshed could seem to do more, that it could be more visible to outsiders, that Inkshed would earn a reputation as an association that does something important and good in Canada?

(<http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed/shed2000/tsethnog.htm>)

Tania felt that Inkshed was not being public enough in Canada and that as an association it needed to do more. This too is an issue that occasionally gets discussed, but very little changes. At the conference in 2006, a proposal was brought to the AGM to look into the possibility of setting up a network with CATTW and CSSR in order to facilitate things like funding. Although the members at the AGM eventually agreed that this could be looked into without committing to any action, even this agreement to look into a potential change was met with resistance. One veteran Inkshedder voiced his concern that Inkshed remain small and focused on pedagogy. He was clearly concerned that this proposal might lead to a change in the nature of Inkshed (Field notes, 5/14/2006).

Despite the veteran Inkshedder's assertion that Inkshed needs to stay as it is in order to meet the needs of its members, questions about the viability of the community have also been raised. In response to a presentation I gave, one person wrote:

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?

(<http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed/inkshed23/edsheds/miriam.htm>)

When I included this excerpt with a question about the community's future on the listserv (see Chapter 5), it was met with a resounding discussion (from long-time and well-established Inkshedders) affirming the community's role and viability. For example, Roberta Lee wrote:

The validity of the community does not depend on the various ways that inkshedding is or is not used. . . . In addition, I have appreciated the quality of the dialogue and the way in which those who participate are respected as equals, whatever their "credentials." This kind of support and encouragement serves as a powerful antidote to the competitive and hierarchical nature of academia.

Could it be that this unique Canadian community is needed more today than ever before? (Listserv, 12/15/2006)

This response was typical of the kinds of postings to the listserv that both validated and promoted the Inkshed community. Thus, like inkshedding texts that Russ Hunt (2004) suggested can be thrown away immediately after a discussion, Inkshed, as a public domain, does not appear to carry forward. Criticisms and questions are met with resounding testimonials of why the status quo must be maintained. One original Inkshedder admitted:

I have been going for such a long time—and loving the way it’s traditionally been done-- that there’s always a danger that my ideas may be resistant to change. (Personal correspondence, 6/2/2004)

While those who laud Inkshed do so with reason, to others, this kind of stasis constitutes weakness.

However, like the published texts that, as artifacts, represent a history of mutual engagement, negotiation, and creation of meaning, the Inkshed community embodies a history, a way of thinking, and a way of understanding the world. In describing genres, Schryer (1994) described them as, “stabilized-for-now or stabilized enough sites of social and ideological action” (p. 108). This description rings true of Inkshed. Inkshed is a stabilized (for now) community whose practices and actions reflect social and ideological values. While not everyone chooses or feels like they can be members of the collective, those who do, do so passionately. Inkshed does not have more of a national presence or give way to other forums and formats because the current characteristics embody its history, development and values, which do not include a more public role. As long as even a few members continue to share those values, the community will remain viable.

Summary

In summary, publication, or movement to a place in which interactions are publicly acknowledged is a realization of community membership. This publication happens at a variety of levels—from publication of an inkshedding text that has been circulated among peers to the publication of an individual who has been acknowledged and accepted by her peers. This publication serves as a marker for both the individual and the collective that the individual has made a valuable contribution to the community, understands the community values, and therefore, for at least that moment, is a member of the community. Publication is an embodiment of belonging and a tool for creating and maintaining this community of practice.

In addition, publication is a stage in which a writer is given full responsibility for her participation and that participation is legitimized by the collective. That is, from the perspective of LPP, the individual who publishes has successfully learned to participate and has moved from a position of peripheral participation to full participation. The community acknowledges this successful movement by making the text public.

Through my examination of the stages described in previous chapters culminating in this final stage of publishing, a clearer image begins to emerge of the ways that writing processes facilitate community membership. My research question sought to explore the ways in which collective writing processes (i.e., socially mediated writing practices of communities) facilitate newcomer membership. This chapter reflects the outcome of the inkshedding process, the outcome of the learning process, and the ways that I, as a newcomer, successfully learned to participate in the Inkshed community of practice.

In the final chapter, I reflect on the implications of this work and the lessons that I have unexpectedly learned as a result of this long-term ethnographic study.

