12 WRITING INTO THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY OF VULNERABILITY IN INKSHEDDING

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Burke (1973) described the way that knowledge is created by likening communities of like-minded peers to a parlour gathering. He wrote,

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. 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)

Applied to academia, Burke's description calls to mind a group of scholars, confident and self-assured, intent on participating in the conversation and anxiously engaged in knowledge making. What this perception of

knowledge creation, as well as other research that more closely links writing practices with socially situated knowledge practices (Bazerman, 1988; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Paré, 2002; Schryer, 1994), fails to account for, however, is the human experience of joining those disciplinary conversations or disciplinary writing practices and the way that the human experience impacts discourse practices.

Imagine, for example, the feelings of a graduate student or other newcomer entering the established discourse of a community for the first time. She may feel awed by the presence of legendary participants, unsure of the appropriate language to use, unsure of how to join in the conversation, and unsure of how she will be received. In this chapter, I examine the feelings of vulnerability that accompany many newcomers entering the parlour of their disciplinary conversation. Drawing from a broader program of research in which I explore the ways that learning social writing practices of a community facilitates (and occasionally frustrates) community membership (Horne, in press), I explore the intense feelings of insecurity that many newcomers experience, reasons underlying these feelings, and the impacts that these feelings have on the process of membership. Thus, this research seeks to understand the human experience in the link between writing and knowledge by exploring the ways that academic communities "constrain, enable, or otherwise shape writing as a knowledge making practice" (Starke-Meyerring & Paré, this volume). It is valuable in the ways that it acknowledges and gives voice to those who struggle in their efforts to join academe and participate in knowledge practices be it new students, new scholars, or others.

Although I have limited this discussion to my study of a specific academic setting—the annual conference for the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning (CASLL), also known as Inkshed, much of what I describe here resonates with other experiences of initiation and apprenticeship in a variety of academic communities. I have chosen to locate my research in the Inkshed community because of its explicit concern with writing as knowledge practice. This is demonstrated through a collective writing process called inkshedding (from whence the community takes its name) that takes place during the three-day annual conference. Even though the express purpose of this writing activity is to collectively generate knowledge as in a Burkean parlour, my data suggest that feelings of anxiety and vulnerability may hinder newcomer participation in inkshedding and therefore in knowledge creation in the community. In order to gain full membership in Inkshed, newcomers must recognize their anxieties, trust in the support of others who feel the same way, and inkshed. Through inkshedding, they become participants in knowledge construction and the knowledge society.

INKSHEDDING

Inkshedding is a collaborative freewriting activity invented in the early 1980s by St. Thomas University professors Russ Hunt and Jim Reither. Hunt and Reither wanted to make classroom writing assignments rhetorically meaningful for students and dialogically transactional. At the same time that they were introducing inkshedding to their classes, Hunt and Reither were co-founding what is now known as CASLL. They took inkshedding to the first annual conference and it has become a hallmark of the community.

Briefly, at the conference, the inkshedding writing process follows four basic steps. First, participants respond in writing to a common prompt—for example, a conference presentation such as, "What is literacy in the information age," or "Resisting the teaching subtext in composition books" (presentation titles from the 2005 conference) to name two. The writing activity follows one or several presentations on a theme and is similar to a freewriting experience. (Freewriting is a term coined by Elbow, 1973, who describes a writing process, often used for generating ideas, in which participants write for around ten minutes without stopping. There is no concern for grammar, or punctuation, or format, but instead, for getting ideas out of the head and onto paper.) The writing produced is often messy and unorganized, but many Inkshedders (a title taken on by people who attend Inkshed conferences, participate on the listserv, inkshed, and otherwise mutually engage in socially situated and dialogic written interactions) argue that it affords everyone—not just the highly articulate and verbal or the most aggressive community members—equal opportunity to express whatever thoughts the presentations may have inspired. Second, after writing for a few moments, participants pool their writing in the center of the table (there are usually about eight people per table and about eight tables in the conference room). Everyone then takes a text other than her/his own and begins to read. As participants read, if anything stands out to them as significant or meaningful in any way, they draw a line beside it in the margin, underline it, or otherwise highlight it to show other readers that they found the particular section meaningful. Some people will even add a few words reflecting their response. Participants are encouraged to read and respond to as many texts as they can during the allotted time period. Third, the marked up texts are taken to an editorial committee (usually made up of volunteer conference participants) who look at the sections that have been most marked up. These sections are excerpted and typed up. Finally, the typed-up sections are copied and circulated to all participants in order to facilitate and encourage further discussion.

