

## Entrevista

Désirée Motta Roth

mottaroth@gmail.com

Charles Bazerman

bazerman@education.ucsb.edu

# Literate action, writing and genre studies: Interview with Charles Bazerman<sup>1</sup>

## Ação de letramento, produção textual e estudos de gênero: entrevista com Charles Bazerman

### Entrevistado

Charles Bazerman é professor do Departamento de Educação da Universidade da Califórnia em Santa Bárbara. Seus interesses de investigação envolvem principalmente questões associadas a gêneros textuais e à prática e ao ensino de escrita em contextos sócio-históricos específicos. É presidente da *International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research* (ISAWR – <http://www.isawr.org/>), a partir da qual promove ações de pesquisa interdisciplinar sobre escrita e ensino de escrita ao redor do mundo. Algumas de suas publicações mais recentes podem ser acessadas no site *The WAC Clearinghouse* (<http://wac.colostate.edu/>).

### Entrevistadora

Désirée Motta Roth é Professora Titular de inglês e Linguística Aplicada da Linha de Pesquisa Linguagem no Contexto Social do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, onde coordena o Laboratório de Pesquisa e Ensino de Leitura e Redação. É Pesquisadora PQ1/CNPq e Líder do Grupo de Pesquisa/CNPq “Linguagem como Prática Social”. Seus interesses de investigação incluem: teoria e análise crítica de gêneros discursivos, letramentos acadêmicos, produção textual para fins acadêmicos.

Ao considerar a possibilidade de realizar uma entrevista para a revista *Calidoscópico*, cujo Comitê Científico integro há vários anos, minha escolha imediata

recaiu sobre Charles Bazerman, professor da Faculdade de Educação Gevirtz da Universidade da Califórnia, em Santa Bárbara. Essa escolha baseia-se na consistência da produção intelectual do Professor Bazerman na área de estudos da escrita e dos letramentos e sua longa colaboração com pesquisadores brasileiros, conforme se vê em seu currículo (disponível em <http://mina.education.ucsb.edu/bazerman/cv/cv1.html>). Suas obras têm servido de inspiração para todos aqueles interessados em estudos de gêneros discursivos e das práticas de letramento, especialmente em contextos de produção de conhecimento.

Uma de suas principais contribuições para o campo dos estudos de escrita e letramentos é o livro *Shaping written knowledge* (publicado em versão impressa em 1988 e online em 2000), que recebeu vários prêmios, inclusive o Prêmio de Excelência em Escrita Científica e Técnica do Conselho Nacional de Professores de Inglês dos Estados Unidos (*National Council of Teachers of English Award for Excellence in Scientific and Technical Writing*), em 1990. Dentre seus trabalhos mais recentes, destacam-se três livros sobre a vida na modalidade escrita: *What writing does and how it does it* (2004), em colaboração com Paul Prior, *The handbook of writing research* (2007b), pelo qual Bazerman recebeu, em 2009, o prêmio de Livro de Excelência na Conferência sobre Composição e Comunicação na Universidade (CCCC – *Conference College Composition and Communication 2009 Outstanding Book Award*) e *Genre in a Changing World* (2009), em colaboração com Adair Bonini e Débora Figueiredo, professores

<sup>1</sup> Este trabalho foi realizado com o apoio da Bolsa CNPq/PQ nº 309668/2013-1, referente ao projeto *Letramentos acadêmicos/científicos e participação periférica legítima na produção de conhecimento* (Motta-Roth, 2013).

da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Suas obras *Gêneros textuais, tipificação e interação* (2005), *Gênero, agência e escrita* (2006), e *Escrita, gênero e interação social* (2007a), foram traduzidas, no Brasil, por Judith C. Hoffnagel e Ângela Paiva Dionisio, professoras da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.

Além de contribuir para o campo com uma extensa obra, Bazerman é membro de comitês editoriais de vários periódicos acadêmicos – incluindo *Academic Literacies*, *Written Communication* e *Applied Linguistics* – e tem servido de parecerista para diversas editoras como *Cambridge University Press*, *Harvard University Press*, e *Sage*. Foi Professor visitante em várias universidades em todo o mundo, tais como University of Lorraine (França), Masaryk University (República Checa), Sogang University (Coreia do Sul), e Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.

A participação ativa de Bazerman no debate com pesquisadores brasileiros sobre teorias de gêneros discursivos bem como sua mais recente publicação em dois volumes sobre a teoria e a retórica da ação letrada (*literate action*) (Disponível em <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/literateaction>) serviram de pano de fundo para a realização desta entrevista. Dado que nossa conversa demandou preparação da minha parte (pesquisa e leituras prévias), mantivemos comunicação ao longo do mês de julho de 2015. Assim, a entrevista foi planejada para ser conduzida em duas partes. A Parte 1 tem por objetivo servir como uma apresentação geral do Professor Bazerman e seu trabalho para aqueles leitores da *Calidoscópico* que, porventura, não tenham tido contato prévio com suas publicações. A Parte 2 é projetada para que o Professor Bazerman discuta em maior detalhe sua publicação recente sobre ação letrada (Bazerman, 2013a; 2013b).

