

PART I

**THEORIES AND MODELS
OF WRITING**



CHAPTER 1

What Do Sociocultural Studies of Writing Tell Us about Learning to Write?

Charles Bazerman

Writing is a social technology designed to communicate among people. It is learned and produced in social circumstances, establishes social relationships, changes the writer's social presence, creates shared meanings, and accomplishes social action. Writing partakes of and contributes to the social circumstances in which it arises and bears the characteristics of the cultures it participates in and the histories it carries forward. The social value of writing motivates the difficult learning of the material and symbolic technologies of writing and the strenuous psychological effort of writing. Social, cultural, and historical approaches to writing have informed many studies and volumes (see, e.g., Castelló & Donahue, 2012; Starke-Meyerring, Paré, Artemeva, Horne, & Yousoubova, 2011) and have been substantially reported in reference books (e.g., Bazerman, 2008) and review chapters (e.g., Russell, 1997b). Rather than replicating these surveys, this chapter synthesizes some of the general principles that sociocultural inquiries have added to our understanding of writing, supported by a few citations of representative studies. Further, rather than drawing a broad picture of writing in societies and history, and the impact of writing on social institutions and practices (see Goody, 1986; Bazerman, 2006), this synthe-

sis focuses on the kinds of issues about writing that have been of interest to educational psychologists—such as the challenges writers face and the development of individuals as writers.

Why and When People Write

- *Writers write to participate in social situations.* Writers write for situations, to accomplish things and make statements within situations. Numerous ethnographic studies of writers inside and outside of school show people planning and composing within specific situations, based on personal estimations of situations and one's roles and interests in those situations, whether young children explaining photographs through captions (Castedo & Ferreiro, 2010), citizens engaged in civic activities (Barton, 1998), or scientists attempting to gain attention to their findings and credibility among various audiences (Bazerman, 1988; Knorr-Cetina, 1979).

To determine what to write, what material to include, and the most effective way of representing it, writers often consciously gather information about the situation and resources appropriate to the situation. Selzer (1983), in studying the writing processes

of a working engineer, observed that his subject spent half his time writing, and of that 80% was devoted to planning, consulting colleagues, and gathering and selecting information. This predominance of planning with an eye to understanding the situation is typical of skilled writers, and Selzer's findings have been often replicated (e.g., Huettman, 1996; Dauterman, 1993; Cross, 2001). Further, interaction with audiences can help writers develop their presentations. Blakeslee finds that the scientist she studied, when unsuccessful in communicating findings with scientists in a different specialty, set about creating a series of interactions to learn more about the intended audience, even to the point of sending a post-doc to work in a laboratory in the target specialty (Blakeslee, 2000). In all these cases, writing is a means of continued participation in the forum; maintaining or improving one's presence requires gathering information, planning, and adjusting writing to meet the needs and opportunities of the situation.

- *Writing fits into temporally changing circumstances.* For writing to be attended to, it must come at the right time (see Miller, 1992) within contingent circumstances, and then attention usually fades. In sciences, citation studies give some indication of this pattern, with even highly cited articles taking time to be noticed, and then have a half-life as citations fade away (Price, 1963). It is rare that any text (such as Darwin's *Origin of Species*) stays in people's attention across decades. Although academic citations are easier to document, we can see the same phenomenon in newspapers read the next day (or with Internet publication in the initial hours and minutes) and then fading rapidly, ultimately to be read only by the occasional historian. Fiction and poetry, reports and forms filed with governments and bureaucracies, school and medical records, and even letters to friends and families have their own temporalities of attention (Bazerman, 2014b).

- *Writing takes place in the context of prior texts.* Writing involves relations to other texts to which they may refer explicitly or implicitly. Although academic disciplines and sciences foreground citation and the explicit mention of prior texts (Bazerman, 1991, 2004), many other domains

have well-developed procedures for referring to important texts (Devitt, 1991) or rely directly on foundational texts (McCarthy, 1991). Even journalism relies on readers' implicit knowledge of previous days' stories and regularly refers to government reports, speeches, and other documents from which the news is formed, collected, confirmed, or authenticated. Thus, writers must learn to select prior texts to draw on, represent them appropriately, and apply them to the purposes of the new text (Rinck & Boch, 2012; Nelson, 2001).