Since the introduction of inkshedding at the first conference in 1984, the annual conference has continued to grow around the philosophy of dialogism

that inspired inkshedding. To this end, there are no concurrent conference sessions. Everyone attends the same sessions so that everyone is able to respond to the same prompt. In addition to this, however, the conferences are often held in remote locations where there are few distractions to draw participants away from conference sessions. Participants are lodged under the same roof and share meals and evening entertainment together. In fact, one of the highlights of the conference is a talent night held on the last evening of the conference in which everyone is given the opportunity to participate (the term "talent" is very loosely interpreted). In these ways, people get to know each other and interact more than they might at a larger more traditional kind of conference. As much as possible, conference organizers facilitate social interaction and dialogue in order to generate knowledge. The conference center becomes a Burkean parlour where all who enter, newcomer and old-timer alike, are invited to participate in an on-going conversation. While this invitation to participate comes in the opportunity to present research, participate in talent night, and otherwise engage in socializing, the primary and central means for participation in the Inkshed conversation at conferences is through inkshedding. Thus, those who successfully learn how to join in inkshedding join in the practice of knowledge making in an academic society. Those who do not learn to participate effectively remain peripheral to knowledge creation. In this chapter, I examine the feelings that accompany entry to the Inkshed parlour and address the ways that feelings of vulnerability impact participation in inkshedding and therefore participation in the Inkshed community and knowledge practices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My larger program of research, of which the focus on vulnerability is part, examines the ways in which learning to participate in collective writing processes facilitates (and sometimes frustrates) membership in communities. In using the term collective writing processes, I draw on the work of social rhetoricians (Bizzell, 1983; Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999; Faigley, 1986) who argue that writing is not an isolated act. It is not, as Dias and colleagues (1999) explained, "a discrete clearly definable skill learned once and for all" (p. 9). Instead,

> 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 con-

texts, and writing strategies vary with individual and situation. (Dias et al., 1999, p. 10)

As a way of understanding this link between writing practices and social contexts, many scholars have turned to genre theory (Bazerman, 1988; Devitt, 2004; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Miller, 1984; Paré, 2002;). 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). 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. In short, genre theory is a way of understanding "dynamic rhetorical forms that are developed from actors' responses to recurrent situations and that serve to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning" (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, p. 4). Thus, genre theory informs this examination of inkshedding in the Inkshed community by seeking to understand the relationship between the community and the texts produced within the community.

Many researchers who embrace genre theory also draw on the theory of communities of practice (CoPs) to explain the social context for the documents they study. Understanding a group or organization as a community of practice is a way of understanding shared values, practices, and learning within a community. By studying the writing practices of Inkshed, I have examined the values and practices of the community. These practices bring people together into what Lave and Wenger (1991) described as CoPs. Wenger (1998) explained that

> 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 shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities, *communities of practice.* (p. 45)

Many of the knowledge societies described in this book can be described as CoPs as they engage in shared practices of knowledge making.

The usefulness of the theory of CoPs to my research 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. In particular, through the notion of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), theories of CoPs describe how newcomers learn to participate by taking on first small but meaningful tasks, which gradually increase in responsibility. This leads to increased membership in the community. Theories of CoPs com-

bine logically with genre theory as ideas of genre help to focus the practices Wenger (1998) refers to, specifically, on writing practices. It is the experience of learning these writing practices within an academic community that I address.

