Continuing a Dialogue

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I have had the good fortune in recent years to host a number of visiting scholars from the People's Republic of China at the University of California Santa Barbara. They have represented different regions (including Kunmin, Shenyang, Shanghai, Beijing, and Langzhou) and different sorts of universities (including medical, geosciences, marine sciences, and languages. Through them I have begun to know the active and expanding world of foreign language education in China, and particularly the growing interest in professional and academic English. They have also given me glimpses of the rapid expansion of higher education in China and the exciting new developments in understanding first language writing now occurring in China, and I have encouraged them to share that knowledge with western audiences. To achieve that purpose, Professor Chen Huijun of China University of Geosciences in Beijing is publishing an essay on "Modern Writingology in China" in a volume *Traditions of Writing Research* (Bazerman et al, forthcoming) coming from the conference on Writing Research Across Borders in 2008 <http://educaton.ucsb.edu/wrconf08> . At the same time the visiting scholars have shown interest in the approach to writing and the teaching of writing developed by myself and colleagues in North America, and they have been generous in offering opportunities to explain our approach in this journal and elsewhere.

As a number of my pedagogic articles will soon be translated into Chinese in a volume being prepared by Professor Chen, I would like to give an overview here of some the ideas, theories, and research that lie behind the approach to the teaching of writing presented in that work. Many of the essays I mention are available at my website <http://education.ucsb.edu/bazerman> or at the Writing Across the Curriculum Clearinghouse <http://wac.colostate.edu/books> . A good place to start is with the widely-known concept of genre. The concept of genre is of course almost as old as writing, as soon as people noticed writing needed to take different forms for different situations and tasks. The concept more recently has been central to contemporary second language teaching and applied linguistics, particularly in two closely related versions coming from Systemic Functional Linguistics (as developed by M.A.K. Halliday and his followers) and from English for Specific Purposes (as developed by John Swales and his followers). I believe it is through the concept of genre that a number of the visiting scholars from China and elsewhere have developed a curiosity about my approach, and therefore have spent time at my university.

The approach to genre I share with a number of colleagues, however, differs in significant ways from the SFL and ESP approaches and those differences account for a difference in pedagogy and research (see Bazerman 1998). Both the SFL and ESP approaches, as one would expect from functional linguistically oriented approaches identify linguistic regularities of texts, usually at the organizational level or the lexical and semantic levels and associate those features with meaning functions accomplishing

the text's communicative intent. The pedagogic goal of these applied linguistics approaches is for students to be able to produce texts of an appropriate form that would be evaluated as idiomatically correct and functionally accurate by knowledgeable readers. Thus much of the pedagogy is directed to recognizing the features accurately, gaining facility with those features and being able to produce them in functionally appropriate situations. There is much to recommend these two approaches, particularly when one is working with adult second language writers who are fully articulate writers in their mother tongue. Such people would know what they want to say, are aware of the arguments they need to make, the evidence at hand, and the social organization of their communicative situations. Their primary concern is to identify and deploy the appropriate linguistic resources in the second language so as to be able to put those thoughts into acceptable form in the new language.

I and my colleagues adopt what is sometimes called the North American genre theory (Hyon, 1996) or an activity theory approach to genre (Russell 1997a). It arises out of first language writing education and addresses the development of articulate writers through helping them understand communicative situations, articulate their goals and meanings that would speak to the situation, and then bring those intentions and meanings to their most effective form appropriate to the situation. From this approach genre becomes a situationally appropriate vehicle for the framing and assertion of meanings and social actions, intelligible to the intended audience. Genre is located where individual intent and agency meets socially recognizable forms of action (Miller,1984). The observable regularities of texts, what we might call the features of the genre, are simply the expected elements of the action that help writers shape their message in ways that have been historically effective (and thus have a functional dimension). These historically emerged expected formal elements are responsive to the action demands of repeated situations and help the readers identify what kind of message they are receiving as well as expectations and criteria by which they can make sense of and evaluate the text (Bazerman, 1994). Thus genre instead of being fundamentally a textual category, inherent in the form of the text, is a psycho-social recognition category, socially communicated and shared but individually used to focus perception and action (Bazerman, 2004).

Genre helps align writer and reader through the means of familiar formal textual elements. These formal features can change through time, following the changing activities and relationships being mediated by the texts as well as the changing perceptions and intentions of readers and writers. Each written text is different based on the local circumstances and relevant meanings, but is also responsive to the intentions, motivations, and creative action of each author. In attempting to make the text maximally effective for the situation the writer may seek innovation by folding together the force of multiple genres, by heightening attention through surprise, by deepening analysis by adding another level of information or discussion beyond the expected, and so on. And even the writer seeks to stick closely to prior models, the text must be adapted to local conditions and contain the locally relevant information, for otherwise he or she could simply photocopy the prior text. Thus each writer makes the genre new each time he or she writes a text, no matter how conventional and generic the text seems. Similarly each reading is fresh, dependent on the needs, perceptions, position, and thought of the reader.