Gostaria de agradecer ao Professor Charles Bazerman, por aceitar o convite, apesar de toda a sua imensa carga de compromissos e envolvimento com ensino, orientação, conferências e publicação. Também gostaria de agradecer a minhas orientandas no LABLER-Laboratório de Pesquisa e Ensino de Leitura e Redação da Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, Amanda Pretto e Anelise Scherer, pela ajuda na revisão e na formatação desta entrevista para publicação.

### Part 1: The author and his work

**Désirée Motta-Roth (DMR):** How would you introduce yourself to those *Calidoscópico* readers who have not had contact yet with your work? I mean to ask you to do something like: Charles Bazerman in his own words.

**Charles Bazerman (CB):** My fundamental commitment is as a teacher of writing. At almost every university in the United States most students must take one, two or more courses to prepare them for the kind of writing they will need to do in their other courses and their careers, so there have been many, many teachers of

university writing for over a century. But when I started teaching university writing in 1971, there was very little research about what was really entailed in writing, the teaching of writing, and the development of writers. As well the field did not have much status at the university and there were no post-graduate programs to train people to teach writing. So I am part of a generation that has helped build research and professional standing for the field. All of my research and theory has been to help us understand writing and writing development, and to advance teaching methods that will improve students' ability to write for their academic needs and intellectual growth.

As I began to research the kinds of writing students need to do for their academic writing I found that the writing students did varied from course to course and discipline to discipline. This led me to study genres and how they were parts of differently organized social systems, such as disciplines. I also found that most of the writing students did at the university was based on other texts that they read. This led to my interest in intertextuality. These two interests came together since intertextuality is part of the social organization and communication within activity systems, and knowledge of disciplines is developed, shared, evaluated, and connected through the intertextual organization of disciplinary literatures. I pursued these researches by looking at the history of scientific writing and at contemporary academic writing practices. These researches then helped me understand writing in all spheres of activity. As my researches extended, so did the ideas and theory that explained the patterns I was seeing.

Although my research and theory now may seem very far from the writing classroom to my mind they remain closely linked, because the more we know about writing, how it works in the world, what it accomplishes, and how it provides the basis of modern social institutions, the better we can prepare our students to participate in such literate social structures.

**DMR:** I would like you to tell *Calidoscópico* readers about your connection to Brazil: how it started, how you were drawn to Brazil, the developments and perspectives you see for writing research.

**CB:** My connection with Brazil started when Professor Angela Dionisio of UFPE applied to be a visiting scholar with me at the University of California Santa Barbara. She spent a year in Santa Barbara, and as we discussed her projects I started to become familiar with the language and text studies in Brazil. Shortly thereafter I was invited to speak at ABRALIN in February 2005 in Brasília, and later that year at SIGET in Santa Maria. I have returned for every SIGET since then, and have made several other trips in Brazil. Also a number of visiting scholars from Brazil have since come to Santa Barbara, and three books of my essays have been translated into Portuguese in volumes organized by Angela Dionisio and

Judith Hoffnagel (Bazerman, 2005, 2006, 2007a). They have also organized translations of two volumes (Bazerman, 2013a, 2013b) I will discuss in this interview and which should have appeared by the time this interview is published.

In all these contacts I have been inspired by the energy and commitment of the teachers in Brazil and the recognition of the importance of literacy and writing for the future of the Brazilian people. I have also found that Brazilian scholars are able to draw on many different perspectives from different countries, bringing them together, even though these perspectives are intellectually isolated from each other elsewhere. Systemic Functional, Social Discursive Interactionist, Applied Linguistic, and North American rhetorical perspectives live side by side in Brazil and mix within pedagogies. To this mix Brazilian scholars add a strong concern for social justice and language practices of daily life. Together these views reinforce and are reinforced by a strong educational policy orientation towards genre in the national curricular proposals. I hope to speak in more detail about this at SIGET this year.

And of course I take great delight in the food, music, dance and beaches.

**DMR:** Taking SIGET as an important aspect of your interaction with Brazilian language scientists, how would you describe SIGET's relevance nowadays? What should we be paying attention to in order to qualify the debates in and results from SIGET?

**CB:** SIGET remains the only regularly meeting congress on genre theory and research in the world and also has the most comprehensive multi-perspectival approach. Other genre congresses only meet sporadically and tend to reflect one view or another. So SIGET has an important global role in advancing genre studies. It also has an important national role as it is the main location for studies on the teaching of writing within Brazil. Perhaps because of the national policy proposals, genre has become a key approach to the teaching of writing within the country, and discussions of how to advance teaching of writing in secondary and higher education intersect with the study of academic genres.

**DMR:** Let's concentrate on your most recent two-volume publication: *A Rhetoric of Literate Action: Literate Action Volume 1* (Bazerman, 2013a) and *A Theory of Literate Action: Literate Action Volume 2* (Bazerman, 2013b). These and other volumes written by several au-

thors are available online for free at <http://wac.colostate.edu/books>. First of all, how would you describe the WAC Clearinghouse site to our readers?