Through several years of conference attendance, and following a participant observer methodology (Denzin, 1997) through which I was able to participate in a variety of ways, I was able to gain a rich set of data with which to work. These included journals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), fieldnotes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994), in-depth individual and focus group interviews (Seidman, 1991), a variety of documents (inkshedding texts, newsletters, the listserv) (Denzin, 1978), and interim writing (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I draw from these data for this chapter and note that when names have been used, they have been used with permission. Some data appear without a participant's name. This is in accordance with ethics of privacy.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

As social constructionists argue, knowledge is not discreet content (Geertz, 1973; Kuhn, 1970; Rorty, 1979). Rather, knowledge is active practice. This research supports notions of writing as situated practice (Dias et al., 1999) and writing as active knowledge building (Bakhtin, 1986; Emig, 1971). As my data suggest, however, feelings of vulnerability can impede that knowledge.

I have chosen to share this theme in two different ways. First, in the following section, I look at the feelings associated with learning to Inkshed; I look at where feelings of vulnerability come from when writing in a community; and I examine the consequences of these feelings to membership in the collective. I use examples from the data to discuss and explain my findings. The second way that I portray the data, however, is somewhat less traditional. I present an audio clip (available because of the medium of this book) that intertwines a variety of data in order to recreate an inkshedding experience. I do this by creating fictional Inkshedders and using their voices to articulate the data. Although the account I present is fictionalized, I have used the exact words of those who participated in my study as much as possible. I have done this in an effort to help readers understand the inkshedding experience. The audio text was performed by amateur actors and no actual recordings of Inkshedders from my data are part of this performance.

I have created this audio clip in an effort to help readers understand the lived inkshedding experience. I have recreated an inkshedding experience in the spirit of bricolage as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2003). They explained, "The interpretive bricoleur produces a *bricolage*—that is, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation" (p. 5). Thus,

I have pieced together a representation of what it may feel like to participate in inkshedding, but many listeners will find that the thoughts expressed here resonate with other experiences of community entrance. In addition, performance ethnography, or the sharing of ethnographic results through means of a performance, is becoming increasingly valued as a way of sharing narratives (Becker, McCall, & Morris, 1989; McCall, 2003; Pollock, 1990). It affords a perspective not otherwise attainable. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) explained, performance texts are "Dialogical texts. They presume an active audience. They create spaces for give-and-take between reader and writer. They do more than turn the other into the object of the social science gaze" (p. 7). Thus, I have created a performance of an inkshedding experience in order to share the tensions and fears associated with writing within the context that it occurs (the audio text can be found at this link: http://www.MiriamHorne.net/InkshedPlay.mp3).

VULNERABILITY

Although my data deal specifically with the Inkshed community, feelings of vulnerability are not unique to this community. From graduate students entering their disciplinary community to undergraduate students entering academia to professionals entering an unfamiliar work environment, entering a Burkean parlour can be intimidating. Consider the following vignette created from journals and field notes in which I describe my first inkshedding experience:

> We are told to write. I break into a cold sweat. A knot of fear grips my stomach. Write? Here? What if I don't write the right thing! "Respond to what you read," we are told. But people can see me writing. I have to write something significant. How can I protect myself? People will know I'm just a grad student and don't really belong. "Now, pass your paper two people to the right and mark anything that stands out to you with a line in the margin." Panic rises. Too hard! I can't! Can I walk out? No, too many people would see me. I have no choice. I pass it on but notice that others at my table look equally uncomfortable. I read, I respond, I read, I respond. I find myself searching for value in my colleague's writing so that she can feel more comfortable. Momentarily I lose track of my own text. Then it's back in my hands. Lines highlight certain phrases I have written. Sometimes two or three lines for one comment. No one has corrected me. No one has told me I don't belong.