Chapter 9

Lessons learned

Because I wanted to understand the membership process of Inkshed through my own writing experiences, I drew on qualitative methodologies for this study including: phenomenology (Van Manen 1998) as a way of understanding the experience of a culture, ethnography (Lincoln, 2003) and autoethnography (Tedlock, 2003) as a way of understanding a culture and making sense of that culture based on my experience, and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as a way of exploring the story of my experience. As a result, although I have supported my claims with data from other Inkshedders, the conclusions I draw, and the lessons I learned are the result of making sense of my own experiences. When I first started this endeavor, many years ago now, I sought to understand the way that the writing activity called inkshedding worked in the classroom. As I look back now, I realize that I wanted to understand what it was about the activity that resonated with me. Why did an activity that made me feel so uncomfortable have such positive outcomes for me like making me feel like a more confident writer, feeling stronger about facilitating student writing, and so on?

Those questions that first drove my exploration laid the groundwork for my study and led to deeper insights than I imagined. But my exploration comes back now to trying to understand the resonance that inkshedding has for me because that resonance has moved me from a non-member to a fully participating member who claims an Inkshed identity. That resonance has shaped not just my participation in the activity, but the way I function in the community, the way I understand the community, and the ways that I report on the community. It has also, however, shaped and refocused my perceptions of

other communities and my membership in those as well. In particular, it has helped me gain access to and membership in the broader disciplinary community of composition and rhetoric and as such has heightened my understanding of theories behind writing practices as well as understandings of the groups that use them.

The resonance that I feel with inkshedding and Inkshed has given me a place to belong—it has given me an identity. Although this study explored that identity as a process of membership, that exploration took place through the lens of the Inkshed identity that I have acquired and that has shaped my observations in particular ways. In Chapter 4 I explained that I wanted to explore the process of joining a community, the role of writing in that membership process, and the role of writing in communities. By presenting my data chronologically, I have detailed the process of joining the Inkshed community and in the last four chapters have reflected on Inkshed community membership and the role that writing has in that membership. In this chapter, I add to these perspectives by summarizing some of the central themes and experiences that have characterized this research.

Practice essential to belonging

Inkshed gave me a community. What does that mean? This is a question I explored in Chapter 5 when I discussed some of the defining characteristics of the Inkshed community, but it is also a question that I have addressed in sharing the stages of inkshedding and parallel stages of membership. Since beginning this process, I have had the opportunity to attend a variety of conferences other than Inkshed. While they were all interesting and provocative, and they all dealt in some way with issues applicable to writing studies in Canada, none of them were quite the same as Inkshed. None of them

worked so hard to create a community. The other conferences assumed a community through disciplinary identity, that is, they seemed to operate under the assumption that if you are interested in writing studies, then you are part of the community. Inkshed does far more than that. By isolating participants from potential distractions and holding the conference in an isolated location, by running a single-session conference, by housing participants all together, and by ensuring lots of time to socialize as well as work together, and, of course, by writing together, Inkshed strives to be more than a disciplinary community concerned with writing studies. It is that, but it is more.

As I have discussed elsewhere in this document, some of the criticisms leveled against Inkshed suggest that it is too insular, too close-knit. I do not dispute these points of view, but wonder if part of what creates this impression is also what makes Inkshed more than a disciplinary community concerned with writing studies. Inkshed is a result of the small handful of people who are willing to participate in the peculiar activities that set it apart from other academic communities. A small group of people founded and developed the community based on the things that they valued and those values (collaboration, dialogism, and so on) are manifest through the practices. The practices and values reciprocally reinforce each other. Therefore, membership requires practice.

When Wenger (1998) wrote, “collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations” (p. 45) and that “these practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise” (p. 45), he explained how communities are formed through practices. His explanation, while written to describe any community of practice, seems rich in the way it describes Inkshed as a community of practice.

Community members engage with each other to learn and that engagement has led to inkshedding practices that reinforce learning.