**CB:** The WAC Clearinghouse is an open access publisher for books, journals, teaching materials, and other documents. A large part of these materials are specifically about writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines, but the website also contains materials from other perspectives about teaching of writing in primary, secondary, and higher education, several book series, including an international series with several volumes from South America.<sup>2</sup> A reference guide series<sup>3</sup> provides comprehensive views of different topics in the teaching of writing – presenting theory, research, and practical information for teaching. The Perspective series<sup>4</sup> contains books of new research and theory, a Landmark series<sup>5</sup> reprints major books in writing across the curriculum, and another series<sup>6</sup> provides teaching materials and textbooks. All of the materials are downloadable and free. The Clearinghouse is also a partner with Comppile.org, which is the most extensive bibliographic database in writing studies covering all ages and school levels. If you are engaged with writing research or the teaching of writing you should become familiar with the WAC Clearinghouse.

**DMR:** How would you synthesize the content of your most recent publication? What is literate action? What was your aim in writing about it? How do the two volumes differ, I mean, what should a reader expect from the rhetoric volume in opposition to the theory volume?

**CB:** The two volumes of literate action tie together all the parts of the theory of writing that I have developed through my research and teaching. The title of both volumes “Literate Action” signifies that texts constitute actions between people. Texts are not ends in themselves, but are dynamic parts of social activity, transacted across the time and space in which texts travel. Writers produce texts to have effects on or share knowledge and ideas with readers and thereby attempt to accomplish things with, for, or in conflict with others. Successful writing is writing which accomplishes something the writers desire and which enlists or positions others within those tasks.

The first volume, *A Rhetoric of Literate Action*, is the more practical book, speaking directly to writers, helping them to conceive the challenges they need to overcome to write effectively for their purposes. The first

<sup>2</sup> Available at <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/international.cfm>.

<sup>3</sup> Available at [http://wac.colostate.edu/books/reference\\_guides.cfm](http://wac.colostate.edu/books/reference_guides.cfm).

<sup>4</sup> Available at <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives.cfm>.

<sup>5</sup> Available at <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/landmarks.cfm>.

<sup>6</sup> Available at <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/writingspaces.cfm>.

and most fundamental challenge is for writers to conceive of the situation and the kind of literate action that would serve their purposes within the situation. Because writing travels across time and space, the situation for which one is writing may not be self-evident in the way it might be in a face-to-face social situation. An awareness of the activity system and the genres that communicate within those systems help with the mental construction of situation and the timing of one's response. The writer then develops the particulars of meaning and form for the text framed by the mental construction of situation, activity system, and genre – in a way that, if successful, will engage the reader within the relationships, meanings, and responses desired by the writer.

The second volume, *A Theory of Literate Action*, synthesizes the intellectual resources that underlay the theory. These sources are multidisciplinary (sociological, anthropological, psychological, psychiatric, linguistic, evolutionary, historical, and biological) reflecting the complex multidimensionality of writing. In a single moment of writing, a writer uses his or her mind, emotions, and motives to interact socially within complexly organized social events, building on histories of events and relations and deploying the resources of language as they have been developed over generations.

## Part 2: A closer look at literate action

**DMR:** Let's go back to a passage in your answer to Question 1, in which you describe your work in the following terms:

As I began to research the kinds of writing students need to do for their academic writing I found that the writing done by students varied from course to course and discipline to discipline. This led me to study genres and how they were parts of differently organized social systems, such as disciplines.

Those involved in genre theory and pedagogy research know that there is a number of different concepts for the term used in different theoretical frameworks: as form, as function, as event, as cultural artifact, among others. I would like to concentrate on certain passages of your two-volume work on literate action and how you make reference to genre in these different ways, implying different concepts. Considering the following passages, please (a) discuss your view on the challenge to apprehend the concept of genre in simple univocal terms and (b) indicate which definition of genre seem more appropriate to your theory of writing.

### **Genre as text:**

These various orders converge in genre as a recognizable invocation of these multiple orders and recognizable place that each of our utterances take within them to assert our unique, situationally relevant meanings (Bazerman, 2013b, p. 23).

For writers, the orderliness of genres constrains and focuses the writing task. A person writing a research report on a psychological experiment knows specific things should be attended to and specific kinds of information should be reported in the text according to a fairly stable and recognizable organization, deploying standard formulations, techniques, and phrases (Bazerman, 2013b, p. 55-56).

### **As an event:**

Or if one person indicates by facial gesture that he hears another's comments as an insult, all eyes focus on the social conflict and leave the substance of the discussion behind. This reorientation from one kind of scene to another is facilitated because we come to recognize patterned kinds of social scenes, interactions, and utterances. We see events as similar to other events and recognize them as of a kind, or genre (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 10).

H. Sacks' (1995) analysis of membership category devices, Hanks' (1990) analysis of cultural deixis, and Bakhtin's (1981) consideration of chronotope all elucidate the cultural and genre horizon of expectations about what a scene is likely to include (Bazerman, 2013b, p. 132).

