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Some Problematic "Channels" In the Teaching of Critical Thinking in Current L1 Composition Textbooks: Implications for L2 Student-Writers

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Advanced writing courses in many freshman composition programs stress the importance of teaching critical thinking skills where students—both L1 and L2—are encouraged to examine and question the social world they inhabit. Derived from an analysis of 12 current freshman composition textbooks, we identify three common "channels" through which student-writers are inducted into the critical thinking practice. These three channels are: (1) using informal logic as a way of developing students' reasoning strategies, (2) developing and refining students' problem solving skills, and (3) developing students' ability to analyze hidden assumptions in 'everyday arguments.' This study calls attention to the problematic nature of these "channels" and to some implications of transferring these channels in L2 writing classrooms. We believe that critical thinking is largely a sociocognitive practice that draws significantly on shared cultural practices and norms that mainstream students have (had) access to. ESL student-writers, however, given their diverse sociocultural backgrounds, have not necessarily been socialized in ways that would make induction into critical thinking a (relatively) smooth process (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995). Using critical thinking textbooks (written by and large for L1 students) then, in L2 writing classrooms has complex consequences. Based on our current examination and previous study (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a), we propose a discipline oriented approach to teaching writing, especially for non-native student-writers.

The plethora of materials—programs, textbooks, appraisal kits—published on critical thinking (CT) over the last decade points partially to how problematic this notion has become in education-related circles. National appraisals on the state of education belittle rote memory and cry out for the inclusion of thinking/reasoning skills in curricula as the fourth 'R' (Siegel, 1990). The Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (1986) and the Holmes group (1986) stress the importance of teaching thinking skills to both students and teachers. The Commission on the Humanities (1980), the College Board (1983) and the National Education Association (Futrell, 1987) similarly promote the incorporation of teaching thinking skills in current curricula; many mainstream universities in the U.S. require their students to take CT courses. Not only does there seem to be much debate over what the phrase means and how to define it (Ennis, 1962; Glaser,

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1984; McPeck, 1981, 1990), but also over educational levels at which it should be implemented as well as how it can best be tested and assessed. This paper enters this national debate not to offer one more definition of critical thinking (for definitions and discussions on this concept see Ennis, 1981,1987; Johnson, 1992; McPeck, 1981; Nelson, 1981; Nickerson, 1984, 1987; Norris, 1985, Paul, 1985), or to suggest ways in which it can be evaluated. Rather we want to examine some aspects of a specific set of textbooks that purport to foster these skills, and to explore some implications of these materials for a specific student population.

The pedagogical artifacts under consideration are 12 current rhetorically oriented L1 freshman composition (FC) textbooks. The readings in these texts are predicated on the popular view that students should be encouraged to examine critically and to question the social world they inhabit (Bizzell, 1992; Shor, 1993). Thus, most of the readings included in these texts revolve around current sociopolitical problems such as animal rights, censorship, or the right to die (see Appendix for a partial selection of topics covered) to encourage students to examine critically certain cultural "givens." Accompanying these readings are rhetorical "channels" or heuristics by which some of these social problems can be addressed. Popular as these textbooks are, both the readings and the channels accompanying them are based on problematic assumptions particularly disadvantageous to L2 student-writers.

The heuristics and readings examined for this study revolve around at least three related channels that these textbooks identify as central to the development of critical thinking/writing skills:

(1) developing students' sense of informal logic toward strengthening their reasoning strategies,
(2) developing and refining problem-solving skills,
(3) developing the ability to look for hidden assumptions and fallacies in arguments.

All three of these features are identified as central features in the five standardized (machine-gradable) English language critical thinking tests (administered to high-school students) currently available on the North American Continent. These tests are:

- The Cornell Critical Thinking Test, Level X (Ennis & Millman, 1985a)
- The Cornell Critical Thinking Test, Level Z (Ennis & Millman, 1985b)
- The New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills (Shipman, 1983)
- The Ross Test of Higher Cognitive Processes (Ross and Ross, 1976)
- The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (Watson & Glaser, 1980)

However, as this paper points out, all three related channels are in themselves problematic, with serious implications when transferred into advanced col-

lege L2 writing classrooms. Even if the points were not problematic and did fully "work," they draw on shared cultural knowledge that the L2 learner cannot always be assumed to have. L2 composition students, then, are doubly disadvantaged: not only do they have to grapple with U.S.-specific social problems, but, as we will presently point out, they must also grapple with tools that are in themselves problematic. Problems such as the ones presented in this paper as well as those discussed elsewhere (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a; 1996b) lead us to question whether the teaching of advanced writing might be more effective—for both L1 and L2 student-writers—if it were taught within more situated contexts (Brown et al., 1989; Collins, 1991) such as specific disciplines. Most undergraduates in four-year colleges are required to take two semesters of composition. Having both native and non-native students take their advanced composition course (not necessarily in the second semester) in the discipline in which they are planning to major might help alleviate some previously identified problems (Ramanathan and Kaplan, 1996a; 1996b). Anchoring writing in a discipline will provide students with a disciplinary context (Bizzell, 1992; Brannon, 1995; Petraglia, 1995; Swales, 1990; Young, 1994) within which to gauge what constitutes problematic issues; it will also give them a clearer sense of discipline-specific rhetorical tools with which to address those issues.

CRITICAL THINKING AND FRESHMAN COMPOSITION TEXTBOOKS: HOW WE GOT HERE

To provide at least a partial backdrop against which to place CT in Freshman composition (FC), the first half of this section will be devoted to partially reconstructing the background from which this concept emerged; the second half will briefly address CT as a sociocognitive practice. Section 2 will be devoted to discussing the problematic nature of the three common features that all of the examined composition texts identify as central to critical thinking. Where relevant, this section will also discuss the implications of these assumptions for non-native student-writers.

According to Kennedy et al. (1991), part of the critical thinking debate focuses on whether critical thinking is the same across disciplines or whether all critical thinking abilities are specific to disciplines. At one end of the spectrum are thinkers like Glaser (1984) and McPeck (1981) who uphold a subject-specific view of critical thinking; Project IMPACT (Winocur, 1985) in California is, for instance, an attempt at integrating thinking instruction into content areas of Math, reading, and language arts at the middle school and high school levels (cf. Kennedy et al., 1991). At the other extreme are proponents who advocate instrumental enrichment (Fuerstein et al., 1985), "lateral thinking" (deBono, 1983) and "structure of the intellect" (Meeker, 1969) (cited in Kennedy et al., 1991). These experts advocate separate thinking courses and programs such as Philosophy for Children (Lipman, 1982). Ennis (1985) and Sternberg (1987) point out that each approach has its

advantages and have put forward a "mixed model" (Sternberg, 1987, p. 225) that integrates elements of each.