- *Technologies influence the situation, form, and production of texts.* Technologies of text production and distribution change the multiple participation and distribution of work in the production of documents, the possibility and convenience of graphic design and multimedia elements, the form and materiality of the document, the temporality of the work, the social circulation of documents, and the social situation of the documents—whether the technologies are older print or newer digital. Electronic tools and social media have now made possible more complex collaborations (e.g., McCarthy, Grabill, Hart-Davidson, & McLeod, 2011; Fernheimer, Litterio, & Hendler, 2011) and the incorporation of visual, sound, and animated elements. They have also created the need for new exigencies in gaining the attention and timely input of participants, requiring new techniques of work coordination (Orlikowski & Yates 2002). Technologies also facilitate new distributions of documents and social formations (Starke-Meyerling et al., 2011; Buehl & Gross, in press).

The Consequences of Writing

- *Writing builds relations with readers.* Writing as a communication among people forms specific communicative bonds between writer and reader, and these relations must construct appropriate intimacy or distance (Hyland, 2010). Relations with audiences have long been a concern of rhetoric that has fostered writing practices and forged a means of understanding writing events. The medieval arts of letter writing, advising on how to write correspondence within the church bureaucracy, provided

extensive advice on establishing good will, respect, and appropriate work relations with the correspondents (Murphy, 1985). Dyson's studies of children in the early grades of school indicate how much their writing is directed toward carrying out social relations, as the children create characters in plays to be performed in class based on their friendship networks and attitudes toward their classmates (Dyson, 1989, 2003).

- *Through participation writers gain voice and identities within forums.* Contributing texts within a forum establishes a voice to say something. The more effective and prominently the text appears to other participants, the more clearly and strongly the text is heard and is consequential for future action by others. A news story that gains attention, is mentioned by others, and becomes the basis of future action “speaks more loudly” than a story that never gets past the editor's desk or is buried in the middle of the paper. Similarly, by all measures many published scientific articles are rarely cited and have little voice in the unfolding of their disciplines, whereas a small percentage of articles garner the great majority of citations (Price, 1963; Hamilton, 1991). The figures for engineering, social sciences, and the humanities are even more lopsided.

When Thomas Edison wanted to pique public interest in his latest project of light and power, he used his mounting fame and skill as an interviewee to gain journalistic attention. This presence then increased his standing among financiers willing to back research and development, whom he cultivated through correspondence and personal meetings. To establish his rights of property, Edison and his agents needed to establish and protect legal presence through participation in the patent and court systems by the filing of applications, complaints, and briefs, backed by many documents. Further, to establish the credibility of their claims and technology, Edison and his colleagues had to participate in international technological and scientific communities by publishing papers and submitting reports. They even had to participate in the communicative system of domestic design to make their lighting fixtures acceptable, attractive, and prestigious to consumers in the growing affluent urban market (Bazerman, 1999).

- *Voice is attributed by readers.* Voice is more than loudness at the right time. It is also a character, quality, or identity that readers attribute to the text and by extension to the writer of the text. Recognition of a quality of voice appropriate to and authoritative within a forum can help a text gain credibility and attention, while a failure to project the right voice can stigmatize the writer as an outsider, not worth heeding. This evaluation of appropriate voice affects how scientists read other scientists (Bazerman, 1988) and how teachers evaluate the work of students (Williams, 1981). As a consequence, part of the work of writers is to sound like they belong, to adopt the voice of a profession or other insider group, and to avoid the stigmatizing marks of being an outsider (Castello & Inesta, 2012; Nelson & Castello, 2012; Carroll, 2002). Further, if the particular writing task calls for asserting the identity of an institution or a corporation rather than that of an individual, the writer must remove markers of individuality to adopt the voice of the organization (Ketter & Hunter, 2002) or the organization's spokesperson (Smart, 2006; Bruss, 2011)

But within many communities, as long as one has the voice of an insider, appropriate individuality is invited or even expected to mark a unique perspective or achievement. Within literary writing, individuality of voice is foregrounded and is often the core of appreciation and interpretation, but even in professional domains a political commentator, legal scholar, or scientist may seek to have a distinctive voice signaling a unique perspective. Myers's (1990) study of two senior biologists shows how in review essays they create a distinctive persona and project different views of the current state and future directions of their fields.

