



# Mind, Culture, and Activity

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## INTRODUCTION

David Russell & Charles Bazerman

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## INTRODUCTION

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We express our gratitude to David Russell and Charles Bazerman for preparing this special issue. Writing has long held fascination for cultural–historical activity theorists. Until recently, however, the study of high-level literacy among adults in relation to their activities has received little attention. The articles that follow provide evidence that the study of writing-in-activity is well on its way.

The Editors

### GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

As David Russell recounts in the review article that leads off this special issue of *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, the teaching of writing at the university in recent years has spurred a vigorous investigation of the writing practices that pervade the academy, the professions, and all the institutions of modern society, which depend on the technology of writing. This investigation is distinctive from literary approaches to written texts in that it has turned from primary attention to the language of the text (an interest shared with linguistics) or even the creative processes of the authors (an interest shared with cognitive psychology) to the cultural–historical activities that the texts mediate. Writers, readers, and texts are seen as part of complex social discursive systems, and the activity of text and author is understood in relation to multidimensional genres, extending in time and space through the mediation of material inscriptions. The microlevel interactions of people with texts are provisionally stabilized through multidimensional genres, which give shape to macrolevel activities and which are in turn made and remade by each new act of writing and reading.

As the intellectual, professional, and cultural forms of work mediated by writing are often counted among the most developed of human accomplishments—accomplishments that create and transform the social sphere in which we grow up and live—the study of writing within complex systems of interaction then becomes a site for the study of higher cognitive functions, in the Vygotskian tradition. The study of the organized, situated practices of writing in which people come to participate—from the grandest treatises of science and literature to the humblest of bureaucratic forms—can tell us much about the enactment of power and influence in the modern world as well as about the formation of the collective and individual minds that inhabit this modern world. We hope the articles in this special issue make evident how useful the study of writing can be for developing activity theory.

David Russell and Charles Bazerman