Current L1 composition textbooks appear to fall toward that end of the spectrum that advocates separate, discipline-free thinking skills. The nature of topics covered in current rhetoric-oriented FC texts (see Appendix 1 for a partial list) seems to reflect strong ties to a currently fashionable movement in education, namely "critical/radical pedagogy" (Shor, 1993; Shor & Freire, 1987). Much of this movement is centered around the idea that schools should serve as "sites for learning about the principles of critical literacy and democracy," since such education would promote the development of "critical citizenship, civic courage, and . . . organic intellectuals" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 216). This movement aims to achieve its ideals by stressing forms of learning and knowledge that will provide a critical understanding of how social reality works, on how certain "disparities between democratic principles and undemocratic realities" (Benesch, 1993, p. 546) are sustained and reinforced, and of how those aspects related to the logic of domination can be changed (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 216).

The above pedagogy follows closely on the heels of "liberal humanism," a movement in the 1960's that stressed the importance of empowering students and parents, and of connecting school to students' real lives. This movement—frequently associated with John Dewey—emerged primarily as a response to a conservative demand that schools offer more rigorous courses in Math and Science—a notion in keeping with the idea that mastery of techniques is equivalent to a "full education." For Dewey, the point of education was not so much to prepare students for jobs or skills but rather for the broad requirements of citizenship in a democratic society. Dewey also claimed that it was crucial for every child to participate in the learning experience as opposed to being a passive object of education, a point that was later echoed—albeit more vociferously—by radical pedagogue, Freire (for a comprehensive history of composition see Berlin, 1987).

Radical pedagogues adopted and extended yet another view of Dewey's: The idea that "knowledge is a perception of those connections of an object which determine its applicability in a given situation" (Dewey, 1966, p. 200). In other words, it was important for schools to teach students to apply their learning in the real world. Self-knowledge, Dewey felt, was the key to one's knowledge of the world, and specifically to the ability to connect contemporary experience to received information. This view—that schools devise curricula around "information" and the real world—informs both current views about critical thinking in general and FC texts in particular.

While Dewey's movement became very popular, it failed to become completely integrated into school ideology; instead, it was appropriated "piecemeal into a hybrid discourse" of liberal reform which has dominated U.S. schools since the turn of the century (Aronowitz & Giroux 1985, p. 7). Radical pedagogues felt that "although he [Dewey] had a clear idea of what schools *ought to be*, he carefully avoids making a social and political analysis of what schools actually *are*"

(Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 9). Likewise, Gramsci (1971), the noted Italian Marxist, did not address what schools actually do; instead, his views primarily focused around developing a school form that would enable subaltern children not only to gain access to the "dominant Discourse" (Gee, 1991), but to relate it critically to dimensions of their own histories, experiences, and cultures. Paulo Freire, on the other hand, did address social and political inequalities that school structures perpetuated (1977; 1985). Like Dewey and Gramsci, he stressed the importance of validating oppressed voices (in his case Brazilian peasants) by connecting the individual to historical and contemporary circumstances. Education had to have the practical outcome of transforming society to meet the collective needs of individuals; it became for him the "central terrain where power and politics operate out of a dialectical relation between individuals and groups who live out their lives with specific historical conditions and structural constraints. . . ." (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 12).

Many freshman composition programs aiming to develop "critical thinking" skills can be located against this partial background. Bizzell, a central figure in L1 composition theory, for instance, openly acknowledged her affiliations to Freire in her work (1992). Like Freire, she hoped to foster "critical consciousness" through literacy schooling, which in turn could be turned on inequities in the larger social order.[1] However, she has since questioned the causal relation between critical consciousness and academic thinking and has, in fact, gone on record rejecting the imposition of academic discourse on all students at all costs (1993), a point very much in keeping with the overall stance adopted in this paper. Other factors that have contributed to sensitizing students in writing courses to their "political responsibilities whether as leaders or simply as active participants" (Berlin, 1987, p. 189) have been the contributions of rhetoricians from a variety of fields, including poststructuralist literary and cultural criticism (Barthes, 1988; Eagleton, 1988; Jameson,1984; Lentricchia & McLaughlin, 1987; Said, 1988) and philosophical pragmatism (Rorty, 1995). Rhetoricians operating in this mode have tended to "move in the direction of the epistemic, regarding rhetoric principally as a me*thod of discovering*, and even *creating knowledge*, frequently within socially defined discourse communities" (our emphasis, Berlin, 1987, p. 183).

The idea of "creating knowledge" appears to crucially inform the readings in the textbooks under investigation. Even a cursory examination of topics covered in several current L1 composition texts (see Appendix for a partial list) points to the seriousness with which these texts view the importance of creating learners' knowledge by sensitizing them to contemporary "public issues" and the importance of enabling writers to "take a stand" on an issue (*Writing Arguments,* 1995, p. iv). The texts are designed as aids to "writing thoughtful, effective arguments on important political, social and scientific ethical and religious issues" (*Current Issues and Enduring Questions*, (hereafter CIEQ, 1993, p. iv). Likewise, an examination of the rhetoric sections of these books reveals an emphasis which regards rhetoric as a "method of discovering" through the development of "respectable

techniques" (as opposed to "gimmicks," *CIEQ* 1993, p. iv) by which to target these public issues. Thus, both the readings and the rhetoric accompanying them point to the importance laid on teaching student-writers "a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering and making sense of it" (Berlin, 1982, p. 777). But as we, along with others, have pointed out (Atkinson, to appear; Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Bizzell, 1993; Delpit, 1988; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1995a, b), and will presently demonstrate as well, this idea of imposing on all students one way of ordering or making sense of the world is problematic.