### **As the form of the written text which writing assumes in opposition to textual topic and substance:**

Starting with the explicit sociality of letters, many other written genres were able to find shape and meaning, until they became recognizable and recognized as distinctive forms – such as business reports, scientific journals, newspapers and magazines, and even financial instruments such as letters of credit, checks, and paper currency (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 21-22).

Many intermediate cases combine a degree of social compulsion with individual choice making about topic, substance, and genre, as well as the underlying motives that might be served (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 78).

If, for example, you need comparable specific information from a group of respondents, you are likely to use questionnaires with questions in familiar formats, so respondents know what you are asking for and how they might respond if they so choose (Bazerman, 2013b, p. 130).

Thus the genres within which people frame their utterances can be seen as also being vehicles for participation in historically emerged activity systems and their ongoing maintenance. By learning to write in the typified forms available at one's time and social place, one learns not only means of participation but the very motives and objects one might have, as Miller (1984) pointed out. Genre – conceived as the form discursive action takes – is part of the larger social activity structures within which action takes place (Bazerman, 2013b, p. 52).

### **As a form of action:**

Our motivations in any writing situation occur at the intersection of our long-term concerns and the emergent situation, recognized and given shape by our typifications about how situations are organized and the forms of action available in such situations. That is, our genre and situation shaped perceptions of openings for immediate action serve to crystallize underlying concerns and interests that lie behind our sense of imperfection in that situation (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 77).

***As something associated with a type of action:***

[...] the genres and the associated activities and dynamics, identify our opportunities to intervene by writing, and the repertoire of devices, styles, phrases, and tactics that are effective in the relevant genres (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 84).

In conjunction with deciding the appropriate moment for entry, you need to decide the particular form of action you want to take, which then suggests the genre you choose to write in and thus the way you will make your presence known. [...] a range of actions, genres, and presences [...] appropriate or germane or meaningful to the moment (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 95).

***As an artifact that can be used as part of the material culture of a given social activity system:***

We learn about how to do school assignments; how to advance and gain rewards in schooling; how to use to advantage the minor institutional genres around the edges – whether excuse and doctor’s notes, hall passes, or petitions for exceptions to regulations; and how to participate in the culture of students through note passing, secret peer notebooks, or sponsored activities like newspapers (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 82).

You may even create hybrid genres that take the discussion to strange places. You could take your consideration of the policing policy to a science fiction fantasy to demonstrate a dystopic or utopic future that would result from the policy and related approaches, or you could create a computer game or cartoon to mock the impulses behind the policy (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 98).

Genres are designed for social action, designed to bring about changed material states in the world, transforming our social and material scenes of existence and being. Thus the genres within which people frame their utterances can be seen as also being vehicles for participation in historically emerged activity systems and their ongoing maintenance (Bazerman, 2013b, p. 52).

***As the complex combination of textual form, content, and style, social action and event, etc:***

Developed cultural practices and forms, identifiable as distinctive genres, discourses, disciplinary languages and tasks – the typified practices that characterize the differentiation of our social and cultural worlds – can be seen in Vygotskian terms as particular sites of activity deploying particular cognitive tools and supporting different lines of psychological development (Bazerman, 2013b, p. 34).

**CB:** The concept of genre here is multi-dimensional and is fundamentally different from those found in most language or text focused perspectives. As such, the coherence of my uses of the term genre may not be apparent if approached in a text based way. A text has no meaning without a person to make sense of it, and a person cannot make sense of a text unless he or she perceives or imagines a meaningful sharing with the producers of the text. If we have no clue as to the script, the language, and the situation in which the text arises, we cannot find meaning or attribute any genre to it. Therefore in my theory volume I do not consider the orderliness of language until chapter 8, after I consider the many underlying processes

from which we create orderliness in our selves, our social relations, and our shared activity.

The concept of genre I propose is grounded in human social interaction and the individual’s perceptions of them. The concept draws on phenomenology, socio-cultural psychology, and pragmatic and structuralist sociology, as I elaborate in the theory volumes. Genre does not reside in any individual text or even a stable body of texts. Notice that in the quotations you cite as examples of genre as text or form, I discuss the genre as part of a situated process in which meaning and action arise. Genre is something individuals attribute to a text within an activity situation based on a perceived association with other texts, arising from their prior experience of texts, socially circulated typifications they are familiar with, and their perceptions of the current situation and the associated activity. Genre cannot even be attributed to an individual text in isolation, as the attribution depends on perceived similarities and differences with other texts. Thus genre is a psycho-social recognition category attributed in the process of making sense of texts we receive from others and texts that we are creating for others as part of the process of engaging in activities with others within social settings we perceive as organized by the typifications within the situation.

