Activity Theory and Process Approaches: Writing (Power) in School, and Society

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Abstract

Breaking with the still-dominant process tradition in composition studies, post-process theory—or at least the different incarnations of post-process theory discussed by the contributors represented in this collection of original essays—endorses the fundamental idea that no codifiable or generalizable writing process exists or could exist. Post-process theorists hold that the practice of writing cannot be captured by a generalized process or a "big" theory.

Most post-process theorists hold three assumptions about the act of writing: writing is public; writing is interpretive; and writing is situated. The first assumption is the commonsensical claim that writing constitutes a public interchange. By "interpretive act," post-process theorists generally mean something as broad as "making sense of" and not exclusively the ability to move from one code to another. To interpret means more than merely to paraphrase; it means to enter into a relationship of understanding with other language users. And finally, because writing is a public act that requires interpretive interaction with others, writers always write from some position or some place. Writers are never nowhere; they are "situated."

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Comments

Activity Theory and Process Approaches: Writing (Power) in School and Society

David Russell

More years ago than I care to remember, when my daughter Madeleine was in third grade at Roosevelt Elementary School, I went to the Parents' Night Open House. When I walked into Madeleine's room, the first things that caught my eye were four large yellow posters mounted high on one wall. Each of the posters—obviously commercially produced—contained in large black type one word. PREWRITE. WRITE. REVISE. EDIT.

A few years ago, like many others, I was trying to get the National Council of Teachers of English to change certain things about their curriculum standards document (NCTE/IRA). The thing I argued most passionately to change was the phrase "the writing process." I held out for the plural, "writing processes," but the change was not made.

The process movement began with psychological or at least psychologizing approaches. In the work of Janet Emig, Sondra Perl, Nancy Sommers, and others, the individual writer is the focus, not the text. This was a very important shift. It was a revolt against a particularly limiting "current-traditional rhetoric," "desiccated rhetorical principles devised by second-rate rhetorical theorists," as Kitzhaber termed it thirty-five years ago (372). The work of the process pioneers revalorized the student as an object of our activities. But their work remained with the individual, an attempt to describe psychological processes that might be generalized across students in different settings. The goal was to make students like "real" writers, I think. And that is a worthy goal. But real to whom and for whom? Early on, researchers such as Applebee ("Problems") pointed to problems with notions of the writing process, as a unitary psychological process that would be somehow more "real"—less school-bound—than previous ways of learning and teaching writing.

After all, Emig's book is not titled The Composing Process but The
Composing Process of Twelfth Graders, middle-class, white, American, Eastern, suburban twelfth graders in English class. She and the other process pioneers did their work on school writing (processes), leaving the study of noncomposition-class and nonschool writing processes to others and leaving the primary composition classroom genre of the essay unchallenged.

In the last decade some research strands in our profession have made great strides in understanding the composing processes of writers outside of composition classes and outside of schools. In this exploratory essay, I want to ask how we can understand the relation between school writing (processes) and the writing processes beyond school and perhaps the relations between them. After all, we have schools, in part, to select and prepare people to enter and transform the processes (writing among them) beyond school. So the relation between school and society, as Dewey put it, is an important one for those who study and teach (the) writing process(es).

Plural Processes and Activity Networks

The great shift in composition studies of the last decade has been from psychology toward sociology and anthropology, where have been marvelous insights. We have learned above all that organizations as well as individuals have writing processes and that analyzing the various writing processes of different networks of human activity—variously theorized as social or discursive practices, communities of practice, or discourse communities—can help us understand how writing works and people work with writing, individually and collectively. Drawing on Vygotskian activity theory, I have used the term activity system to mean collectives (often organizations) of people who, over an indefinite period of time, share common purposes (objects and motives) and certain tools used in certain ways—among these tools—in-use certain kinds of writing done in certain ways or processes. These kinds of writing used in certain ways for certain recurring purposes I have called genres (Russell, "Activity Theory" and "Rethinking Genre"; Berkenkotter and Huckin, Genre Knowledge).