CRITICAL THINKING AS A SOCIOCOGNITIVE PRACTICE: LOCATING L2 STUDENT-WRITERS

The emphasis placed on developing "thinking" skills across various levels of educational curricula (Ennis, 1962, 1987; Norris, 1985; Walton, 1993) seems to reflect a general view that this practice is largely cognitive. However, much research in situated cognition (Brown et al., 1989; Lave, 1988; Resnick, 1990) challenges this idea that the social and the cognitive can be studied independently, "arguing that the social context in which cognitive activity takes place is an integral part of that activity, not just the surrounding context for it" (Resnick, 1990, p. 4). As Lave argues (1988), our definition of the cognitive is influenced by assumptions that derive from social and economic arrangements with long historical roots (Goody, 1989).

From this point of view, critical thinking is not only a cognitive practice, but a sociocognitive one whose detailed workings are hidden from our view because it has become a practice that we take for granted. This practice—as is any practice, as Vygotsky's writings testify—is mediated on both social and individual planes by "tools" and "signs" (Vygotsky, 1981; Vygotsky & Luria, 1930; Wertsch, 1991) that reinforce and sustain it. Two critical corollary points regarding such signs must be taken into account when attempting to understand Vygotsky's explanation of human mental functioning. The first is that "[by] their nature, signs [tools] are social, not organic or individual" (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 137), and that they are products of sociocultural evolution and hence are inherently positioned in sociocultural contexts. They are not invented by the individual nor discovered in the individual's independent interaction with nature, and they are not inherited in the form of innate predispositions (Wertsch, 1991, p. 92); instead, individuals, by being part of a sociocultural milieu, appropriate these mediational tools (Leont'ev, 1959). Mental functioning—or, in the present case, the ability to think in particular ways—can be seen to be rooted as much, if not more, in social contexts than in the individual. The second relevant Vygotskian point is that "[by] being included in the process of behavior, the. . . tool [the textbooks] alters the entire flow and structure of mental functions" (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 137). In other words, the tools aid in transformations—including social and cognitive—that occur when the learner is being inducted into the practice.

These points have important implications for the present discussion: Given that "tools" in themselves are sociocultural in nature, and given that they mediate between the social practice and learner, it would follow that people of shared sociocultural backgrounds would have a relatively easier time accessing and/or dealing with those "tools." Ethnographic research on literacy practices has shown us that middle-class socialization practices such as reading bedtime stories at home (Heath, 1983) or participating in "show and tell" in school (Michaels, 1981) ultimately prepare the child for essayist/school-based literacy. In the light of the present discussion, L1 students who have been socialized in mainstream ways of using language (cf. Gee, 1991) have an easier time in composition classes where CT skills are fostered because so much of the CT practice draws on shared cultural knowledge and values (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995). Thus, although the "channels" adopted by these "tools" are problematic, L1 students are better prepared to handle them than L2 students.

Induction into the CT practice for L2 student-writers, on the other hand, is that much more difficult given that they are socialized in their respective, culturally valued practices (Connor & Kaplan, 1987). They often come to the writing task having been socialized into "analyzing" "problems," with particular "reasoning" strategies (features associated with the CT practice that will be discussed in more detail presently) that are not only acceptable by their respective cultures, but in ways that are compatible with the linguistic means provided by their languages (Berman & Slobin, 1994). Kellerman (1995, p. 138-139), citing Berman and Slobin's evidence, presents four versions of the same event interpreted in four different languages to illustrate the point that the resources available to speakers of different languages prompt somewhat different presentations of the event:

Below is a (slightly abbreviated) cross-language example showing how different languages "filter" the way in which events are related. It comes from transcripts of children with different native languages relating the "Frog Story" from a set of pictures without words (Berman & Slobin, 1994, p. 11). All of the children in these examples (their age in parentheses) are native speakers of the respective languages:

> <u>English</u>
> *And he starts running. And he tips him off over a cliff into the water. And he lands* (9; 11).
> <u>German</u>
> *Der Hirsch nahm den Jungen auf sein Geweih und schmiß ihm den Abhang hinunter genau ins Wasser.*
> [The deer took the boy on his antlers and hurled him down from the cliff right into the water.] (9; 11)
> <u>Spanish</u>
> El ciervo le llevó hasta un sitio, donde debajo habia un rio.
> *Entonces el ciervo tiro perro y al nino at rio. Y despues, cayeron.*
> [The deer took him until a place, where below there was a river. Then the deer threw the dog and the boy to the river. And then they fell.]

> Hebrew:
> *Ve ha'ayil nivhal, ve hu hitxil laruts. Ve hakelets rats axarav, ve hu higia lemacok she mitaxat haya bitsa, ve hu atsar, ve hayeled ve hakelev naflu labitsa beyaxad.*
> [And the deer was startled, and he began to run. And the dog ran after him, and he reached the cliff that had a swamp underneath, and he stopped, and the boy and the dog fell into the swamp together.] (9; 7)

Berman and Slobin claim that the differences between these excerpts is to some extent determined by the linguistic possibilities inherent in each of the languages. The first two, in English and German, describe the complexity of the fall via a series of adverbial particles and prepositional phrases (*tips off, over a cliff, into the water, schmiß, den Abhang_hinunter, ins Wasser*). The verbs *tip* and *schmeißen* [hurl] signify the manner in which the deer causes the fall. The Spanish and Hebrew versions resemble each other but differ from the English and German versions. In the former pair, the event is recounted as a series of episodes. First there is a description of location (cliff with river below, place with swamp underneath); then the deer acts and, as a result, the boy and the dog fall. Berman and Slobin (1994, p. 12) point out that the verbs chosen (*throw, fall, stop*) are "bare descriptions of change of state, with no elaboration of manner." Furthermore:

> These are not random differences between the narrative styles of these . . children, but rather show their abilities to convey just those analyses of the event that are most compatible with the linguistic means provided by their languages. English and German provide large sets of locative particles that can be combined with verbs of manner, thereby predisposing speakers toward a dense style of encoding motion events. On the other hand, a different style arises in the other . . . languages, which rely more on simple change-of-state and change-of-location verbs, thereby predisposing speakers towards more extended analyses of motion events (Berman & Slobin, 1994, p. 12).