This vignette describes discomfort and insecurity in the inkshedding activity. I was not sure, however, if these feelings were a result of my own personal demons, or if others shared my experience. After reflecting on my own discomfort, I asked Inkshedders to share their feelings and experiences on learning to inkshed. The language of their responses made it clear that inkshedding touched on emotions and feelings far deeper than Burke's utopian parlour accounts for. Inkshedders described their initial participation in the Inkshed conversation in some of the following ways (the emphasis is mine in order to highlight the power of the language used):

> 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)

> I was out there, *vulnerable, naked* ... (Inkshedding text)

> I felt very *nervous*—the notion of "publication" and the making public of my "writing" created real *anxiety.* (Inkshedding text)

> I didn't like it—I felt *pressure* to say something intelligent. (Inkshedding text)

> 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. (Inkshedding text)

> *Discomfort. Fear* that I had nothing to say that anyone would want to hear. (Inkshedding text)

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

> I felt *uncomfortable* (kind of *exposed* without any desire to do so). (Inkshedding text)

> For many writing is exposure, vulnerability, danger. (Inkshedding text)

Danger, fear, vulnerability, anxiety, exposure—these words express the intense feelings associated with inkshedding—with learning the writing practices of a CoP and learning how to engage with the collective. As the following sections describe, some of these feelings stem from a lack of familiarity with the social context in which the writing takes place, and by extension, lack of familiarity with functions of the inkshedding activity.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Wenger (1998) pointed out that for a newcomer to become a full participant in a CoP, she must mutually engage with other community members. That is, she must negotiate and create meaning through shared interests and shared practices—in this case, she must continue to build on the shared values of dialogism in the community by participating in inkshedding and her inkshedding must contribute to the ongoing creation of Inkshed knowledge. As a newcomer, however, these values and practices are unknown. Without a full understanding of the community, it is a challenge to engage with it.

Many of the writers who expressed discomfort with inkshedding related their feelings to their relationship with the collective. They explained that part of their discomfort was a result of not really knowing the community. In fact, many newcomers to Inkshed quickly learn that Inkshed is a unique culture; it is a set of values, beliefs and practices that are intricately intertwined, but understanding these is not always easy. Entering the community is like entering an unknown culture. One Inkshedder reflected that his first time at an Inkshed conference was like carrying on a conversation with someone whose background he did not know. He explained,

> 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)

This excerpt shows that the newcomer recognized a unique set of traits within the community. He made sense of the experience by drawing on other background experiences, but acknowledged that he needed to learn more.

Another participant linked the challenge of entering and understanding the community as similar to learning a new genre. She wrote,

> 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)

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 Inkshed 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 excerpts I used earlier to illustrate the sense of vulnerability that newcomers to Inkshed feel. They illustrate writers' awareness of the community around them and the attempt to write in appropriate ways for the community. Each of the writers in these excerpts qualifies how s/he feels about his/her inkshedding by drawing connections to the audience, i.e., the community. One writer describes the first time inkshedding in the following way: "Discomfort. Fear that I had nothing to say that anyone would want to hear" (Inkshedding text). In this example, the writer expressed a fear not that she might be mute or might lack the ability to express herself, but that no one would want to listen to her ideas. The fear for newcomers is not that there is nothing to say, but rather, whether or not it is worth paying attention to in this particular setting; whether or not it will engage the collective. Similarly, other writers explained,

> 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)

> And 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)

The first of these two excerpts echoed the feeling of vulnerability described previously, and, driven by anxiety, anticipated a negative reception by the community. Interestingly, the writers in both of these excerpts went on to question their own abilities, but did so in relation to the community. The language reflects this. The sentences do not end with "significant" or "meaningful." Instead, both writers 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 engage the collective.

One final example illustrates the same awareness of the relationship 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). 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 by redefining "impressive" to reflect how the writer negotiates engagement. The writer wanted to write something that would help him belong in the community.

As these data illustrate, 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 mutually engage the audience. Without engagement, knowledge and the society generating it remain static.

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 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.

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, learn-

ing what the community values must come through trial and error in the inkshedding practice and other interactions with the community.

FUNCTIONS OF INKSHEDDING

While one reason for feelings of vulnerability result from a desire to fit into the community by pleasing the reader with clever and intelligent comments in order to mutually engage with the collective, another reason inkshedding may cause anxiety also reflects a desire to please the community, but this time by "doing it right." In other words, newcomers struggle to understand the function or role of inkshedding within Inkshed. While the newcomers seem to be aware that, despite instructions given to the contrary, there is a "right way" to inkshed, they are unclear of the relationship between the writing process and the collective. Unwritten rules hover in the background and writers only learn them when they break them.