Seeing texts as instantiations of genres and textual features can give us clues as to situation and meaning attributions we may make, just as aspects of the situation can give us clues as to genre and meaning attribution. We may also well use multiple genre attributions to make sense of any text. Thus we may see within an apparent news article the promotion of a political candidate through the presentation of a humanizing anecdote. Others may see in the same text a subtle critique of the supporters of the candidate through an ironic representation of the maudlin values projected by the candidate. Thus, genre is not an absolute characteristic of texts, just as meaning is not, nor the action that the meaning is part of. Genre and meaning are in the attributions of readers and writers and their association of any one text with other texts they deem as similar in their form, situation, and activity. Further, genre usually does not fully define meaning, but only provides a frame within which meaning is projected and received, and reflexively our making sense of meaning may then modify our perception of genre, which then further modifies our making sense of the meaning and our orientation to the activity. In the earlier example of the news article, our perception of irony in the representation of some details may switch both meaning and genre, and modify the way in which we perceive the other details of the article. Thus genre is most fundamentally understood as typified action within structured social settings (that is, situations that are reproduced because we perceive them similarly and act within them similarly), and becomes the frame in which we then create or interpret meaning.

**DMR:** I would like to go back to how you made reference, in answering the first question, to the pedagogical implications of your work on writing, in the following terms:

So I am part of a generation that has helped build research and professional standing for the field. All of my research and theory has been to help us understand writing and writing development, and to advance teaching methods that will improve students' ability to write for their academic needs and intellectual growth.

Also, in both passages below, your comments call attention to the problem of paying attention to the “fundamental problem” in writing and to the teaching of the “disembodied code”. How can writing teachers deal with these issues?

In short, a fundamental problem in writing is to be able to understand and recreate the social circumstance and social interaction which the communication is part of, but which is obscured by the transmission of the words over time and space from one apparent set of social circumstances to another (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 7).

The problem of context is crucial to writing, yet it is elusive. Writing comes to us on pieces of paper or digital screens that look very much one like another, obscuring where the message may have come from, where it was intended to go, and what purpose it was intended to carry out in what circumstances. If texts travel through time and space, where is their context? Do they make their own contexts, which they then speak to? Unless we have means to address such questions, our approaches to understanding what to write and the meaning of others' writings are limited to issues of code (spelling, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and style) and decontextualized meanings (imagining such things could in fact exist) (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 14).

**CB:** The brief answer here is to build the students' awareness of the situations they are writing for and the difficulties of communication within those circumstances. The more they can conceive of the social transaction their writing engages in – what they want to accomplish with whom in what organized setting – the more they will be able to perceive the interests and purposes of the readers; the orientations, knowledge and criteria the readers will bring to the text; and the challenges of enlisting those readers in the writer's purposes. Genre understanding can help in this process if genre is not seen just as a form, but as the visible realization of a complex organized social transaction. The reasons behind the typical forms in the genre open up the social complexity of the transaction and situation. A longer answer can be found in my textbooks *The Informed Writer* (1995) and *Involved* (1997) that are available in open access editions at the WAC Clearinghouse. I also elaborate in my many pedagogical essays, some of which are translated into Portuguese in *Gênero, Agência e Escrita* (2006).

**DMR:** In different parts of both volumes on literate action, you refer to teaching (a) sometimes highlighting the necessary connections between classroom activities

and social discourses, (b) sometimes offering rhetoric as a conceptual tool to deal with writing and warning against explicit teaching of linguistic aspects of decontextualized texts or the use of manuals because they can constrain rhetorical choices and writers' agency, as in the passages below.

(a) Russell (1997a) explicitly ties this notion of systems of genre to Engeström's model of activity systems, with attention to the particular problem of understanding the relationship of classroom activity systems with various public and professional discourses related to the course discipline (Bazerman, 2013b, p. 54).

(b) Thus, what a rhetoric can most usefully offer, rather than specific prescriptions about what to say or write and how to say, is conceptual tools to ponder one's rhetorical situation and choices. If, however, situations are heavily constrained and practices typified and even regulated, then specific advice might be usefully given, but at the cost of constraining the writer's range of action and choices (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 16).

Some authors identified with the Sociorhetoric field, such as Amy Devitt, tend to question the value of explicit teaching of linguistic features in writing pedagogy, emphasizing the importance of teaching “genre awareness” to students instead: “Chapter 7 considers the question of whether to teach genres explicitly, especially in light of arguments about language acquisition critiques of genre pedagogies. It proposes that we teach genre awareness, not specific genres [...]” (Devitt, 2004, p. 4).

Your own warning against offering “prescriptions or ready-made solutions for particular writing situations” seems to reinforce Devitt's view. How do you see theoretical books, teaching materials or explicit instruction that aim at explicating discourse performance and analysis? Hasn't this been part of your concerns when working with intertextuality, as in your 2004 book entitled *What Writing Does And How It Does It?*

**CB:** I recognize the value of Amy Devitt's advocacy for helping students become aware of and deploy their knowledge of antecedent genres. This is in fact a form of explicitness, though different from prescriptive explicitness of a genre one wants students to write in. I have no problem with being explicit with students at the right time and place and in the right way that does not mislead them into thinking there is only one way to write. Writing should be more about choices than about following rules. Explicitness can also include more fundamental understanding of the purposes and context of the writing as well as the familiar linguistic pattern that might be used to realize purposes. As I state in quote (a), sometimes students need to be able to produce highly constrained texts according to well established patterns, and then it makes sense to explicitly teach and have the students practice those patterns. But also in those circumstances I usually am explicit about what those constraints are and why they have led to expected textual patterns. I also try to discuss

explicitly what those patterns accomplish and the ways in which writers may achieve those purposes by other means, or may attempt to change the purposes and discourses. On the other hand, students may not be ready or interested in an explicit examination of the underlying principles and analysis of the situation. In that case one would stick closer to the familiar forms. In deciding where to focus explicit attention – what one ought to discuss with students – the teacher should always evaluate the students, their needs, the situation, the unfolding dynamic of the classroom and the educational goals.