Thus, the order and manner of presentation (including addressing a problem as well as analyzing and reasoning through it) appear to be culture-specific, conditioned in part by the linguistic resources available but also by customary modes of perception. L2 student-writers, given their respective sociocultural and linguistic socialization practices, are more likely than native English speaking (NES) students to encounter difficulty when being inducted into CT courses in freshman composition classes; they are not "ready" for CT courses in either L1 or L2 writing classrooms.

THREE PROBLEMATIC CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH CRITICAL THINKING IS FOSTERED

Twelve argumentation-oriented L1 freshman composition textbooks were examined for the purposes of this paper. To ensure that our conclusions are based

on recent textbooks, we randomly selected those argumentation textbooks whose dates of publication fell within the last six years (1989-1995). Five of these texts are in at least their second editions. Our analysis consisted of identifying those channels that all twelve texts emphasized as crucial to CT.

Channel #1—Developing reasoning skills through informal logic models: How general or specific a skill is CT?

Before considering whether reasoning skills can in fact be encouraged through the teaching of informal logic, it might be fruitful to consider whether they constitute some kind of general ability (with "general" benefits) or whether they point to a specific skill (McPeck, 1991). This distinction is important because if we had some sort of mutually agreed upon idea as to the kind of competence reasoning skills are, then we would be in a better position to articulate ways of teaching it and testing for it. The existence of a clear universally accepted definition would make it possible and realistic to determine what courses taught at what point in the curriculum could promote CT skills.

An analysis of our data reveals that rhetoric-oriented freshman composition textbooks present reasoning skills as at once a "general ability" leading to particular general benefits as well as a "specific skill," a feature that only problematizes issues regarding whether and how they are to be taught and tested. Reasoning skills are presented as a general ability in that they are predicated on the idea that they lead to liberal critical thinking (Cederblom & Paulsen, 1987; Johnson, 1992); they are presented as specific in that they are seen to consist of teaching a relatively small number of specific skills (Kahane, 1976; Walton, 1993) that "once mastered enable one to deploy these skills across any problems, arguments or questions where critical thinking might be called for" (McPeck, 1990, p. 24). Thus, for instance *Writing Arguments* (1995) sees the function of argument as the general ability to

> think through the complexity of an issue and seek truth . . . . The writer, confident in the truth and rightness of his or her claim, concentrates on swaying an audience. . . . [T]he value of referential or truth seeking argument lies in its power to deepen and complicate our understanding of the world. . . . The value of an argument with a persuasive aim is its ability to help social groups make decisions in a rational and humane way (p.5).

Elements of Argument adopts a similarly general stance by maintaining that argumentation can help "cope with the bewildering confusion of voices in the world. . . . It can give you tools for distinguishing between what is true and what is false, what is valid and what is invalid" (1994, p. 7). Argumentation, for this text, is seen to have a political benefit as well: "democracy depends on a citizenry that can reason for themselves, on men who know whether a case has been proved, or at least made probable" (p. 7). Argumentation is seen as a "civilizing influence," "the very basis for democratic order." "In free societies, argument and de-

bate remain the preeminent means of arriving at consensus" as opposed to totalitarian countries where coercion may "express itself in a number of reprehensible forms—censorship, imprisonment, exile, torture, or execution" (p. 8).

All of the texts examined for this study articulate, albeit in varied ways, similar stances regarding the general benefits of critical thinking. That these texts are also simultaneously specific is partially evident in their emphasis on specific rhetorical tools, especially those oriented around "soft" logic (Scriven, 1980; Walton, 1993), as means to target some of the general aims mentioned above. Thus, Scriven's idea (1980, 1992) that "the goal of soft logic is internalizing the skills of reasoning" (1980, p. 159) appears to be echoed in various ways in all of the examined texts: All emphasized in varying degrees aspects of "informal logic" considered crucial to effective and "sound" reasoning. *Writing Arguments* (1995), for instance, devotes a part of its section on Aristotelian logic to explaining the importance of assessing enthymemes in arguments. An *enthymeme* is defined as "an incomplete logical structure that depends, for its completeness, on one or more unstated assumptions (values, beliefs, principles) that serve as the starting point of the argument" (p. 105). In their summarization of the enthymeme section, the editors lay out the following three points and an illustration supporting these points:

> 1. Claims are supported with reasons. You can usually state a reason as a because clause attached to a claim (see Chapter 4).
> 2. A because clause attached to a claim is an incomplete logical structure called an enthymeme. To create a complete logical structure from an enthymeme, the unstated assumption (or assumptions) must be articulated.
> 3. To serve as an effective starting point for the argument, this unstated assumption should be a belief, value, or principle that the audience grants.
> Let's illustrate this structure by putting the previous example—plus two new ones—into schematic form. . . .
> INITIAL ENTHYMEME: Cocaine and heroin should be legalized because legalization would eliminate the black market in drugs.
> CLAIM: Cocaine and heroin should be legalized.
> STATED REASON: because legalization would eliminate the black market in drugs.
> UNSTATED ASSUMPTION: An action that eliminates the black market in drugs is good. (Or, to state the assumption more fully, the benefits to society of eliminating the black market in drugs outweigh the negative effects to society of legalizing drugs) (p. 100-101).

The above steps are presented as ways by which to arrive at unstated assumptions that one's audience will (or will not) accept, since audience-acceptance at least partially influences whether or not the writer has grounds from which to begin building an effective argument (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a). The successful and logical arguer, said Aristotle, is the person who knows how to formulate and develop enthymemes so that the argument hooks into the audience's values and beliefs (*Writing Arguments*, p. 100).

Similar to *Writing Arguments'* discussion of enthymemes is the section on warrants in *Elements of Argument*. Adopting the "Toulmin model," *Elements of Argument* (1994) posits the importance of *warrants* as effective strategies by which to ensure a "sound," logical relationship between a "claim" and "support" (pp. 9-11). "A warrant is an inference or an assumption. . . a guarantee of reliability" (p. 11). The following segment drawn from *Elements of Argument* stresses the importance that this text (along with 10 of the 12 examined) places on establishing what one's given audience would consider "logical connections" between one's claim and support:

> CLAIM: Laws making marijuana illegal should be repealed.
> SUPPORT: People should have the right to use any substance they wish.
> WARRANT: No laws should prevent citizens from exercising their rights.
> Support for repeal of the marijuana laws often consists of medical evi dence that marijuana is harmless. Here, however, the arguer contends that an important ethical principle is at work: Nothing should prevent people from exercising their rights, including the right to use any substance, no matter how harmful. Let us suppose that the reader agrees with the supporting statement, that individuals should have the right to use any substance, no matter how harmful. But in order to accept the claim, the reader must also agree with the principle expressed in the warrant, that government should not interfere with the individual's right. He or she can then agree that laws making marijuana illegal should be repealed. *Notice that this warrant, like all warrants, certifies that the relationship between the support and the claim is sound* (*Elements of Argument*, p.12, emphasis added).