Surprisingly, one area that has helped me understand the role of practices in Inkshed membership is my membership in the Mormon community. Both in earlier chapters and later in this chapter, I make allusions to the intersection of my Inkshed life and my Mormon life. Despite my own discomfort and the discomfort that this may create in the reader, juxtaposing Mormonism and Inkshed at this point facilitates an understanding of the way participating in practices strengthens communities and individual commitment to the community. In a recent article describing rhetoric of spirituality, Gore (2006) described Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon church and founder of Mormon practices. He wrote, “what qualifies Smith as a genius was his recognition that in order for the spirit of Mormonism to survive, it must become a people, by which we are to understand it must become a distinct nation of sorts” (p. 89). One of the ways that this has successfully been accomplished is through the demands of its practice. Being a Mormon means living the religion every day. It is not enough to go to church every Sunday. Rather, built into Mormon doctrine are rules governing practices in everyday life, or opportunities to participate in the community through practice. This includes everything from a code of health, including abstinence from coffee and cigarettes, to a tithe that dictates financial contributions, to time spent volunteering in various auxiliaries of the church. Participating in the Mormon church in these ways sets its members apart from the rest of the world—giving members practices to unify them. By ensuring participation in a variety of ways that affects the members on a regular, daily basis, and in most cases shapes their lifestyle, the church strengthens its membership.

The members feel like they are making important contributions and become increasingly committed to the organization.

Although it may seem like an odd comparison, I have come to see that what happens at Inkshed conferences is not unlike what happens in a Mormon community. In some churches, Sunday attendance or sometimes even only baptism is sufficient to identify oneself with that community. Other practices may be encouraged, but not necessarily required. In a similar way, one can attend an academic conference without ever engaging in any more than cursory practices. However, in the same way that the Mormon church demands more, so does Inkshed. Newcomers and veteran Inkshedders alike are expected to participate through inkshedding. But like the Mormons, there are a variety of other practices that help encourage membership—talent shows, editing inksheds, giving presentations, taking turns organizing conferences (an unpaid volunteer job like auxiliary work in the Mormon church). Like my participation in the Mormon church, my participation in Inkshed through a variety of activities—presentations, talent shows, transcriber of “the Wall,” inkshedding, and so on—has drawn me into the community. My membership has come through participation. Thus, to return to Wenger (1998), this participation is “the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise” (p. 45). And like the identity created in the Mormon church through the dedicated participation of its members, Inkshed has also established itself as a distinct group, a group which requires dedication, a group that aspires to a noble cause (helping students), and a group that rewards participation through publication and membership.

Wenger's (1998) theory of CoPs points to the importance of practice in bringing people together in a community working toward a common goal. My research supports this notion. The practices of Inkshed are essential to its identity as a community and are essential in gaining membership. While it is possible to be an Inkshedder without practicing inkshedding, it is not possible to be an Inkshedder without embracing and practicing the philosophies behind inkshedding—that is, writing as socially constructive, as knowledge generating, as dialogic, and so on.

Thus, what I have come to understand about that first awkward attempt at writing in Anthony Paré's writing across the curriculum course, which I described in Chapter 1, was that when I began I felt like I was in a peripheral position. I had been accepted to graduate school, but seriously questioned my abilities to perform adequately and succeed. When he introduced inkshedding to our class, Anthony asked us to do more than sit passively and go unnoticed in whatever place we were in. He asked us to participate. Over the two years that I participated in inkshedding in a variety of courses at McGill, I was forced to participate in my classes, interact with my classmates, and otherwise take place in my classroom community. This participation, although often uncomfortable, helped me to understand my classmates better—I came to know them more personally, to know their interests, to follow their studies and otherwise make connections when I might otherwise never have spoken with them. I gained confidence in my identity as a graduate student learning the discourse of academia as I participated in my classroom microcommunities. I tried ideas, had feedback from peers, and was never laughed at. It gave me a way of fitting in.

I recognize that this does not work for everyone. Perhaps what worked for me was that I lacked the drive to engage in other ways and needed the strong invitation that Inkshed presents and the dedicated requirements of participation. Other people reject that invitation, but for me it worked. When I went to the Inkshed community, I was invited to participate in the community not just in inkshedding, but also in all the other dialogic kinds of activities available at the conference. I felt as though inkshedding and all the other activities were invitations to participate and engage. I was fortunate enough to have a strong and insistent invitation facilitated by my connection to original Inkshedder Anthony Paré, and by my research agenda. At times, others feel like they are extended a polite invitation and then ignored. Although I respect this perspective and understand how the intensive nature of the conference might lead to this, it is not a perspective that my experience led to. I had an invitation to participate and did so. The result of my participation was identifying with other participants. I was given opportunity to and did connect in meaningful ways with other Inkshedders to the extent that I could identify with them and call myself an Inkshedder. The initial question of what makes inkshedding work I understand now as not a question about inkshedding *per se*, but as a way of understanding how participation in a collective leads to membership. That membership, both in graduate school classes and at Inkshed, gave me a community and therefore a place to belong.