In all cases one should respect and make use of the knowledge, motives, and meanings students bring to the task, including their prior genre knowledge. These differing resources they bring may mean they each interpret the task and procedures differently to create novel meanings they find value in. These differing prior resources also allow students to reach beyond the typical response to a task. Too strict an adherence to explicit rules can cut students off from their impulses to create and express meaning. Ill-placed explicitness can lead to rote behaviors and shut down thinking, if all students do is follow preset rules. Writing is about effective meaning-making within particular circumstances and regularly presents deep puzzles to be solved and choices to be made.

The book *What Writing Does and How it Does It* (2004) provides explicit instruction in the purposes and procedures of different modes of text analysis. By providing multiple models it poses to student writers the question of which method is appropriate for their research questions in which circumstances. It then provides them introductory means to explore what they can get from each of the methods. Since they may not be familiar with most or all of the methods presented, the book does provide explicit guidance about key concepts and procedures. The reasons for the choices found in the procedures and patterns are often explicitly stated so students can make choices and also pursue alternative ways to achieve similar ends. But the end purpose is to open up choices and options to thoughtful and flexible decision-making.

In terms of the purposes of the analysis, it is not necessarily to reveal widely-spread linguistic patterns to be found in a large corpus of texts, therefore creating pedagogic prescriptions. Careful analysis in many cases will, on the contrary, reveal variation of patterns arising from different purposes, meanings, and situations. The analysis can serve many purposes, depending on the research questions. Intertextuality, for example, can be examined to show the different intellectual resources two different writers rely on and the stance they take towards those resources; such analysis could reveal the difference in their point of view and their intellectual projects. On the other hand, one could examine the growth and variation in one student's intertextual practices to understand his or her increasing abilities and changing engagement in

the intellectual world of a discipline or topic. One could also examine whether two specialties interact or maintain intellectual boundaries.

There are many purposes to intertextual analysis as any form of analysis. Analytical methods are only tools to be chosen depending on one's larger project. If one's larger project is the applied linguistic one of finding patterns to serve as the basis of explicit instruction about language form, one could do so, and given the coherence and stability of the discursive domain one is examining, one might be able to develop fairly reliable prescriptions. But some domains accept greater variation, and may even require variation depending on situation characteristics. And neighboring domains may be more different than one would at first imagine.

**DMR:** In higher education, terms such as *Writing Across the Curriculum*, *Writing Across Disciplines*, *Writing for Academic Purposes*, *Writing to Learn* have been used to refer to the teaching of writing. Could you comment on these different approaches so that *Calidoscópico* readers become more acquainted with writing teaching practices and approaches in your context? Furthermore, how can writing teachers deal satisfactorily with a myriad of privileged productions and literacies, diversity in language and genre systems, the needs of newcomers to higher education, that have experience with non-standard language and non-academic interaction such as those we see in *Facebook*? How can science incorporate life?

**CB:** *Writing Across the Curriculum* (WAC) was the original term arising within the context of U.S. universities where since the nineteenth century there typically were required first year writing courses taught in the English Department. In the 1970's WAC programs developed to encourage more assignment of writing in courses in other departments, and to improve the assignment and support practices of teachers in those other disciplines. As WAC developed it was recognized that writing in different disciplines was different in form and practice and those differences were tied to the nature of the disciplines. Some people then adopted the term *Writing in the Disciplines* (WID) to identify this recognition and to locate instruction more within the disciplines, but many now use the terms interchangeably as it is widely recognized that different disciplines use different genres, employ different practices, and value aspects of writing differently. A WAC/WID orientation towards writing instruction requires the cooperation and concerns of instructors in the various disciplines and requires the writing or language instructors to become open to the variety of practices and concerns in other fields. Dialog and cooperation are essential, no matter how instruction is arranged at each institution. *The Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum* (2005) at the WAC Clearinghouse provides more detail on the

history of the WAC movement, research on the writing practices of disciplines, and instructional approaches that have been developed.

The other issues you mention about the diversity of students' prior literacy experiences, the range of dialects and class experiences students bring, and the many uses of writing in other non-academic domains are very wide-ranging, and are each the subject of extensive publications within composition studies. There are no easy answers, but many programs and practices have developed to address these issues. The first step, from my view, is already implicit in the question – and that is to be attentive to your students, their needs, and their uses for writing. Then remember the kinds of literacy development that are the object of your program.