- *Voice can also be reflexively understood by the writer as a characterization of one's self and one's commitments.* As writers look back on the words committed in their texts, they can come to see themselves as having expressed identities and have created their own voices (explicitly exemplified by Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor, & Otuteyé, 2005, documenting a strong assertion of public identity through a student's engagement in performance poetry). Statements asserting stance and attitudes, beliefs,

interests, skills, accomplishments, or commitments can then become a sign of who one is becoming, as Smagorinsky (1997) reveals in a study of a high school classroom and as Herrington and Curtis (2000) examine in a longitudinal study of four college student working through personal issues while writing papers in academic courses. These reflexively understood identities can then form a stance for further encounters, even affecting future learning, as Powell (2002) finds in comparing the interactive styles and earning trajectories of three students in the same college classroom. Even young children first learning to write develop a sense of themselves as writers (Rowe, 2003; Martello, 1999). This sense of voice in turn becomes an important motive for the development of writers and an imperative in their writing, both in gaining a sense of social presence and power and in providing an understanding of oneself (Elbow, 2012).

- *Writing creates shareable meanings and representations of the world.* Writing produces representations of the world, establishing situation-appropriate knowledge and then reasoning about those representations (Christie, 2003; McCarthy et al., 2011). Even young children begin to understand the value of making information explicit in order to make messages intelligible to others (e.g., Castedo & Ferreira, 2010). Short-form social media that are centered on representations of the self, such as Twitter, particularly challenge the need to represent the context from which the writer is responding in order to identify the specific world being indexed and represented in the text (Haas, Carr, & Takayoshi, 2011). The history of knowledge is a process of increasingly representing the world in texts to be contemplated and reasoned about, through varying social criteria and procedures, starting with catalogs of produce and tax rolls and continuing today in the documents of government, military, law, commerce, and academic disciplines. Through shared texts, the social facts that are believed by a society and guide actions are represented, distributed, and given authority. Literacy education has focused on creating people adept in recording knowledge of the world and in recent centuries on creating new knowledge (Bazerman & Rogers, 2008).

- *Written meanings and knowledge can have material consequences.* By creating shareable meanings, writing makes things happen and brings about social change (Faber, 2008). Through writing, organizations get formed (Doheny-Farina, 1986), are regulated, (Zachry & Thralls, 2007), and become sites for power struggles (Winsor, 2003). Buildings get built (Medway, 1996), and students are admitted to the university (Early & DeCosta-Smith, 2010). Group identities are formed, group interests are advocated, and political struggles are engaged (Royster, 2000; Duffy, 2007). Victims' interests are asserted (Propen & Schuster, 2010), and prisoners are sentenced (Converse, 2012). Extended statements are transformative of situations by asserting new meanings into the situations, whether within political and government deliberation, scientific reasoning, philosophic argument, economic forecasting, or religious belief.

How Writing Gets Done

- *Writing processes allow planning and refinement for social effectiveness.* Written texts, unlike spoken utterances, typically are not immediately received by the intended audiences as soon as they are conceived, but rather they can be worked on to maximize their social effect. The role of audience awareness has long been documented as an aspect of skilled writing and revision (e.g., Berkenkotter, 1981). Audience-directed revision can improve the quality of even middle school students (Midgette, Haria, & MacArthur, 2008). But this improvement must make assumptions about the situation and audience, as there is rarely immediate feedback to allow correction and adjustment to audience response. In those special instances where feedback is available, such as in review processes for journal publication, writers respond to, act on, and even fundamentally redesign their communications in response to reviewers' and editors' responses (Myers, 1990).