Change comes about by the innovation, local adaptation, hybridization, and other modifications made by each reader and writer in each local instance of use.

There are, of course, limits or constraints to the creativity of reader and writer if they are responsible toward creating mutually intelligible meaning. Writers have an incentive to make their innovations intelligible to readers by using existing and anticipatable understandings associated with the genres and that would likely be invoked by the readers; similarly readers motivated by mutual understanding are attentive to the words of the text and the communally shared expectations of the genres signaled by the text. constrained only by what is intelligible to the readers, for if the readers do not find appropriate meaning in the innovative texts, the innovation will wither (Bazerman, 1999b, Bazerman & Prior, 2005).

From this perspective what a writer needs to know extends far beyond the typical textual features expected of the genre at each moment, and even more than understanding the function of each of those features in realizing meaning in the text. For a start the writer needs to understand who the readers are, the kinds of situations and activities within which they are likely to read the text and the kinds of frames and expectations they are likely to apply to the reading. The writer needs to understand the larger social interactions, coordinations and relations being mediated by the text, for only that information will allow the writer to make choices about the genre and its modification, how each aspect a can be realized to speak to the task at hand (Bazerman, 2001a, 2001e).

And to understand the task at hand to be mediated by the text the writer needs to be able to articulate goals within an organized social activity situation and needs to understand how various choices of form can help realize those goals (Bazerman, 1994, 1997). The broader understanding the writer has of alternative goals and alternative formal choices and the criteria to measure these by, the wider repertoire the writer can draw on to make creative choices and strengthen texts, with deeper consideration of the consequences of each choice. The writer needs to see what degrees of freedom each situation and set of readers might allow and what are the limits and constraints must be respected (Bazerman 1992, 2001b). Within these complex social understandings of the role of genre and related choices, knowledge of linguistic form remains important, because language and related inscriptions are the material of which the texts are necessarily composed, but linguistic knowledge in itself is not sufficient to make an effective writer. Becoming an effective writer requires long path of learning starting with perhaps most typified and stable—where meaning and information to be added is limited and highly stylized (name in a blank), but moving into situations allowing wider degrees of freedom and innovation with greater possibilities of novel meaning creation. (Bazerman, forthcoming b)

This perspective has many pedagogic implications. The first is that language is generally taught best in use, as part of meaningful contexts and consequential application. The focus should remain on the actual production of texts that carry out recognizable and motivating communicative within situations that have value for the students' lives. Students need to want to produce words to engage in the hard work of problem solving, developing and articulating thoughts and messages, finding the best formulations, and

improving through purposeful processes and revision. the technicalities of language are best seen as facilitative of improved communication rather than as ends in themselves or just means to avoid social stigma concerning error,. Explicit teaching of the technicalities of language (with its domains of morphology, grammar, syntax, lexis and general principles of higher level organization) is best carried out in contexts of use. In addition to being more motivating for students, such instruction in the context of use raises important questions of appropriateness and effectiveness of choice, giving salience to the difference of linguistic forms and building the kinds of evaluative criteria necessary for students to see the value of and carry out linguistic precision. This does not rule out explicit instruction of linguistic elements, but only that such explicit instruction have an immediate relevancy to writing tasks the students are engaged in or will soon be engaged in, so that students will see the concrete reward of linguistic attentiveness, aligned with writing across the curriculum (see online reference volume Bazerman et al 2005)

A second implication is that students should be engaged in many different writing tasks, audiences, situations, and goals. This variety of writing experiences not only expands the students' repertoire of forms, expressions, text-types and vocabulary. it increases their ability to compare writing tasks and situations and see the particular character of each as well as what can be appropriately transferred from one to another. If students are exposed t only one or a few repeated tasks totally embedded within the frame of classroom skills practice and testing, students wind up with a very limited view of writing leading them to approach other writing tasks inappropriately. They may see the purpose of writing as to avoid error and correction, always following the organizational and content model of standard school essays. This would not support positive to desire to engage in other writing situations nor will it support success in meeting the goals of those new writing situations.