Notice that this definition goes beyond our ordinary sense of genre as a static category of texts that share certain formal features. It includes also processes—uses—of that kind of text. In this sense, a genre
enacts social processes, including composing processes. For example, a list of food items might be a grocery list for a family, a tool for reducing temptation for a weight-loss group, an order form for buyers employed by supermarkets, or an invoice for the supplier (Witte). Each of these genres operationalizes routine interactions—processes—with and within supermarkets. But each does so differently for a different activity system, according to the object and motive of the activity system, its history and current conditions—constraints and affordances on action, including those actions of writing (processes). Genres and the social (writing) processes they enact are dynamic, always capable of changing, though always capable of being (temporarily) stabilized as their conditions of use are stabilized. An activity system is a unit of analysis of social and individual behavior, something like a discourse community, but it allows us to think about tools without confining ourselves to discourse and about people who interact purposefully without confining ourselves to the warm and fuzzy notion of community (see Harris, "The Idea").

When we view the research literature on writing in organizations through this theoretical lens, it turns out that there is a glorious diversity of genres, of writing processes, which can be analyzed in terms of their sociologies, to borrow sociologies Bruno Latour's term, as well as in terms of the individual psychology of the writer. Within an organization (an activity system) and among organizations (activity systems) there are a range of genres that form a complex system of genres, mediating the interactions of people and facilitating their collaborative (and competitive) work (Bazerman, "Systems of Genres").

To take only one example, Jone Rymer has shown that the writing processes of internationally known scientists differ a great deal not only according to the personality of the scientist, his or her individual routines (habits, processes) of writing, but also according to the organization of the laboratory and its relation to other organizations (activity systems), such as other laboratories, grant agencies, universities, and so on. It is highly collaborative, structured by the hierarchical division of labor in the lab. For example, the subgenres of data charts and methods sections (within the genre of the experimental article) are roughed out by those who collected the data. One main writer, the senior scientist, does the title, introduction, discussion, and abstract (other parts or subgenres) (223). The processes she describes are not much like the conventional writing-process sequence that we com-
positionists describe for writing in schools. There are a number of genres (oral, written, visual, manual) that work together in a complex system to produce a research article in such laboratories.

Plural writing processes (genre systems) mediate work within many activity systems. In most activity systems of business and government, revision is accomplished by means of "document cycling," a sequence of revisions—sometimes highly formalized—that allows a document to be developed and negotiated among different people and departments within an organization. Again there are great differences according to the division of labor in what is sometimes called the "discourse community" (Harris, "The Idea"; Kent, "On the Very Idea"). Susan Kleimann, for example, describes two work groups within the U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) who use, respectively, highly collaborative and highly hierarchical document cycling, with complex effects on the writing processes of members of the two groups.

The complex negotiations within organizations using various genres (and writing processes) involve the flows of power, extending to the most minute decisions about texts and their processes of composition. For example, Smart describes the way bank managers interact with their research staffs, who prepare written reports that are used by the managers, through oral genres of discussion, to make policy decisions. The expectations of managers condition the writing processes of their research staffs in powerful ways, as the writing of research staffs conditions the oral genres of policy decision making of managers.

Moreover, we have found that there are plural (and interacting) writing processes—and genre systems—not only within organizations (or, more broadly, activity systems) but among them. As one activity system interacts with others, genres mediate those interactions and the writing processes of participants. As complex organizations (activity systems) interact with other organizations and individuals (consumers, clients, patients, citizens), systems of genres and writing processes evolve, as in Devitt's study of accountants ("Intertextuality"), Bazerman's study of patent approvals ("Systems of Genres"), or Van Nostrand's study of scientific granting agencies. Paré's (1993) study of social workers writing the genre of the Predisposition Report to guide judges in sentencing juvenile offenders shows how their typical writing process is conditioned by legal, professional, and family activity systems on the boundary of activity systems of social work.

Writing processes (and genre systems) are not only plural but chang-
ing. As social practices (activity systems) change over time, historically, so also their writing processes (and genre systems) change, sometimes in a gradual evolution and sometimes in a rapid revolution. The growing number of synchronic case studies of plural writing processes are being complemented by a growing number of diachronic studies of changing writing processes. For example, Yates (1990) has shown how writing in organizations evolved in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with changes in technology (e.g., vertical files, typewriters, printing presses) and social organization (large corporate and governmental networks organized hierarchically and controlled through new genres). Bazerman (Shaping Written Knowledge) chronicled the genre and activity of the scientific article, in its change from letters exchanged among seventeenth-century amateurs to a complex intertextual network of experimental articles characterized by complex cycles of review, revision, and credit in the twentieth century. The work of Haas (Technology) and others on writing and computers is yielding similar insights into the ways activity systems change their writing processes with the introduction of that family of tools we call "computers."

We have learned that answering the following questions matters a great deal: What kind of writing does the writer process, for whom and for what purposes? We cannot know the writer apart from the genres in use, any more than we know the cancer from the dance, to paraphrase W. B. Yates.