**DMR:** Your proposal “to create a rhetoric of wide generality, relevant to all written texts in all their historical and contemporary variety [...]” that “[...] will provide principles to understand any particular set of constraints and typified practices in any focused domain, and could be used to uncover the rhetorical logic in any set of instructions or style book” (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 16) seem very broad and encompassing. How does it differ from the theory of written texts that dominated higher education in the late nineteenth century in the United States and which is described as broad in the following passage?

As the teaching of writing became a regular and widespread component of higher education in the late nineteenth century United States, another theory of written texts came to dominate education. This theory assumed a correlation between faculties of human understanding and a small number of patterns of textual exposition (known as the modes; Connors, 1981). The theory and the accompanying pedagogy did not attempt to contend with the wide range of social uses of writing, the many different social systems writing was part of, range of goals and interests of writers, or the variety of potential readers with different interests and different situations. That is, as a rhetoric, while reflective of individual understanding (according to a particular psychological theory), it was not strategic or situational. It rather assumed a constrained uniformity of understanding, activities, and goals (Bazerman, 2013a, p. 18).

**CB:** The theory I propose locates writing within social interaction and provides tools for understanding that social interaction to be able to write effectively for it. The nineteenth century theory of mental faculties saw writing as determined only by a small set of faculties which operated independently of social situations. That theory led to the teaching of a small set of decontextualized genres and prescriptive rules which became regularized within school practices, but did not match well with other genres used throughout life and even in the academy outside the writing class. Nor even within the classroom setting did it provide tools to understand the nature of the rhetorical activity being reproduced. Rather it cast writing as an individual accomplishment for the advancement of individual

intellect. The generality of the theory I propose comes not from decontextualizing writing to make it an individual display within uniform textual patterns, but from understanding and adapting to the variability and creativity of writing within complex social processes.

**DMR:** From my point of view, one of the most interesting contributions of your work to the construction of a rhetoric of writing is your ability to explain genres in association with systems of social activity, in a very direct and uncomplicated style, such as your 2005 book entitled *Gêneros Textuais, Tipificação e Interação*. In *Literate Action* (2013a, 2013b) again you construct an uncomplicated text to write about very complicated issues. I get always positively surprised by the ability that you have to talk to the reader in a straightforward way. Tell us about your writing process. How do you manage to write and publish so much while having so many other activities in your day? How did you gather material to write the *Literate action* book with more than 300 pages divided in two volumes?

**CB:** I work hard at writing, spending much time in planning and strategizing – then drafting and revising. Almost every day I spend some time on my writing projects, and I try to organize my projects so that even during busy times I can make continuous progress.

I began work on an earlier version of a manuscript that was to become these two volumes almost 30 years ago. The ideas and theories had come out of my previous teaching, research, and writing, and I wanted to pull all the pieces together into a coherent picture to explain the way I was coming to see the world. So many of the resources and ideas were already there in part. Of course, as I developed each of the chapters I had to read more deeply into the ideas I was drawing on, and I saw I had to look more fully into topics I had not thought about enough.

I tried a number of different strategies and organizations to tie these ideas together. A short synopsis of my intentions became the theoretical introduction to *Constructing Experience* published in 1994. I finally developed a plan that worked to organize the parts and provide a stance for the narration in 1997, when I split the practical rhetoric from the theoretical volume. At that time I wrote a proposed outline which developed the main outline of the arguments of the two volumes. Although I made some changes, this outline guided me for the next fifteen years, as I wrote and rewrote the chapters in between and alongside my other research and writing projects.

My processes vary depending on my situation and the task, but the most important thing is that I allow extensive time for the work. Next important is that I trust the process, so that I take risks in the belief that even if I do not know how I will accomplish something, I will be able to do so if I just go step by step. I then try to figure out what is the next step I can accomplish and which will

advance the project. Then I take that step in faith that it will lead to a further step.

Much of my work on all my projects is to think how I can make my ideas accessible and interesting. I try to determine what is the core of what I am trying to say and get to that directly, avoiding distractions or neighboring thoughts that might lead toward confusions, alternate interpretations, or questions not central to my message. I try to find powerful and familiar examples. I try to make my sentences as simple and direct as I can without losing the complexity of the thought. I am very concerned with the sequence and coherence of the ideas, so that the reader can follow and go along with each step of reasoning. All this requires extensive, multiple revision. Yet no matter how careful I am to pare the syntactical, lexical, and organizational complexity, I often find that readers find the text difficult, not because the language in itself is difficult, but because the ideas are unfamiliar, strange, or in tension with previous ways of looking at things. So I also need to be aware of readers' likely orientations and how I can lead them on the journey I wish to take them.

These and other practices and processes of writing are elaborated in volume 1, *A Rhetoric of Literate Action* (2013a), which aims to provide practical ways of approaching writing tasks, as well as in my textbooks *The Informed Writer* (1995) and *Involved* (1997). I usually practice what I preach and preach what I practice. Writing such practical books in fact helps me make explicit and elaborate what my practices are and helps me figure out better practices. Many times I have changed my practices based on what I learned in writing textbooks, as well as through my research and theory. If something is good for my students, it is good for me. I see myself as no different than my students and other writers, except more experienced and more reflective. Being a writing teacher has made me a more effective writer.