Border crossings

While I did not begin this study with the intent to become an Inkshedder, my participation led to this identity and this additional way of thinking and being has gone far beyond writing a dissertation. As I have suggested elsewhere (see Chapter 5 and 8) it

has permeated and crossed over into other aspects of my identity as well. Not surprisingly, and since, in part, my classroom practices drove me to this study, my identity as an Inkshedder has crossed into my pedagogical practices. I find myself approaching classroom writing tasks as an Inkshedder, that is, with the philosophies embraced by Inkshed about writing. I try to make the writing that I do with my students dialogic. I try to give them opportunities for authentic, real and meaningful interactions through writing. When giving an assignment, I struggle between the demands of institutional requirements and the things I have learned about writing assignments at Inkshed. Theories of writing and composition jump to the forefront of my teaching. I try to help students link specific forms with recurring rhetorical contexts. I try to help them use writing as discovery and as a way of learning. Through my participation in Inkshed, I have learned that writing pedagogy is not only form; not only process; and not only social context, but an effort to help students understand all these aspects of their written communication.

As a direct result of my inkshedding experiences I also use writing specifically for community building. I have come to believe that writing well in a community leads to confidence. Understanding a community of peers and having that community support your writing leads to self assurance, improved writing, and increased skills and strategies in writing like the ability to understand rhetorical context and so on. Thus, this influence in my teaching is not so surprising, nor such a dramatic border to cross. In fact, the borders between research, theory and practice are meant to blur and overlap.

Although crossing the border into the classroom was natural and easy, not all border crossings have been so smooth. As I suggest later in this chapter, because I took

on an Inkshed identity, it shaped my identity as a researcher and the perspectives with which I understood my data. Where I was particularly unprepared for crossing of boundaries, however, was in the way that Inkshed crept, or rather, bounded into my spiritual life. As much as I tried to ignore it, the connection was made. Betsy Sargent has told me on more than one occasion that inkshedding is a spiritual experience for her. She links the idea of practice with faith and a higher good. She wrote:

I think that, like meditation or daily exercise, inkshedding is discipline that one does even when one doesn't particularly feel like it, in the faith that the cumulative impact will do one nothing but good. (Personal communication, 12/14/2006)

While for Betsy, the idea of everyone sitting and writing together is deep and profound, I do not think that it is the activity itself that crossed the boundaries of academia and into my private life; it was the outcome of the activity and the philosophy that drives it—that persistent quest to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Without going into doctrine or history, I think it important to explain what I mean when I talk about spirituality. Mormons teach that any time you feel good, happy, content, or otherwise positive, this is a manifestation of the Holy Ghost—the manifestation of the Holy Ghost is like the presence of God, and therefore this constitutes a kind of spiritual experience. Since my initial talent night when I felt a strong resonant connection with the spirit of the moment, I have had to reexamine my understanding of spirituality, the experiences I describe as spiritual, and what has made them so. This led to questions about God. Primarily, “What does God care about inkshedding?” or “Why would God’s presence be manifest at an Inkshed conference?” This has led to other

questions about God and the role of God in my life and has also led me to re-examine other significant spiritual moments in my life. Without doing a completely exhaustive life review, some commonalities emerge fairly quickly. The majority of these experiences share two common things: a strong sense of womanhood—that is, there are usually a majority of women, and (as contradictory as it may seem) a patriarchal figure.

These commonalities are consistent with my Inkshed experience. While I had not focused on it before, in a recent conversation, Roger Graves pointed out that in the course of its development, Inkshed has undergone a feminization. It should be noted that I use this term cautiously. I am aware that the term is imbued with meaning through gender studies, philosophy, history and other schools of thought that try to make meaning of the world. For my purposes, I use it not only because the majority of participants at the conference are women, but also because I would argue that the spirit of traditional male-dominated agonism and competition that lead to some of the “trashing” in early years (see Chapter 6) has given way to a spirit of support, sometimes even nurturing, caring and other characteristics typically assigned to females.