Warrants, then, serve as bridges between claims and supports, as warranties that encourage skeptical audiences to be receptive to particular arguments (*Writing Arguments* 1995, p. 102). In many ways they are not that different from "unstated assumptions" (of the kind presented earlier) in that they too are underlying beliefs that link our claims to our audience's beliefs.

A problem with models like these (though they are no doubt useful in creating successful arguments) is that there appears to be much variation between textbooks as to which particular model (or set of models) actually fosters critical thinking skills. *Elements of Argument* tends to stress the Toulmin model (partially illustrated by the above excerpt) whereas *Writing Arguments* presents its discussion of enthymemes along with discussions on Aristotelian logic and the "stasis system" (Fahnestock & Secor, 1991) as necessary channels through which to effect "sound" reasoning. Also related to the specific nature of these texts (but not particularly related to the point about informal logic) is the fact that there appears to be little agreement between these textbooks as to *which* specific skills comprise critical thinking. Each of the textbooks examined for this study (to say nothing of the different programs/tests/kits across the country) lay differing emphases on different skills. Thus, for instance, *Writing Arguments* partially emphasizes the ability to detect *logical fallacies*, while *The Informed Argument* partially stresses the impor-

tance of *getting to know one's audience*. In the same vein *Current Issues and Enduring Questions* partially stresses the difference between *reason and rationalization*, while *Contexts and Communities* highlights *critical reading strategies*. Arriving, thus, at a finite set of critical thinking skills about which there is complete mutual consensus—a feature that would facilitate its teaching and testing—when there is so much variation seems, at least for the moment, improbable. Furthermore, while the italicized phrases, above, are presented as "specific skills" that contribute to critical thinking, one could, in fact, argue that they are large bundles of different kinds of skills that need to be taught and learned in more situated contexts such as particular disciplines (Freedman, 1995; Resnick, 1990; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a; 1996b).

Thus, the simultaneously general and specific nature of these L1 textbooks renders these pedagogical artifacts problematic. There seems to be an incongruence in the idea of exposing students to particular informal logic models in order to produce an "informed citizenry": the (overly) specific means do not exactly fit with the (broad) general ends. When such incongruent means-ends are transferred to L2 writing sections, the consequences are much more complex. Non-native speakers of English, whatever their technical visa status, do not necessarily come equipped with assumptions about democracy or with a general desire to be an "informed citizen" of the United States; as pointed out earlier, they may also be accustomed to using a different ("soft") logical system, one which differs substantially from English in the frequency, distribution and function of grammatical structures depending on what is or is not permissible in their respective native linguistic system. We saw in section 1b that the large sets of available locative particles in English and German may partially account for the increased use of location descriptors by (native) speakers of these languages; spoken discourse in Spanish and Hebrew, on the other hand, does not offer as many locative particles (Berman & Slobin, 1994). L2 student-writers, then, expected to structure their information in ways that meet discourse-expectations of English speaking audiences (Ramanathan-Abbott, 1993) can find themselves doubly disadvantaged: They are not likely to have been socialized into middle-class literacy practices that would facilitate mastery over these models, and they are more likely to have been socialized into other linguistic systems that employ different logics to address problems and the structuring of information.

Channel #2: Encouraging reasoning/critical thinking skills by developing and refining students' problem-solving skills

Critical thinking experts such as Ennis (1962; 1987), Kahane (1976), and Johnson (1992) seem, on the whole, to collapse notions of "reasoning ability" and "everyday problems" to "argument analysis." "More often than not they go on to collapse these distinctions by simply talking about 'everyday reasoning'—a phrase which has a nice ring about it, if for no other reason than it suggests something which is clear and understood by everybody" (McPeck, 1990, p. 1). Scriven (1980;

1992) maintains that training in critical thinking should include highly controversial issues of considerable personal, social, or intellectual importance that are not seriously addressed in the regular curriculum. Arguments, as presented in the texts examined for this study, appear to reflect this view: The subject matter of most of them subsumes "everyday" matters of public controversy or social problems that concentrate on current sociopolitical issues such as nuclear armaments, the right to die, gays in the military, gun control, animal experimentation, illegal immigration, affirmative action, women's rights, to name a few. (For a partial list of public issues covered by the texts, see Appendix). Reflection on and exploration of such "everyday" arguments is regarded as healthy and desirable because the "argumentative process . . . is indispensable to the preservation of a free society" (*Elements of Argument,* 1994, p. 5). Such a view is justified on at least the following points: (1) the survival of a democracy depends partially on public debate about such issues (Cederblom & Paulsen, 1987); (2) public education in North America would like to prepare people to make decisions about such issues, and (3) these are areas around which honest disagreement is possible (McPeck, 1990).

The following cases that the introductory chapter of *Writing Arguments* has students consider illustrate the sociopolitical nature of some of these problems:

CASE ONE
ILLINOIS COURT WON'T HEAR CASE OF MOM
WHO REFUSES SURGERY

CHICAGO—A complex legal battle over a Chicago woman's refusal to undergo a caesarean section, even though it could save the life of her unborn child, essentially was settled yesterday when the state's highest court refused to hear the case.

The court declined to review a lower court's ruling that the woman should not be forced to submit to surgery in a case that pitted the rights of the woman, referred to in court as "Mother Doe," against those of her fetus.

The 22-year-old Chicago woman, now in the 37th week of her pregnancy, refused her doctor's advice to have the surgery because she believes God intended her to deliver the child naturally.

The woman's attorneys argued that the operation would violate her constitutional rights and the free operation of her religious beliefs.

Cook County Public Guardian Patrick Murphy, the court-appointed representative of the woman's fetus, said he would petition with the Supreme Court asking it to hear the case. He has 90 days to file the petition, but he acknowledged future action would probably come too late.