A third implication is that students need to be introduced to the vocabulary and reasoning that helps them assess writing situations and goals as well as the formal elements of text. And again as with formal elements these need to be introduced, discussed and practiced in contexts is meaningful contexts of use. Some of the relevant concepts are recognizably rhetorical, such as audience, timing, situation, situation relevant topics and arguments, Some of them are concepts of social action and organization, to understand where texts are likely to flow within socially structured settings, the uses that will be made of, the socially structured sets of roles that will define how people engage with texts, evaluate them and use them, the values likely to be at play in the social organization, the sequences of texts, and so on. Then, since in most literate situations, the surrounding texts form much of the resources as well as the issues and problems to be addressed, there is some need for understanding intertextuality—both as how one refers to and cites other texts, but more deeply about how the current writing is situated with respect to prior texts. Similarly since much persuasion, engagement and cooperation is based on evidence, information and knowledge, writers benefit from knowing something about how evidence and data is gathered, gets represented, and is reasoned about, as well as how existing knowledge from other sources may be best used. Of course all of these are deep issues that one could explore at great depth, and one must not overwhelm students with considerations beyond which they are ready to use. So instruction needs to

calibrate the aspect and depth of such issues in relation to the writing task at hand and students' knowledge. Twelve year old students gathering facts for a classroom report on the geology of their region may not need in depth discussions of epistemology, the economics of mineral resource information gathering, and the relation of research articles to more popular publications, but they will need to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources. Nor do they understand the many audiences interested in the information, but they do need to understand the demands and structure of the classroom, though they may have had so much experience with this they may know this implicitly. if however, they were asked to prepare this report for a local community magazine helping people understand the economic potential of their region, they would ave to engage more of these issues. And years later, if they were to complete their degrees and enter into a government economic ministry, for their writing to be effective, they would have to engage all these issues and more in great depth.

A fourth implication comes from seeing writing as a complex accomplishment built over time rather than a standard form which can be filled with appropriate linguistic elements. It has been commonplace to consider writing as a process, even at ust the basic textual production level, starting with planning and going through various stages of drafting, revision, correction, editing, and final preparation of clean copies. Making students aware of this process has helped students be more realistic about their work and also focus their attention at different moments to different aspects of the task. It encourages sufficient planning, allows for improvement, keeps students from worrying about small details of correctness when they are first gathering their ideas, but then ensures there will be sufficient attention towards the end on improving sentences and cleaning up spelling, grammar, and transcription errors. But the process suggested by the activity theory approach is even more extensive, to include one's engagement with the situation which may eventually call for writing, the processes of recognizing the set of relations and activities, the sequences of intertext that the new piece of writing will add to, the framing of goals, enquiring into issues and solving problems. thoughtfully gathering relevant information and analyzing it, the social collaborative processes that may enter into the planning and production of texts, and the processes of uptake by which they text has consequences for the future actions of oneself and others. The nature of the process is again related to the nature of the task and the knowledge and experience the writer brings to the situation, so instruction needs to be well calibrated for both. seven year old children writing to their classmates about their pet may need only a few minutes of planning to come up with some relevant statements, but they may need much work on transcription and correction. But the same children collaborating on a project presenting the different kinds of public servants in their community would need to do much planning and information gathering, facilitated by the teacher over several days. Of course a doctoral student planning a dissertation, reading the necessary background, carrying out the research, and writing a three-hundred page document has a more complex process to go through. In each case, however, having the teacher or advisor guiding the process and helping the student understand the steps he or she is engaged in will underline the importance of and focus the work to be done at each stage, resulting in a more effective final result.

A fifth implication is on the role and nature of evaluation, both during the process of writing and in considering the final text. Rather than evaluating student work in terms of how closely it approximates an abstract formal ideal, it is best evaluated on how well it accomplishes the task within the situation. This criterion of task accomplishment is useful not just in assigning a grade at the end but in helping make decisions throughout the process. It is only a classroom or similar situations that grades are assigned; usually in the work and public world writing is evaluated by whether it completes the desired task: Does the written proposal get accepted by a client or a funding agency? Does the personal letter build closer bonds of friendship? Does the medical pamphlet get accurate healthcare information to the patient in a form he or she will use? Further, in writing evaluation occurs constantly as the writer decides what to include in a text, how it should be organized, what words to use, and a thousand other decisions. A teacher's commentary should help the student improve the text this time or the next time he or she writes a similar text. Evaluation should support making better choices, Further there is no one right way to write a task. There are many right choices, though in the end some may be more effective than another. Ultimately if we help students develop their own criteria for effective writing for the tasks they need to address, then they will be able to apply these criteria in the course of writing and in providing feedback to their peers, removing the teacher as the sole authority and chief anticipated reader. Ultimately writing should be directed towards people who need to be communicated with in actual situations, and not just toward a test examiner in a school setting.