Whereas a traditional academic conference is set up in an agonistic kind of way, that is, with the presenter on the spot and under fire to hold ideas up to careful scrutiny, presenters at an Inkshed conference find themselves part of a larger intellectual endeavour. That is, they work not individually, but as part of a whole to make meaningful connections. In the attempt to make people feel welcome and equal, the focus is not on individuals, but on relationships—i.e., relationships between people and between ideas for the constant furthering of knowledge.

Although I did not choose to rely on feminist theory for this research, this idea of feminization merits investigation. I am left wondering how the comparatively large number of women and the focus on relationship contributed to my Inkshed conversion.

In addition to this female presence at Inkshed, as in my positive Mormon experiences, I recognize a respected patriarchal figure. I have often found myself referring to Russ Hunt as “the father of inkshedding,” and I realize now that in my head (but perhaps the community has done this too) I have assigned him the role of patriarch. English professor, American transplant, gray beard and graying hair—he is so much like my own English professor father, I wonder if I have not, in some way, assumed the same role—respectful, unquestioning, eager for approval. The questions that arise from these self-reflections lead me back to the other side of the Inkshed border. Am I so obedient to the rules of inkshedding and Inkshed because of Russ? Do my philosophies of teaching writing come from my own process of arriving at them, or are they so closely aligned with Russ’s because of my perceptions of Russ? Is my successful participation in Inkshed a result of trying to please the father figure, or an impression that somehow I have?

These surprising ways that my research has crossed boundaries in my life has left me with different perspectives than I anticipated as well as many questions to explore. In addition, this crossing of borders has served in one way to reinforce my belief about identity. As I explained in Chapter 3, I believe that identity grows and develops in conjunction with social interactions. On the one hand, like Wenger (1998), I believe that identity is “a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities” (p. 5). I also explained that the

psyche is not filled with multiple personalities each of who steps out at the appropriate time. Rather, identity is a process, and that process incorporates a myriad of influences. Sometimes, depending on the context, one part of the process may be more dominant than another such as the role of academic in a university classroom. On the other hand, however, border crossings happen because my identity is complex, and although I continue to believe that I am at once a mother, a teacher, a student, a girlfriend, an Inkshedder, I cannot help but wonder if this concept of identity (like the criticisms leveled against Wenger's use of the term 'community' for its utopian connotations (Cox, 2005)) is not too altruistic, simplistic, and dismissive of the reality of the intricacy of individual identity. I am sensitive to this because my Inkshed and Mormon identities seem negatively reciprocally intertwined. That is, as my Inkshed identity has grown and solidified, and I have moved into a position of full participation, my practices in the Mormon community have decreased. Although I can no more cease to be a Mormon than I can a Horne since it is part of my cultural heritage, I no longer claim a Mormon identity. When forced to, I admit to being a "bad Mormon." For some reason, these two identities, Mormon and Inkshedder, seem unable to co-exist—I cannot fully participate in both communities. Thus, in this case, identity is not only about a process of membership, but also a process of disfellowship.

Social writing practices

One of the concepts that drove this study was an underlying motivation for inkshedding—that is, that writing is a social act. Scholars in writing studies have explained that writing takes place within socially situated contexts, has meaning within those contexts, and is shaped within those contexts (Bazerman, 1994; Dias et al, 1999;

Miller, 1984) . In turn, different writing forms and practices shape the communities that develop and use them (Devitt, 2004; Paré & Smart, 1994). Before I began this research, this was only a concept to me—a good one, one that resonates with social constructionist views. But it was only a concept. This research has helped me understand the social nature of writing with more clarity. It has reinforced notions of writing as a social act—in particular, the work of Dias et al. (1999) who argued that:

Writing is seldom the product of isolated individuals but rather and seldom obviously, the outcome of continuing collaboration, of interactions that involve other people and other texts. Writing practices are closely linked to their sociocultural contexts and writing strategies vary with individual and situation. (p. 10)

Additionally, this research resonates with claims of genre scholars who:

connect a recognition of regularities in discourse types with a broader social and cultural understanding of language in use. (Freedman & Medway, 1994, p. 1)

Thus, writing practices engaged in by the Inkshed community reflect community values and embody community specific language, the learning of which facilitates community. The activities also help to formalize or concretize a sometimes fuzzy or vague notion of audience.