Doctors say the fetus is not receiving enough oxygen from the placenta and will either die or be retarded unless it is delivered by cesarean section. Despite that diagnosis, the mother has stressed her faith in God's healing powers and refused doctor's advice to submit to the operation (1995, p. 11-12).

CASE TWO

HOMELESS HIT THE STREETS TO PROTEST PROPOSED BAN

SEATTLE— The homeless stood up for themselves by sitting down in a peaceful but vocal protest yesterday in Seattle's University District.

About 50 people met at noon to criticize a proposed set of city ordinances that would ban panhandlers from sitting on sidewalks, put them in jail for repeatedly urinating in public, and crack down on "intimidating" street behavior.

"Sitting is not a crime," read poster boards that feature mug shots of Seattle City Attorney Mark Sidran, who is pushing for the new laws. . . ."This is city property; the police want to tell us that we can't sit here," yelled one man named R.C. as he sat cross-legged outside a pizza establishment.

Marsha Shaiman stood outside the University Book Store holding a poster and waving it at passing cars. She is not homeless, but was one of many activists in the crowd. "I qualify as a privileged white yuppie," she said. "I am offended that the privileged people in this country are pointing at the poor, and people of color, and say they are causing problems. They are being used as scapegoats."

Many local merchants support the ban saying that panhandlers hurt business by intimidating shoppers and fouling the area with the odor of urine, vomited wine, and sometimes even feces (1995, p. 13).

The justification for presenting cases/problems such as these is to induce students "to see argument first as a process of truth-seeking and clarification and then later, when you are firmly committed to a position, as an occasion for persuasion" (*Writing Arguments,* 1995, p. 22). The textbook advises students to seek out a wide range of views, to welcome views different from their own, to treat these views respectfully, and to see them as intelligent and rationally defensible. The skills of reason and inquiry developed through the writing of arguments is meant to help students become more "objective," thereby enabling them to present "sound" arguments.

While these are undoubtedly laudable goals, there are at least two problems. In all of the texts examined, social problems like the above are presented with "pro" and "con" readings that are intended to provide students with different viewpoints on the problem in question so as to enable them to take a more "informed" stand. However, having students "take a stand" and make "sound" judgments after assigning them 3 or 4 "pro" and "con" readings on California's proposition 187 or affirmative action does not enable them to deal with the issue in its complexities at all; if anything, it takes away from the enormous complexities built into issues such as these, turning real problems into pseudo problems with easy solutions. A second problem with this channel has to do with the fact that informal logic tools of the kind discussed earlier are used to perform "sound" analyses on such "everyday" social problems. Like McPeck (1990), we contend that the real difficulty with "everyday" social problems has little to do with establishing soundness and almost everything to do with understanding and assimilating complex informa-

tion. One can pick virtually any "everyday problem" and find oneself sinking into a quagmire of arguments and counter arguments. For example, the issue of gays in the military opens up, among others, questions about religious/"moral" attitudes toward homosexuality, about judging military ability on the basis of sexual preference, about being public or not about one's sexual identity, about equal rights, and even about the possibility of women serving in the military. Making a truly "sound" decision (if there is anything like a "sound" decision) about these kinds of issues would mean having access to a lot of information. In the end, whatever stand we take is tenuous since there are few simple and straightforward decisions in matters such as these, a point that is conceded by at least 5 of the examined texts. However, students would need much more than 3 or 4 readings to make any kind of "informed" judgment. As for L2 student-writers, given that they have not necessarily been socialized in this culture, they may not perceive alleged "problems" as problems at all, or even as matters of particular interest. We have argued elsewhere (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a) that, for example, a topic such as gun control may not be seen as a "problem" by individuals from other cultures in which guns are prohibited entirely, and that individuals from other cultures may not understand the implied constitutional right to bear arms that, among other issues, underlies the gun control debate in the United States

Channel #3. Developing the ability to look for hidden assumptions and fallacies in everyday arguments

This point integrates parts of point one (the use of informal logic tools) and point two (namely everyday arguments) to address the importance of looking for logical fallacies and hidden assumptions. All of the textbooks stress the ability to discern logical flaws in one's own and others' argumentation process as crucial to the development of critical reading/writing skills. *The Informed Argument* (1989), for instance, lists fourteen common fallacies of which the *ad hominem* argument, *ad misericordiam* argument, *ad populum* argument, slippery slope, and straw man are a few (p. 29-35). The following excerpts illustrate the texts explanation of two of these terms:

> **Slippery slope** According to this fallacy, one step will inevitably lead to an undesirable second step. An example would be claiming that legalized abortion will lead to euthanasia or that censoring pornography will lead to the end of the freedom of the press. Although it is important to consider the probable effects of any step that is being debated, it is fallacious to claim that men and women will necessarily tumble downhill as a result of any one step. There is always the possibility that we'll be able to keep our feet on the ground even though we've moved them from where they used to be (p.34).

> ***Ad Misericordiam* Argument** An *ad misericordiam* argument is an appeal to pity. . . . When the appeal to pity stands alone, even in charitable appeals where its use is fundamental, the result is often questionable. On my way to

> work this semester, I have been driving past a large billboard advertising for the American Red Cross. It features a closeup photograph of a distraught (but nevertheless good-looking) man, beneath which in large letters runs the caption: PLEASE MY LITTLE GIRL NEEDS BLOOD. Although I already believe in the importance of donating blood, and I also believe it is important for the Red Cross to encourage people to donate it, I find myself questioning the implications of this ad. Can we donate blood, and ask that it be reserved for the exclusive use of little girls? Is the life of a little girl more valuable than the life of a little boy? Are the lives of children more valuable than the lives of adults? Of course, few people would donate blood unless they sympathized with those who need transfusions, and it may be unrealistic to expect logic in advertising. But consider how weak an argument becomes when the appeal to pity has little to do with the issue in question. Someone who has seldom attended class and failed all his [sic] examinations, but then tries to argue "I deserve to pass this class because I've had a lot of problems at home" is making a fallacious appeal to pity because the "argument" asks his instructor to overlook relevant evidence and make a decision favorable to the arguer because the instructor has been moved to feel sorry for him. You should be skeptical of any appeal to pity that is irrelevant to the conclusion or that seems designed to distract attention from other factors which you should be considering (p. 30-31).