- *Genres guide writers in understanding the situations they are writing for, who their audiences are, what form the texts might take, what material might be appropriately*

included, and what they may accomplish. Usually, however, writers have less knowledge about the actual responses of readers. To meet this challenge, writers rely heavily on understanding the genres they are writing in and the activity systems the genres are part of. Genres reflect recurrent solutions to perceived rhetorical problems in situations perceived as similar. Thus, genres are part of a process of typifying situations, roles, and actions as well as textual expectations (Miller, 1984). The fact that many genres (including scientific articles, business documents, financial instruments, legal documents, and newspapers) have developed from letters that explicitly identify social circumstances and anticipated interactions provides strong confirmation of the social nature of genres (Bazerman, 2000). Over time, letter-based genres can lose the initial trappings of letters or other marks of social origins to become recognizable in themselves and embedded in systems of related genres (Bazerman, 1994), which can be construed as activity systems (Russell, 1997a; see also Spinuzzi, 2003; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). This genre knowledge helps writers identify potential audiences, criteria of evaluation and other expectations to be met, possible actions to be accomplished, stances, and identities. Genres also are associated with typical contents and knowledge, relevant intertextual sources, and their mode of representation (Devitt, 1994), formal linguistic features (Hyland, 2004), and lines of argument.

Young children develop a sense of genre (Donovan & Smolkin, 2006), and more advanced writers, when entering new writing situations, use their prior knowledge of genre to identify what is similar and what is different about their new situation (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011). Genres, however, are not fixed but instead evolve with each new instance, responding to the details of each circumstance and at times hybridizing multiple genre understandings to create new genres (Roosen, 2010).

- *Writing processes are influenced by situations and are often distributed among participants.* The multiple social, cultural, material, historical, technological, and personal relational variables influencing writing situations shape not only the final form of the

written text, but the processes whereby texts come into being (Prior & Shipka, 2002). For example, Paradis, Dobrin, and Miller (1985) describe the document cycling that engages people of different levels, as part of the production, review, and synthesis within a large corporation. Gunnarsson (1997) documents the complex set of spoken and written interactions that give rise to government documents in a process that involves participation of the public, government employees of different status, and elected officeholders. In less formal settings, public scribes collaborate with less educated clients to prepare documents (Kalman, 1999). Lunsford and Ede (1990) offer an extensive survey of varieties of collaborative practices outside schooling. Marttunen and Laurinen (2012) show that even in school settings, the roles adopted in collaboration are multiple and variable.

How Writing Is Learned

- *Development of writing skills depends on a passage through situations, solving problems and becoming articulate in those situations.* Because of the social complexity of written texts and writing processes, learning to write requires writing in many situations across a lifetime. Each new situation requires solving fresh problems. Skills, **vstrategies**, and forms may be learned along the way, aided by organized instruction, but the motivating, meaningful challenges give focus to skills learning and provide unifying, meaningful activities that build tolerance, motivation, or even commitment to technical skill-building. Unfortunately, longitudinal research on writers is limited, covering at best a few years during a single epoch in the writer's life, such as emergent literacy in the family setting, the undergraduate student over the course of four years, or the graduate student (see Rogers, 2010, for a review). Nonetheless, the importance of a passage through multiple experiences for writing development is evident. Thais and Zawacki (2006), for example, examine the growth of engaged professional voices as students enter more deeply into the practices of their disciplines through assignments in their courses. Different sets of meaningful experiences will lead to different trajectories

of writing development, and a paucity of engaging learning opportunities will result in truncated trajectories of learning and development. Meaningful writing opportunities are unequally distributed, depending on many social, economic, and cultural factors, with large consequences for which populations become most skilled to take on influential roles in society.

- *Learning to write within certain domains is closely integrated with learning the knowledge, forms of reasoning, criteria of evaluation, and forms of action in those domains.* Developing as a writer within a specific community is part of enculturation and socialization into the norms, practices, and action goals of a community so as to successfully interact (Besnier, 1995). Heath's (1983) study of literacy practices in three different groups in a small rural Appalachian town shows how strongly community practices of literacy create different school experiences for the children of poor blacks, poor whites, and middle-class whites. Vieira (2011) documents how less educated immigrant adults develop their literacies as part of cultural practices within their church. Karlsson (2009) documents how learning the literacy practices in various occupations is integrated in learning the organization of work practices and developing the values and dispositions of those occupations.