Social values

Devitt (1993) explained that genre theory explicates the ways in which writing practices reflect cultural or social values of the community using them. As quoted in Chapter 3, she wrote that, “understanding the group’s values, assumptions and beliefs is

enhanced by understanding the set of genres they use” (p. 584). Thus, genre theory helps to describe the relationship between writing and the values of the community producing the writing. It describes the ways in which recurring situations lead to recurring responses. In part, these recurring situations are based on values that determine the situations and appropriate responses in the situations. This study of inkshedding and Inkshed illustrates the ways that social values are embedded within the writing practices in which the community engages.

Inkshedding works within the inkshedding community because the community values dialogic interaction and continued learning, but they also value trust, friendship and safety. Inkshedding works because it embodies these same values. In the early years, when inkshedding was used as a tool for trashing, it failed to function as a dialogic interaction because the trust, friendship and safety were also missing. As it has developed over the years, however, the values of trust and safety have become more entrenched so that it can be a dialogic interaction.

Many Inksheddors do not use inkshedding in their classrooms. This may, in part, be because in other settings the same kind of trust that exists in Inkshed does not exist. For example, students who meet only once a week for class take longer to build up relationships of trust and an environment of safety in which to function than might happen in a classroom where students meet together daily. Because inkshedding is a reflection of the values of the community that uses it, it does not necessarily transfer easily to other settings where values are different, or where the community itself is a more loosely defined collective.

Language

Through inkshedding, discussion, nontraditional presentations and so on, the values of the community are manifest and reinforced. Each of these interactions requires language and it is through language that values become entrenched in a community. Part of the embodiment of values is in language. Social constructionists talk about the way that language is created within communities to describe the knowledge they create.

Bruffee (1986) explained that:

A writer's language originates with the community to which he or she belongs. We use language primarily to join communities we do not yet belong to and to cement our membership in communities we already belong to. (p. 784)

According to this logic, as newcomers to Inkshed learn the language, they solidify their membership in the community, but this language and membership is closely tied up with the community values. Learning to use the language appropriately reflects the ways in which members understand values. Throughout this paper, I have made reference to literacy events, literacy practices, and social structures associated with literacy as a way of pointing to the centrality of language in a community of practice. I have talked about the ways practices cross borders in order to help make sense of inkshedding, the centrality of inkshedding as an event that leads to dialogic interaction, and the ways that power structures influence participation in inkshedding. Barton and Hamilton (2005), Tusting (2005) and Creese (2005) all argued that lack of attention to literacy and language constitutes a weakness in Wenger's (1998) explication of CoPs. The absence of language in his theory, they argued, does not allow for a free understanding of social

processes. Language and its use have been central in my observations and participation in Inkshed. Language is both a fundamental value and tool for the Inkshed community. Thus, I reinforce the position of Barton and Hamilton, Tusting, and Creese, and underscore the role of language as a tool for participation and therefore membership in the community.

When I first began attending Inkshed conferences, I had to concentrate and focus to be able to understand what the presenters were saying and struggled to make meaning from their words. Although I mostly knew the words they were using, I was unable to understand how they were using them. As I have learned the language of writing studies, however, my understanding and ability to participate in Inkshed have been facilitated. For example, terms like “genre” and “rhetoric” are not uncommon words in the English language and they appear fairly regularly. However, the way that these words are used within writing studies carry a different meaning than they do when, for example, a book reviewer for the newspaper describes the genre of the book being critiqued, or a news reporter talks about a politician’s rhetoric. In writing studies, these words come laden with dynamic meanings that are constantly being redefined, reunderstood, and reconceptualized as writing studies moves forwards. Within Inkshed, this is equally so. For example, the term genre and the way Inksheddors use it has been heavily influenced by the work of Aviva Freedman, Catherine Schryer, Anthony Paré, Natasha Artemeva and other Canadian genre scholars, where it is coupled with notions of dialogism and so on.