Genre theorists explain that responses and actions within social situations are based on the values of the community in which they occur (Devitt, 2004; Paré, 2002). As standardized forms of responses recur, they reinforce the knowledge and values of the community in which they take place (Miller, 1984). Thus, longtime Inkshedders who know the values of the community do not share the same struggles as a newcomer who must learn the values of the community which they must uncover in the unspoken rules of inkshedding.

Even though instructions on "how to inkshed" never suggest that there is a right or wrong way to write, there are unwritten and unstated rules about what works in inkshedding, so those who agonize about doing it right are not without justification. In an interview with an original member of the Inkshed community (i.e., a member who has participated in the community since the first conference in 1984), I learned that rule-bound expectations exist, even if they are not explicitly stated. The Inkshedder explained that

> 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)

This shows that the community does have certain expectations. Unfortunately, the newcomer only learns by doing it "the wrong way" if she has inadvertently broken the rules.

Russ Hunt (co-inventor of the inkshedding activity, and co-founder of the Inkshed community) gave an example of the kinds of things people do to make

the inkshedding activity not work. He explained that some people might turn inkshedding into a personal letter to the presenter. They might write something like, "Dear Dorothy, I really enjoyed your presentation." First, by addressing only the presenter, the writer limits the conversation to only one person so that the other people reading the text are not invited to respond. Second, the writer is unable to further any kind of dialogic discussion. "I liked your presentation" ends discussion rather than encourages the deepening of ideas.

Hunt described this phenomenon and the problems with it by saying,

> They will address the speaker directly. They will think of what they're writing as feedback to the speaker ... It always makes me uncomfortable because it really misconstrues what this is about. What it's about is about the conversation ... that kind of discourse is conversation ending. (Focus group interview)

At each Inkshed conference, guidelines are given (sometimes with more and sometimes with less instruction as to "how to") for the inkshedding process. However, not until one actually participates in inkshedding is it really clear how the process works or the importance of the activity to the community. One person explained to me that he held back from the inkshedding experience during the first few rounds of writing because he was not entirely sure how the process worked and what the expectations were. In his words, he preferred to "remain on the periphery" until he knew the rules, or the "right way to do it" (Field notes). Even after this wait, however, it may take several tries to understand the process. It was only after studying the activity in the context of doctoral research (searching to understand how the activity worked) that I was able to write with complete confidence and understand the demands of the unwritten rules constituted by the values of the community.

IMPACTS OF VULNERABILITY ON COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP

As I stated at the beginning of the discussion of my data, feelings of anxiety and vulnerability may impede both individual and community knowledge by causing individuals to hold back from participating in knowledge generating activities. This section looks more closely at the impacts of vulnerability on community membership and knowledge building.

My data suggest a variety of ways that people cope with feeling vulnerable, all of which impact the writing experience and the ways individuals engage with the

collective. First, for some who are completely frightened, the writing experience can be paralyzing so that the writer simply does not participate in the writing activity. One woman described her experience inkshedding for the first time in a writing course. She explained, "I didn't want my classmates to read my writing. So while I did inkshed, I didn't tape my paper on the wall" (Inkshedding text). This example describes a slightly different style of inkshedding, but no less intimidating. Rather than circulating the inkshedding texts in small groups, texts are taped to the walls of the classroom and everyone walks around to read them. (This was done in the early years of inkshedding before the conference became too large to manage the inkshedding in this way). The woman explained that she circulated in the room reading everyone else's writing and pretending that hers was on the wall also. She explained that she was simply too uncomfortable to have her classmates read her writing, so she surreptitiously folded her writing up and put it in her pocket (Field notes). By doing this, although she participated in reading, she did not experience the full writing activity. She did not have the experience of having a reader respond to what she wrote, nor did the collective benefit from her contribution. I have also observed others who decline to participate in the activity and sit and talk quietly while others write, or slip out of the room for an early break. This kind of discomfort is not unique to inkshedding. One of my students recently shared a similar discomfort with me. She admitted that in a previous class, every time she was supposed to participate in a peer review activity with her classmates, during which they read and critiqued each others' writing, she would skip class. She felt too insecure about her spelling and felt like she would be judged harshly because of it. Like the Inkshedder who did not share her writing, this student lost out on the chance to learn and participate because of her vulnerability.