- *Moving from one social domain to another requires adjusting writing, learning new skills, and transforming the knowledge one brings from previous experience.* Dias, Paré, Freedman, and Medway (1999) contrast the differences in the knowledge and cultures that frame the writing in architecture, social work, business, and banking, showing how particular each is for both university students and young professionals, and the adjustments in knowledge and orientation students must make in learning to write for the workplace. Writers who must work in multiple situations accommodate to each of them, writing differently with different genres, different goals, and different ends, even when discussing the same nominal contents. For example, Luzón (2013) found that scientists who write public blogs to communicate with nonspecialist readers adopt new strategies to represent them-

selves more intimately and dialogically, with greater focus on personal meanings and relevance to daily life. In a similar way, psychotherapists act as intermediaries between the life world of clients and the technical worlds of psychiatric theory (Berkenkotter, 2001).

- *Enculturation into writing is socially sponsored and shaped by the sponsor's agendas.* Within particular domains, sponsors offer opportunities, motivations, and resources to learn to write. Some sponsorship is through direct personal mentorship, but sponsorship may also be through employment requiring certain forms of writing; provision of interesting materials, activities, or rewards for writing; educational opportunities; or other indirect structural support. Consequently, writers tend to develop in pathways in conformity with a sponsor's interests and ideologies (Brandt, 2001). Further, the development of specific forms of writing is integrally tied to the development of intellect that is expected for many elite roles in society (e.g., see Schryer & Lingard, 2002, on learning medical genres). The extensive literature on writing across the curriculum and in the disciplines, is reviewed in Bazerman et al. (2005).

Students may experience major cultural shifts in literacy practices when they enter school. Children initially develop their sense of literacy and early literacy practices within their families and local communities, which may not be a good match with the practices fostered or required within the schools the children attend. Mismatches between home and school literacy cultures can become an obstacle to achievement in school (Heath, 1983). As children develop literacy within school, their learning may draw on and develop those community literacies (Dyson, 1989, 2003), or they may create distance from community and peer life, producing tensions within education and obstacles to learning (Brandt, 2001). These cultural differences and tensions in education are all the stronger when children's schooling is in a different language from that of their family and community (Boyd & Brock, 2004; Durgunoglu & Verhoeven, 1998).

- *School creates specialized writing activities within a specialized activity system with specialized school genres.* Because

writing also requires many technical skills that remove one from here-and-now experience, learning to write typically requires special training removed from daily life, in the form of schooling. Indeed, schools were early formed to train scribes. Consequently, for many people, writing is closely associated with schooling and school criteria for acceptable writing. Further, the writing experiences, expectations, genres, skills, and objectives in schooling are typically defined by the classroom setting and are focused on developing skills or student understanding (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; VanDerHeide & Newell, 2013). As those who have studied writing assigned in school have noted, the range of writing activities is regularly narrower than needs be even for curricular purposes (Applebee, 1981, 1984; Applebee & Langer, 2009; Hillocks, 2008)

Within school, most writing is assigned and evaluated rather than being voluntary and spontaneous. The most significant readers of most student writers are teachers or assessors of examinations (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975). Student engagement in writing, therefore, is dependent on alignment with the educational objectives of the classroom and communicative relations with teachers and/or assessors. Thus, an important variable in student writing is student understanding of teacher's concerns, criteria, and comments. Research, however, indicates that students frequently do not have good understanding of what teachers want and what their criteria are—often viewing teacher preferences as arbitrary and idiosyncratic (McCarthy, 1987). Students also find teacher comments on their writing enigmatic or do not act on those comments in functional ways (Varner, Roscoe, & McNamara, 2013). Because assessment situations are often opaque to students, students may have unrealistic beliefs about who marks exams, under what conditions, and according to what criteria (Giltrow, 2002). Teacher orientations toward students are equally important because teachers set assignments, communicate expectations, and define specific requirements to students who write for them (McCarthy & Mkhize, 2013).

- *Activities and assignments that engage audiences, activities, and collaboration out-*

side teacher assessment of traditional classroom genres help individual writers develop. To broaden students' sense of the communicative purposes of writing beyond assessment and student teacher relations, peer and community audiences have been introduced into school writing activities. Activities such as writing for parents and families (Wollman-Bonilla, 2000), writing books for younger children, producing school and classroom newspapers and radio (Baltar, 2012), writing within workplace and community service internships, and case simulations all have been found to be motivating, engaging, and learning experiences. Peer response and other collaborative practices have also provided more immediate reactions to student writing in terms that may be more familiar and perhaps more immediately useful to students (Bruffee, 1984; Hillocks 1986; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In collaborative writing, students explicitly share their problem-solving thinking, planning, revising, and other processes. Providing peer feedback on the writing of others provides better understanding of one's own writing (Crinon, 2012). A number of automated systems have now been developed to facilitate formative peer review (Passig & Schwartz, 2007; Goldin & Ashley, 2012) as well as collaborative writing. Noncollaborative observational roles also provide strong opportunities to understand how to write and what is successful in writing (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2009).