Based on my experiences, understanding this language and being able to use the language appropriately facilitates membership. I was pleasantly surprised at the last

conference I attended to find that I understood presentations and discussions. I did not have to squint my eyes and stare at their mouths and visual aids in a desperate effort to focus on and understand the vocabulary the presenters used. As terms like genre, discourse, rhetorical analysis, and so on washed over me, I found that I understood. I did not have to concentrate so hard on understanding the way the words were being used. I could concentrate on making connections between what they were saying and the other presentations, the theme of the conference, my own work and so on. As a result, when it came time to participate in inkshedding, I was a stronger participant. I was able to focus my ideas into bite-size pieces using the language of the community. In addition, I was able to carry on oral conversations and further ideas in that way as well.

This was a far different position than I found myself in at my first conference where I felt vulnerable and insecure. I began in the peripheral position that Lave and Wenger (1991) described—able to participate in a limited way. As my language and understanding of the culture grew, so did my participation. Thus, learning the language of the community and the appropriate ways in which to use it—understanding the exigence of the situation—helped me participate and therefore become a member of the community.

Audience

Knowing the language of the community and using it in inkshedding has helped me know the community better—the language and the way that the language is used taught me about what the community valued—writing pedagogy, dialogic communications, writing studies in Canada, trust, friendship and so on. Social rhetoricians (Berlin, 1982; Bizzell, 1983; Faigley, 1986) who introduced social context

into late 20th century writing studies, argued that writing takes place within specific rhetorical contexts. This was reinforced by the work of genre theorists (Bazerman, 1988; Devitt, 1993; Miller, 1984; Schryer, 1994; Paré & Smart, 1994). A critical aspect of rhetorical context is audience. Bitzer (1968) argued that a rhetorical situation is a “complex of persons, events, objects and relations” (p. 13). Seeing values like writing pedagogy, respect, dialogic communication, trust, and so on in practice through inkshedding made the persons of whom Bitzer spoke more concrete and real. As I came to know my audience, the community, through participation, I was able to participate more easily. I came to understand who and what I was writing for. Writing teachers talk about imagining audience, but in this case, the audience was real. I could look up and see who was going to read my writing. This brought immediate ownership and responsibility to my writing. It required that I raise my standard to meet the expectations of this community of writers. Even now, as I write this document, although one audience is my committee, I have ever present in my head the Inkshed audience. How will this work resonate with them? Have I done a reasonable job at representing them? How will they see themselves in this work? Have I offended? Have I over-compensated? Just as I do with my inkshedding texts, I write this one anticipating the reaction of the Inkshed community.

Writing as discovery

Interestingly, it is this same discovery of audience in writing and the recognition of this very real audience that has lead me to question my role and position as a participant observer and as a qualitative researcher. In phenomenology, autoethnography, and narrative inquiry, the experience of the qualitative researcher is of

paramount importance. Describing phenomenology, Patton (2002) argued that “the only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience it for ourselves” (p. 106). Similarly, Tedlock (2003) argued that “by entering into first hand interactions with people in their everyday lives, ethnographers can reach a better understanding” (p. 109), and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argued that narrative inquiry is concerned with stories of experiences. Thus, the researcher participates and is involved in order to share and explain the experience. While this stance has allowed me to participate fully in the Inkshed community, it has also resulted in participation taking over the role of researcher. While I never intended to be a distant objective observer, by participating, I often forgot my role as researcher and simply participated in the community as an Inkshedder. As I attended conferences, my research gave me authority and reason to belong, but while I took notes and gathered data, the exploration of membership became driven by a need to understand what was happening to me more than it was to understand and report on the experience for doctoral research.

This full immersion has provided me with rich multifaceted sets of data about which to write, but it has also ensured a particular perspective when interpreting my data—an interpretation that only I could have. Despite Patton’s assertions that one must experience something for oneself to really know what it is, my experiences showed that not everyone who attends an Inkshed conference has the same experience. Everyone has their own unique background that Bourdieu (1977) described as “habitus.” Each experience is unique. My uniquely positive experience as a participant impacted my role as a researcher. Although there are many uncomfortable things about Inkshed and inkshedding, my role now as a full participant in the collective makes it difficult and

uncomfortable to give voice to the darker aspects of Inkshed. Although I have attempted to acknowledge different perspectives throughout this document, I worry that the positive experiences that I have had have influenced how I see other perspectives. I worry that I have not been explicit or thorough enough because I do not want to hurt feelings or offend. I am sensitive to the audience I have come to know.