Second, some people participate out of a sense of duty—not because they feel they get anything out of it. One participant explained this by writing

> I didn't—and still don't find the act of inkshedding especially powerful either way. I recognize its value and do it dutifully .... 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. But it's an important symbolic ritual, an outward sign of a commitment to shared text that is more important than the actual words shared. (Inkshedding text)

Another person explained how, although he dutifully participates in inkshedding, he is resentful and does not enjoy the experience. The language used

to describe the feelings about inkshedding is startling: "comply with this experience that is forced on me, but it is certainly uncomfortable"(Inkshedding text). Ordinarily, language like "comply" or "force" might be used to describe life in a totalitarian state. The implication here is that the writer has no control over the experience and therefore resists participating. Someone who is compliant may be less likely to open up and risk writing anything that may push ideas in the inkshedding and therefore, like the previous example, will not have the benefit of having ideas responded to. In other words, a forced response is likely to be cold and uninviting and therefore not part of the engagement. In the same way that the individual misses out on engaging with the collective, the collective misses out on the contribution of the individual.

The phenomenon of participating out of a sense of duty or compliance is not limited to Inkshed. My experience as a teacher and student shows that students often approach writing assignments in the same way. They often write because they feel forced to, not because it enhances their learning experience. They are unable to see their role as participants in a larger conversation. They protect themselves from the vulnerability of the red pen by writing essays that may be structurally precise, but that lack insight or original thinking.

A third way that some people have dealt with their vulnerability is, unfortunately, through abuse. In the five years I attended conferences and collected data, I did not see any abuse through the inkshedding activity. That is, no one used it to criticize or attack a presenter or another inkshedding text. However, in the early years of Inkshed, as the community identity was forming, "trashing" (as old-timers in the community call it) occasionally happened. There are a variety of explanations as to why this occurred. Some suggest that it happened (and may still happen) when people are not required to sign their inkshedding texts. (Writers are given the choice whether or not to sign their inkshedding—a topic of much debate amongst long time Inkshedders.) Others suggest that it is a result of a miscommunication or misunderstanding—often because the Inkshed community traditionally pushes boundaries, thus opening the possibility of misinterpretation of new ideas. One woman, an original Inkshedder, linked it to the sense of vulnerability that the inkshedding activity seems to engender. She 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)

This interpretation explains that people feel vulnerable because they are exposing some of the ideas that they care most deeply about, and, as a result, they become defensive by lashing out before others have the chance to hurt them.

Thus far, all of the impacts of vulnerability that I have described reflect negative outcomes. Based on these examples, it seems that feelings of vulnerability do not encourage or facilitate writing processes, nor do they facilitate meaningful engagement with the collective in knowledge building practices. However, there are others who have come to the Inkshed community and had an entirely different experience. The feelings of vulnerability still exist, but there seems to be a different attitude about these feelings. In a conversation with a fellow Inkshedder, I asked why she had not included a discussion of vulnerability in her writing on Inkshed. She smiled and explained that it was that feeling of vulnerability that gave inkshedding its edge; that, for her, made it fun (Field notes).