- *Ideologies of schooling shape school writing experiences and students' trajectories of learning to write.* The ideologies that shape education influence how we teach writing, what we assign, and what we value in writing (Berlin, 1987; Miller, 1997), even if not explicitly recognized by instructors (Barletta Manjarres, Cortez Roman, & Medzerian, 2012). Further, the ideologies and epistemologies that drive testing and implicitly drive school curricular design are often orthogonal to other views of writing and may restrict writing education (Hillocks, 2002). Within the United States, a number of the ideologies that have at times been advocated for and influential (and have since been studied from historical and critical perspectives) include rhetoric, formal correctness, faculty psychology, expository

rationalism, cognitive development, expressivism, and social construction. In other countries, different ideologies have given rise to different school practices (see Delcambre & Donahue, 2012; Chitez & Kruse, 2012; Thaiss, Bräuer, Carlino, Ganosbeik-Williams, & Sinha, 2012).

- *Learning to write outside of school requires new learning.* Multiple studies have shown that writing situations, goals for writing, criteria of evaluation, and trajectories of learning outside the classroom in the professional, research, commercial, and civic worlds are substantially different from those within the classroom. Thus, students in moving from the classroom to other settings need to make a transition, and deeply entrenched classroom practices and habits can be counterproductive in the new setting. Dias et al. (1999) found that in architecture, law, social work, and business the shift from writing for evaluation of skill to writing for accomplishing work changed what writers sought to accomplish, their choices as writers, how they sought and used help, and even how they related to peers. Former students who continued to see their writing as individual accomplishments and did not seek the help of mentors and peers did not accomplish work effectively, did not grow as writers in their setting, and did not advance. Similarly, Beaufort (1999) found that writers grew on the job by participating in the organization's projects in increasingly sensitive and important roles, guided by mentors who shaped tasks and offered support while keeping the interests of the organization in mind. Inversely, when practicing writers from the professional world, such as journalists, enter the classroom, they find practices they take for granted as professionals in tension with the organization of the classroom (Stephens, 2012; Kohnen, 2012).

Even within the academic world, as graduate students enter research careers, the nature of their writing also changes as they move toward authentic inquiry to advance knowledge in their field (Bazerman, Keranen, & Encinas, 2012); no longer are they students performing in a class or novice researchers whose relation to the field is mediated through their teacher/mentors who interpret the field for them (Paré, Starke-Meyerring, & McAlpine, 2009; Dysthe, 2002). Even the informal world of student peer relations

seems disconnected from their concurrent writing instruction and classroom writing practices. Finders (1996) reported that the middle school girls she studied experienced their private notes and notebooks as far more motivating and authentic than their classroom writing, even though the classroom assignments were designed to encourage candor, reflection, and personal commitment. Similarly, Skaar (2012) found that secondary students in Norway saw only a small connection between their personal Internet writing and the writing they did for school.

In Sum

Writing is a complex social participatory performance in which the writer asserts meaning, goals, actions, affiliations, and identities within a constantly changing, contingently organized social world, relying on shared texts and knowledge. The projection of meaning and shared orientations at a distance requires making assumptions and predictions about who will be reading the texts, what their interest and knowledge are likely to be, and how they may be using the information. An understanding of genres and activity systems helps in making those judgments and in identifying how to write effective texts in those situations that meet the criteria and expectations of the readers. Because writing involves so many problem-solving judgments, it is best learned through a long sequence of varied problem-solving experiences in varied situations. The teaching of general skills and practices provides only some elements necessary for the complex situated problem solving of writing specific texts, both within the structured and limited worlds of schooling and in the more varied worlds beyond schooling. Research, assessment, and curricular goals would benefit from being attentive to this more complex view of writing for instruction and preparation, as well as for motivation and engagement of students.

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