This perspective has largely evolved through writing—it has evolved through writing in the community, through inkshedding, but also through the metaphorical reading and writing of the human text. In a phenomenological exploration of the way readers respond to texts, Sumara (1996) described the way texts leave their mark on their reader. He called it the “trace” and wrote that:

The trace is a binding, a boundary, and a map, for it is by tracing the sense of self in relation to others, to the artifacts that surround us, and the conditions of these relations, that we are able to reflect upon our own life in an interpretive way. (p. 60)

This understanding that texts, both paper and human, impact personal identity as individuals interact with others is relevant for this discussion because it is through the trace left by other Inkshedders, or the ways that other Inkshedders have written on and marked me that I have come to identify myself more as a participant in the community than a researcher. Thus, writing extends far beyond the boundary of the pen or keyboard.

In addition, the writing of this text, the dissertation, like the other kinds of writing, has facilitated my understanding of the collective. Writing as a participant in inkshedding, reading and marking of human texts and the multiple drafts of this dissertation all illustrate the centrality of writing in understanding data. Although I used

Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Makut and Morehouse's (1994) constant comparative approach in which I inductively organized data according to themes and further through emerging questions, it was through writing that these comparisons, connections, themes and so on emerged, evolved, and took shape. The writing became a way of not just experiencing the community, but also understanding the community, thinking about the experience within the community, and understanding my role in the community.

Unexpectedly, it was also through writing within the community, about the community, and writing to think about the community, that I also underwent a kind of self-discovery. That is, through writing I learned about writing, and I learned about myself as a writer and as a member of a writing community. Through the process of writing to learn, I have become a better writer. I have come to understand the ways that I write. And I have come to learn the kinds of expectations that I have from different audiences.

What of the collective

After my first Inkshed experience in which I felt as if I had found a place to belong, I was dedicated and committed to the community. Despite my surprise at this strong sense of commitment to an academic association, I accepted this position. But in the years since I began this research, something odd and deeply disturbing has emerged and hovers unspoken around conferences and behind listserv discussions. Sometimes it comes out and is quickly silenced or testimonied back into an ethereal position—I speak of the future of Inkshed, of where the community is going. Despite wonderful testimonies on a listserv discussion and impassioned commitments from members, Inkshed is not what it was—it is not now what it was when I first had my conversion.

Others notice this too. Even Russ Hunt, in an inkshedding text after a recent presentation I gave wrote, “Miriam’s presentation seemed almost elegiac” (Inkshedding text, 5/8/2007). Other signs are there too: smaller attendance, and perhaps most telling or revealing—the decline in talent night acts. The first year there were so many acts that we had to have an intermission to take a break and get more drinks. Now, intermissions are added in to lengthen the show. The most recent conference I attended had only six acts. No one wanted to leave or disperse, but likewise, no one came forth to add the usual craziness to the evening. Instead, we continued sitting in the room and sharing Inkshed memories. I do not know how to make a direct connection between lack of participation at talent night and the future of Inkshed, but somehow, I feel they are intricately intertwined.

Inkshed began with a specific purpose and goal. Its founders sought to provide, at the very least, a forum in which Canadians concerned with theories, teaching and practice of reading and writing could come together. Inkshed has provided that forum in addition to a strong community. However, like the genre it defines, Inkshed is only “stable for now” (Schryer, 1994) and, although relatively stable, is not static. The community has grown and changed since its inception. It has purposefully evolved to be a supportive community of writing scholars. But although it fits a specific niche (as testimonies about its viability attest to (see Chapters 5 and 8)), other communities have surfaced in Canada that meet other needs. The boundaries of organizations like CASLL, CATTW, and CSSR all overlap somewhat, especially in membership. The question is, will Inkshed continue to fill the same niche or will that space be taken over, transformed, or even

disappear? And what will happen to the values and practices of those, like myself, who take on the title Inkshedder?

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Appendix A

Appendix B