The sixth implication is that writing is so complex, tied to so many forms of understanding, practices, habits, fluencies embedded in reflective understanding and choice making, operating on so many levels of text, self presentation, activity, audience relations, persuasion and cooperation, social settings and roles, communicative flows, information and knowledge, intertextual relations that it takes a lifetime to learn. To reach advanced proficiencies students need to start engaging with writing from the earliest ages and work continuously on ever more challenging writing tasks with expanding social and knowledge and activity realms. So writing must be part of every level and subject matter with support offered for relevant explicit instruction in aspects most at play at each level as meets new challenges, but also mentoring, coaching, and opportunities for collaborative response and feedback from peers. Writing development continues even after school as one engages with new work and community roles and takes on greater responsibilities in the world, so it is also worth considering the kinds of mentoring relationships, structured experiences, and other on-the-job supports offered for job-relevant learning. Each situation brings new challenges, problems, and writing tasks to master.

Given the complexity of writing and the length of time necessary to master its many dimensions we need to be cautious about finding fault with students' skills at the moment or their prior education, even as we show them new skills or demand more from them. At each level of schooling we demand new challenges, so it isn't surprising that students may not fully succeed in what we ask, even though they were effective writers at prior levels of schooling. Particularly when students move into the specialized communicative worlds of disciplines and professions, writing in new genres with changed communities,

relations, intertexts, knowledge, tasks role, and so on, writing takes on new dimensions. Students may struggle with some aspect of the writing task they can barely identify and which noone has provided guidance in, but which unbalances all the familiar skills they already know.   Under the strain of the new tasks students may even forget already mastered skills as all their attention goes to solving novel aspects of their tasks. Writing is a complex performance juggling many skills. If just one of the pieces is awkward or disruptive the whole performance can collapse. Of course there are students who do not put much effort into tasks, or never learned what school has offered, and we need to hold them accountable for that inattention; they may have also received inadequate prior training which we need to help make up for. But we do need to understand the reasons for weak writing in some specific depth before jumping to the easy conclusion that the student or school is at fault   Once we accurately diagnose the challenging aspects of the task we can provide guidance, support and focused practice to resolve the problems.

This orientation to classroom principles and practices has developed in conjunction with an empirical research program to investigate the genres of writing actually used within organized social setting as forms of consequential social action, in particular focus on those genres related to the creation and distribution of knowledge in academic and professional settings (see Bazerman 2006b for another overview). As these forms, practices and social systems have emerged and evolved over long histories, much of my research has been historical, examining the formation of specialized domains of communication, the genres that realize that communicate, and the social activity systems within which those genres circulate and carry out work. In Shaping Written Knowledge and related essays (particularly 1991, 1993), I examine how the article reporting scientific experiments emerged in conjunction with the modern system of science, scientific publication, and social organization. In a later book, *The Languages of Edison's Light*, I examined the multiple literate systems that Edison had to engage with to develop electric light and power, including journalism, financial markets, laboratory communications, governmental and legal systems surrounding patents, corporate communication, advertising, as well as scientific and technical publication (Bazerman, 1999a). Each of these had their genres and forms of representation as well as their activities and social systems in which the texts of Edison and his associates had to be effective. In each Edison was able to create presence, meaning, and value for his emerging inventions and products.

In other studies I have looked at the role of letters as a source for other genres (Bazerman 2000), the emergence of environmental information within public, governmental, and scientific spheres (Bazerman 2001c, Bazerman, Little & Chavkin 2003, Bazerman & de los Santos 2005), the relation of writing to forms of knowledge in various cultures (Bazerman & Rogers, 2008 a, b), intertextuality in science (Bazerman 1991, 1993), and the impact of new technologies on politics and knowledge (Bazerman 2001d, 2002, forthcoming a, Bazerman et al 2008. To facilitate others doing similar work, I have developed several methodological essays (Bazerman 2006a, 2008b and a volume on text analysis including chapters on intertextuality and genre within activity systems (Bazerman & Prior, 2004).

Colleagues have done more contemporary studies of writing within significant activity systems, such as Smart's (2008) studies of writing at the Bank of Canada, Van Nostrand's (1997) study of contracting of government research, Dias et al's (1999) studies of university to workplace transitions (See also Dias & Pare, 2000), (2008) studies of psychiatric case reports, and many essays collected in Bazerman & Paradis, 1991 and Bazerman & Russell, 1997. Russell (1997b) provides a review of related studies as do many chapters in the *Handbook of Research on Writing* (Bazerman, 2008a) and the *Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum* (Bazerman et al, 2005).

I look forward to the opportunity to visit China to meet old friends and new colleagues. I look forward to the opportunity to share perspectives and learn more about the interesting new lines of writing theory, research, and pedagogy developing in China as part of the great expansion of higher education in the country. Our common futures depend on communication and knowledge at the highest level, to make prosperous invention, intelligent choices, and cooperation possible. Higher education writing, focused on writing in the disciplines and professions, is precisely where students learn to become thoughtful, articulate and knowledgeable communicators. I feel honored to be invited to enter into dialogue with Chinese writing educators.

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