The Informed Argument partially justifies its list of various kinds of fallacies on the grounds that some writers and speakers deliberately use them for "winning" an argument and that it is important to be alert for these in others' arguments. Fine. The question we'd like to raise is this: What purpose does a list like the above or an exercise in fallacy hunting serve in creating sound arguments? Even if students learn to discover fallacies in an argument, they are still not going to be able to infer that the opposing side has "won" or is preferable. At best all one can infer is that *this* specific argument is fallacious. It is still not enough basis on which to be able to "take a stand" on an "everyday argument."

The suggested activity of seeking unstated assumptions is equally problematic in the textbooks. *CIEQ*, for example, provides the following example of unstated assumptions in an argument on abortion:

> 1. Ours is a pluralistic society, in which we believe that the religious beliefs of one group should not be imposed on others.
> 2. Personal privacy is a right, and a woman's body is hers, not to be violated bylaws that tell her she cannot do certain things to her body. But these and other arguments assume that a fetus is not—or not yet—a person, and therefore is not entitled to protection against assaults. Virtually all of us assume that it is wrong to kill a human being. Granted, we may find instances in which we believe it is acceptable to take a human life, such as self-defense against a would-be murderer, but even here we find a shared assumption, that persons are ordinarily entitled not to be killed.
>
> The argument about abortion, then, usually depends on opposed assump-

> tions. For one group, the fetus is a human being and a potential person—and this potentiality is decisive. But for the other group it is not. Persons arguing one side or the other of the abortion issue ought to be aware that opponents may not share their assumptions (1993, p. 35).

On the face of it, the above example seems straightforward enough. Although *CIEQ*'s assumptions about a fetus not being entitled to protection against assaults and of all living persons being entitled to life are viable assumptions, they constitute only one set of assumptions. As McPeck (1990) contends there is no method of determining what other assumptions the author might be making partly because there is a potentially indeterminate number of assumptions underlying any given premise, and that each of these possible assumptions may have an indeterminate number of assumptions underlying them. The different kinds of assumptions that we have seen from Scriven (1980) and Walton (1993) for avoiding a "strawman" and "making minimal assumptions" seem designed to create new assumptions about the argument, rather than uncovering "unexamined beliefs" or hidden assumptions. The analyst—in the present case the student-writer—seems to be engaged in such a process; students learn to infer assumptions even though they may not necessarily be implied by the argument. As McPeck warns us: This can be a "very dangerous business indeed, not only because it can easily strap someone with an assumption that they were not in fact making, but also because it threatens to strip argument analysis of its objective integrity by encouraging subjective interpretations" (1990, p. 8).

DISCUSSION

An assumption in the CT practice, and one that has been lurking beneath our discussion so far, concerns the relatively unproblematic way in which critical thinking skills are generally seen to be useful and transferable across knowledge domains (Ennis, 1985; Glaser, 1984). Knowledge-transfer, as research shows us, is a debated notion: On the one hand, researchers like Ennis (1981; 1984), Glaser (1984), and Rubenstein and Firstenberg (1987) maintain that higher-order abilities such as problem-solving and deductive competence can be taught through informal logic tools that will enable learners to reason successfully. This group of scholars, who believe that domain-specific knowledge (more in keeping with our discipline-oriented stand) is not conducive to "good thinking" (Nickerson, 1987), cite research in cognitive science, developmental psychology and human intelligence to support their stand. In fact, Glaser (1984) believes that:

> A student does not tend "naturally" to develop a general disposition to consider thoughtfully the subjects and problems that come within the range of his or her experience; nor is he or she likely to acquire knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning and skill in applying these methods simply as a result of having studied this subject or that. There is little evidence

> that students acquire skill in critical thinking as a necessary by-product of the study of [any] given subject (p.27).

On the other hand, there are scholars like Butterfield and Nelson (1991), McPeck (1990), and Evans (1982) who lean toward the other side in their skepticism about a general system of logical competence. They prefer to see thought-processes as situated and highly content- and context-dependent. Evans has this to say:

> We are forced to the conclusion that people manifest little ability for general deductive reasoning in these experiments. Very little behavior can be attributed to an *a priori* system that is independent of the particular task content and structure. This does not mean that people cannot reason correctly in contexts where they have no relevant and appropriate experience—indeed some evidence suggests that they can. It does mean, however, that adults' reasoning ability is far more concrete and context-dependent than has been generally believed (1982, p. 254).

Butterfield and Nelson's views (1991) also problematize the idea that reasoning skills can cut across knowledge domains. They, along with several other researchers (Bassok & Holyoak, 1989; Cooper & Sweller, 1987; Gick & Hollyoak, 1983; Novick, 1988; Singley & Anderson, 1989), maintain that the general consensus on the transfer of instruction is that

> the majority of investigations have not found flexible use of appropriate variants of taught knowledge and strategies in diverse contexts and for diverse purposes" (Butterfield & Nelson, 1989, p. 69).

While some level of transferability might be possible (Norris, 1985) across some related knowledge domains—whether it is at a macro-level of critical thinking (Greenfield, 1987; Stice, 1987; Woods, 1987) or at a micro-level of specific information processing (Sternberg, 1985, 1987)—the point we are trying to underscore is this: The transfer and general applicability of critical thinking/reasoning skills is at best a debatable one. Thus, for so many composition textbooks—indeed composition programs, syllabi, and other pedagogical tools—to be based on such grounds is cause for serious reconsideration.