**DMR:** What aspects would you explore or how would you explain to an Applied Linguistics readership about how your two literate action books open up to other sociological, phenomenological, or psychological dimensions of writing?

**CB:** Language is the realization of human social impulses in specific circumstances. Language is the material we as writers work with to accomplish our social ends, and of course we need to understand that material – what are its components and what kind of components are they, how to put the components together to be intelligible and coherent for others, and even more what does that material allow us to do and how it provides potentials for expression. Yet to choose our words we must look beyond language to our needs, our social relations, our activities, and our impulses. Further to compose our

words we must use our minds and emotions. To communicate effectively to others and coordinate with their actions we need to understand the conditions that allow for mutual intelligibility and interpersonal alignment. Language by itself without people and minds is a chiffon of air waves or a residue of ink or magnetic bits. Meaning and understanding are what people attribute. So, to understand how to use language and what happens when we use language with others, even in the most practical way, we are led into issues of psychology, sociology, the organization of life and how people make sense of life in a material world, using their material bodies with their neurobiological capacities. These two volumes take us behind the appearances of language to the why and how we make language and how we understand it within local contexts. Even though my primary professional and intellectual identity is as a teacher of writing and although I am familiar with scholarship in language, writing, and rhetoric, the most fundamental theories I draw on and elaborate are from sociocultural psychology, phenomenology, and pragmatic social science. These are what have helped me understand deeper choices within writing to get behind the appearance of language. And these are the perspectives I try to share in these two volumes.

## References

- BAZERMAN, C. 1988. *Shaping Written Knowledge: the Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*. Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press/The WAC Clearinghouse, 356 p. Available at: [http://wac.colostate.edu/books/bazerman\\_shaping/](http://wac.colostate.edu/books/bazerman_shaping/). Accessed on: August 11, 2015.
- BAZERMAN, C. 1994. *Constructing Experience*. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 268 p.
- BAZERMAN, C. 1981/1995. *The Informed Writer*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston/Fort Collins, Houghton Mifflin/The WAC Clearinghouse. Available at: <http://writing.colostate.edu/textbooks/informedwriter/>. Accessed on: August 11, 2015.
- BAZERMAN, C. 1997. *Involved: Writing for College, Writing for Your Self*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 400 p.
- BAZERMAN, C. 2004. *What Writing Does and How It Does It: An Introduction to Analyzing Texts and Textual Practices*. Mahwah/London, Lawrence Erlbaum, 372 p.
- BAZERMAN, C. 2005. *Gêneros Textuais, Tipificação e Interação*. São Paulo, Cortez, 168 p.
- BAZERMAN, C. 2006. *Gênero, Agência e Escrita*. São Paulo, Cortez, 144 p.
- BAZERMAN, C. 2007a. *Escrita, Gênero e Interação Social*. São Paulo, Cortez, 216 p.
- BAZERMAN, C. (ed.). 2007b. *The Handbook of Writing Research: History, Society, School, Individual, Text*. New York, Routledge, 670 p.
- BAZERMAN, C.; BONINI, A.; FIGUEIREDO, D. 2009. *Genre in a Changing World*. Fort Collins/West Lafayette, The WAC Clearinghouse/Parlor Press, 528 p. Available at: <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/genre/>. Accessed on: August 11, 2015.
- BAZERMAN, C. 2013a. *A Rhetoric of Literate Action: literate action volume 1*. Perspectives on Writing. Fort Collins/Anderson, The WAC Clearinghouse/Parlor Press, 165 p. Available at: <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/literateaction/v1/>. Accessed on: August 11, 2015.

- BAZERMAN, C. 2013b. *A Theory of Literate Action: literate action volume 2*. Perspectives on Writing. Fort Collins/Anderson, The WAC Clearinghouse/Parlor Press, 217 p. Available at: <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/literateaction/v2/>. Accessed on: August 11, 2015.
- BAZERMAN, C.; LITTLE, J.; BETHEL, L.; CHAVKIN, T.; FOUQUETTE, D.; GARUFIS, J. 2005. *The Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum*. West Lafayette, Parlor Press/The WAC Clearinghouse, 175 p. Available at: [http://wac.colostate.edu/books/bazerman\\_wac/](http://wac.colostate.edu/books/bazerman_wac/). Accessed on: August 11, 2015.
- DEVITT, A.J. 2004. *Writing genres*. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 264 p.
- MOTTA-ROTH, D. 2013. *Letramentos acadêmicos/científicos e participação periférica legítima na produção de conhecimento*. Bolsa CNPq/PQ nº 309668/2013-1. Santa Maria, Universidade Federal de Santa Maria.

**Désirée Motta Roth**

Universidade Federal de Santa Maria  
Laboratório de Pesquisa e Ensino de Leitura e Redação  
(LABLER)  
Av. Roraima, 1000, Sala 3308, Prédio 16  
Cidade Universitária, Bairro Camobi  
97105-900, Santa Maria, RS, Brasil

**Charles Bazerman**

University of California, Santa Barbara  
The Gevirtz Graduate School of Education  
93106-9490, Santa Barbara, CA, USA