This kind of change in perspective that can open up to and embrace the inherent vulnerability of inkshedding is echoed by Inkshedder Brock MacDonald. Brock, now a well-established member of the Inkshed community, shared his experience in the following way:

> First 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. (Inkshedding text)

In this description of his introduction to inkshedding, Brock echoed the common feelings of insecurity described earlier in this chapter. He even went so far as to describe this vulnerability as feeling naked—an extreme kind of exposure. What is critical to Brock's feelings of vulnerability, however, is how he interpreted them. He went on in describing his experience to show how this sense of nakedness, or vulnerability, is actually important to being part of the community, part of the action. When describing his enculturation into the community in the same writing, he articulated the connection of feeling vulnerable to feeling part of the collective. He wrote,

> "... 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 lib-

eration. Everybody's naked—big deal. Everyone's writing—big deal. (Inkshedding text)

What Brock managed to describe is an experience that is shared by many individuals in the Inkshed collective who manage to return and become part of the community. In order to participate in the writing activity and the community, individuals must live with the inherent discomfort and fear that accompanies inkshedding. They do so with the understanding that others also feel anxious and uncomfortable. Because they are not alone in their fears and self-exposure, they have support in their anxiety and it becomes possible to participate. The shared danger helps individuals to negotiate the path between individuality and becoming part of the collective. As a result, they participate in collective practices which lead to membership in the collective.

The way that Inkshed has allowed people to feel safe, even when doing something "dangerous" like writing in public, has led to a strong sense of community. In reflecting on the way the community has changed and developed over the years, Russ Hunt commented:

> Originally I thought of it [Inkshed] as primarily a way to give people a rhetorical context which would stretch and transform their tacit assumptions about what writing is …. But … it's clear that that has become secondary …. Now it's about creating and maintaining community, supporting each other, etc. (Inkshedding text)

Thus, as Hunt explained, members of the Inkshed community who continue to come to conferences and write year after year have come to understand collective values and appropriate ways to respond and engage through writing practices to form a CoP. Those who call themselves Inkshedders identify themselves as part of a larger collective that encourages risks (as in the inkshedding activity), but also provides a buffer of support for those who are willing to jump in and expose themselves.

BEYOND THE INKSHED CONVERSATION

One of the aims of this book is to explore the relationship between writing and knowledge. This chapter has shown that participating in writing practices of established communities can be challenging and intimidating. It stands to reason that this also impacts the way knowledge is generated and understood

within communities. While it is important to explore the link between writing and knowledge, this research brings a unique perspective by examining the challenge inherent in participating in writing activities. It is not enough to acknowledge a link. Attention must also be paid to the challenges of being able to participate, for without participation there can be no creation.

Acknowledging some of the challenges associated with entering academic discourse provides important insights into students' writing experiences as well as experiences of graduate students or new scholars entering their disciplinary conversations.

These findings resonate beyond the confines of Inkshed conference walls. Like many people who attend Inkshed conferences for the first time, students walking into university classrooms for the first time may feel scared and intimidated by what teachers ask them to write. Compulsory writing tasks, where the rules are hidden or unstated, help to generate students' fears. They enter the writing process often unaware of the generic conventions that typify academic writing, and learn, only when they have broken a rule, what the rules might be. In addition, through writing assignments like literature reviews and research papers, teachers ask students to jump into an academic conversation where a power differential asks them, as novices, to report on the experts who are distant and untouchable. It seems almost impossible that the novice would be able to write something significant enough to truly engage the reader. It is no wonder that feelings of fear, anxiety, and vulnerability surface in academic classrooms.

Graduate students and new scholars face similar challenges. While some may confidently jump into their disciplinary conversations, others may feel uncomfortable, unsure of their voice, wondering about the unwritten rules for speaking up. Ideally, a supervisor will help mentor the graduate student into a place of belonging in the community and perhaps even facilitate the transition to new scholar. But as Paré, Starke-Meyerring, and McAlpine have illustrated elsewhere in this book, those relationships come fraught with their own challenges.

In short, for many writers entering an academic discourse, it is not always easy to follow and learn the conventions of the community. Newcomers may be intimidated and feel nervous and anxious and those feelings may impact the way that the newcomer learns to participate in the community. Some will be able to work through their insecurities and find a place of belonging in the discourse community so that they can take part in knowledge making practices. Others, however, will not. The institutional context that does not acknowledge these insecurities is sure to constrain the potential knowledge of its collective, for the link between writing and knowledge is not only theoretical, but also human.

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