Our own stand on the knowledge-transfer issue, especially regarding CT and L2 learners, leans more toward the view that learning—including the teaching of writing—is situated and context/discipline-dependent. We have argued elsewhere (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a,b) and we would like to stress again in this paper that situating advanced writing courses in specific academic disciplines holds greater promise because specific academic disciplines represent ways of organizing information that are not only freer of cultural constraints (certainly not entirely free of them), but that they also contain the means for event/problem-analyzing that are more controlled by the paradigms of the discipline and consequently may

be somewhat independent of the means, inherent in English or in the students' first languages, for organizing events. Because each discipline constitutes its own "culture" and world-view— inasmuch as each has its own conventions and rules regarding what constitutes effective and appropriate writing for that discipline—each one also determines to a large extent what constitute "problems" and appropriate solutions to those problems as well. Based on 15 years of intensive research across several grade levels and disciplines, Freedman (1995) surmises that "each class seemed to produce its own genre—in the light of traditional definitions relating to textual regularities. For the most part, these pieces were arguments, in which a thesis was stated and supported (sometimes with digression, but significantly with different degrees of tolerance for digression by discipline...)" (p. 133). Furthermore, she found that writing in the disciplines is more supported and facilitated than writing for one composition class. "In Bakhtin's (1986) terms, the students respond dialogically to what was experienced in the class, ventriloquating the social languages therein heard and read, as they developed their own answers to the questions set in the assignment by the teacher" (pp. 133-34). Students are more likely to develop a rhetorical awareness, analyze a complex rhetorical situation before deciding on the combination of writing strategies that would best present their purposes if they were doing so within viable disciplinary contexts (Hill & Resnick, 1995). As we have discussed elsewhere, a (written) text is acceptable within a discourse community only insofar as it adheres to that discipline's world view (Ramanathan & Kaplan 1996a), and the discipline partially determines, who is "qualified" to speak and write, ". . . what may be spoken, and how it is to be said. . ." [as well as] ". . .what is reasonable and what foolish, and what is meant and what not" (Leitch, 1983, p. 145). In other words, the discipline, by establishing its boundaries and regularities, highlights the importance of certain rhetorical strategies, genres, styles over others, thus serving to constrain and contextualize discourse.

In conclusion then, what we are suggesting is that 4-year universities adopt a writing-across-the-curriculum type of model where faculty across disciplines would be responsible for teaching content through writing (Larson, 1994; Young, 1991; 1994). Larson (1994) specifies at least the following advantages of adopting such an approach. First, although teachers may be inexperienced in the teaching of writing, they are "in most cases warmly interested in and familiar with their subject areas, able to guide students in gathering and interpreting data for discussion...able to encourage mastery of the kinds of thinking and reasoning that are honored in their particular field..." (p. 122) in their writing; Second, students gain experience and practice thinking about issues relevant to the field; Third, students gain a sense of the "value of writing as a means of practicing the discipline; and Fourth, students are more likely to get more practice at writing than they would in a composition course after which they sigh with relief "at not having to 'worry' any more about writing" (122-23). Like Young (1994) we believe that adopting such a model would require major structural, university-wide changes,

ones that would bring about change in "shared beliefs, attitudes and social patterns that shape our lives in pervasive and unsuspected ways" (p. 137). Not only would such an approach provide students with contexts with more accessible diameters, it would also mitigate some of the problems currently faced by L2 student-writers when confronted with teaching materials (e.g., the textbooks) primarily written for L1 audiences.

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NOTE

1. Freire (1984) believes that human beings "can detach themselves from the world" (p. 16); that when they enter into social reality from this detached perspective, the 'true interrelations' they will discover will embody injustices which the people will then be able to diagnose and correct, an argument that Bizzell (1992) found very congenial in her early work on academic thinking and teaching methods that she believed would foster critical consciousness.

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APPENDIX: SELECTED TOPICS FROM CURRENT L1 FRESHMAN COMPOSITION TEXTBOOKS

1. Barnet, B. & Bedau, H. (1993) (3rd ed.) *Current issues and enduring questions: a guide to critical thinking and argument.* Boston: Bedford Books.

Bilingual education	
Testing for drugs	Gun control
Gun control	Capital punishment
Capital punishment	Nuclear armaments
Nuclear armaments	Free speech
Free speech	Right to life

2. Bradbury, N. & Quinn, A. (1994). (2nd ed.). *Audiences and intentions.* New York: Macmillan.

Education	Freedom of expression
Women's rights	Our relationship to our natural environment
Prejudice	Sex, gender and family
Freedom of expression	Politics

3. Colombo, G., Cullen, R., & Lisle, B. (1992). *Rereading America: cultural contexts for critical thinking and writing.* Boston: Bedford Books.

Money and Success	Education and empowerment
Nature and technology	Mass media
Melting pot	Democracy
Family/home	

4. George, D. & Trimbur, J. (1992). *Reading culture: Contexts for critical reading and writing.* New York: Harper Collins.

Generations	Style
Television culture	Public space
History	Images

5. Greenberg, R. & Comprone, J. (1994). *Contexts and communities.* New York: Macmillan.

Women in the corporate work place	TV and culture
	Consumerism
Censorship	

6. Kirszner, L. & Mandell, S. (1992). *Patterns for college writing: rhetorical reader and guide.* New York: St. Martins.

History and politics	Ethics, justice and religion
Language and literature	Education, business and work

7. Lunsford, A. & Ruskiewicz, J. (1994). *The presence of others: Readings for critical thinking and writing*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Gender	Views about minority voices
Sexuality	

8. Miller, R. (1989). (2nd ed.). *The informed argument*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

Drug testing	Censorship
Gun control	Animal experimentation
Capital punishment	Competition

9. Rottenberg, A. (1994). *Elements of argument*. Boston: Bedford Books

Abortion	Euthanasia
Animal rights	Freedom of speech
Children's right	Gay and lesbian rights
Endangered species	Multicultural studies
Sex education	

10. Seyler, D. (1991). (3rd ed.). *Read, reason, write*. New York: McGraw.

Television	Sexism
Affirmative action	Pornography
Right to bear arms	Censorship
Capital punishment	

11. Rye, M. (1994). *Making cultural connections: Readings for critical analysis*. Boston: Bedford Books.

Functions of the family	Environment of prejudice
Defining women's lives	Cultures in contact
Working in the world	

12. Ramage, J. & Bean, J. (1995). (3rd ed). *Writing arguments*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Guns and public safety	Global warming
Mercy killing	Single parenthood
Civil disobedience	Legalizing drugs
Sexual harassment	

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Editor **John Edwards**

The *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development* (JMMD) has generally interpreted its mandate in a broad fashion - virtually all topics treating language and cultures in contact are of interest. Within this broad remit, however, special emphasis has always been given to sociolinguistic issues. Thus, in the last complete volume alone, we have published papers on creole in Caribbean schools, French immersion, Singaporean literature in English, census issues in India and the South Pacific, language attrition in Australia, minority languages in France, and language shift among Indo-Fijians in New Zealand - as well as more theoretical pieces on language maintenance, shift, planning and vitality.

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