The Writing Processes (Genre Systems) of Formal Schooling: Commodification

To understand students' writing, we need to trace its comings and goings, its circulation in social networks (activity systems), in and out of, around and through schools. We need to examine the sociologies of the process approach and the ways in which (and reasons why) its formulation of writing has come to be treated as the writing process—in many activity systems of U.S. formal schooling, of textbook publishing, and of composition studies.

The work on writing processes in organizations suggests that the discipline of U.S. composition studies, like other activity systems, also has genre systems, systems that interact with the wider activity
systems of formal schooling in complex ways, through composition courses, writing centers, WAC programs (though composition studies is also influencing nonschool activity systems of business, government, and nonprofit organizations, through communications consulting, the Society for Technical Communications, IEEE, community literacy projects, etc.).

Over the last twenty years, the pioneering research on the composing process came to be treated as the writing process through a process of commodification, long studied in other disciplines but little noticed or studied in composition (Myers; Fahnestock). The discipline of composition studies, like other disciplines, commodifies the products of its research and theory to make them useful to practitioners, clients, customers, students. In a process described first by sociologists of science, the genres of core researchers in a discipline (e.g., research articles) are translated into other genres for practitioners (e.g., research reviews, instructions, teachers' manuals, etc.) and for consumers of various kinds, such as customers (trade book popularizations, warning labels, advertising), clients (intake forms, brochures), and beginning students (teaching materials, Cliff's Notes, and—most predominately—textbooks).

By deploying different discursive tools in various (temporarily) stabilized genres, researchers mediate different boundary interactions among activity systems, those of core researchers with other core researchers, certainly, but also core researchers with practitioners, such as teachers, and of practitioners with students. Though textbooks have been criticized for presenting a discipline as a seamless structure of unchallenged facts, it is important to understand that while the textual commodification of disciplinary practice may reify and bury important social actions, commodification in some form or another grows out of the differences in interactions and is therefore necessary for different people in different though linked activity systems, each with different objectives and motives, to make use of the statements of core researchers. Given the specialization of labor, it would be impossible for students—or even most teachers (practitioners)—to have had a history of interactions sufficient to understand research articles, to follow the network far enough to make sense of a highly specialized activity system's genres. And it would be extremely inefficient for core researchers to write journal articles so that introductory students could read them. Articles would be as long as textbooks, and textbooks
would be as long as encyclopedias. Textbooks and teachers' manuals and research reviews could not give a full account of writing processes any more than a company could package a tube of toothpaste in such a way as to allow consumers to know the history of that product's development and the complex issues relating to its testing and uses.

This is not to say that textbooks and other genres that commodify researcher knowledge cannot give students useful insight into the social workings of a discipline—and through sidebar vignettes, for example, some textbooks explicitly do. But even such accounts are commodified versions of the work that core researchers have done. The solution is not to shorten the network of disciplinary influence but to provide more useful tools ("knowledge" about writing processes) for more consumers of composition studies' intellectual products, even if those tools are, for beginners just making contact with the discipline, four yellow posters of one word each or the kinds of highly commodified summaries found in teachers' manuals.

Discursive tools of the types found in textbooks (or wall posters) represent the sort of interaction that is sometimes called the "material" or "content" of introductory/general/liberal education. As these metaphors of physical objects suggest, the tools tend to be commodified, stripped of the process of their construction within the activity system, which over a long period of time has gradually made these "facts"—from the past participle of facere, "to act, or do" hence: "what has been done."

This kind of reification/commodification is inevitable if there are to be long networks of interaction, and those long networks are essential for power. Like other disciplines, composition has reified the complexity of research and theory that constitutes its core activity, cooled and hardened the white-hot debates of specialists into useful genres: textbook summaries, instructions, precepts. As the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) research has shown, the process approach has been disseminated rather widely even in elementary and secondary schools in the last decade. Textbooks and classroom practice increasingly include this "content," and there is evidence to suggest that it is being usefully employed to improve students' writing (the process approach is highly correlated with success on the NAEP, at least at grade eight) (Applebee; et al.).

One danger here, as with all learning, is overgeneralizing some processes until they are useless or counterproductive. But there is
nothing inherently wrong with conceptualizing, categorizing, commodifying some production process, some "content." The task for any discipline or profession is to make (facere, "to factualize") the most useful tools, discursive and otherwise, and deploy them to make them more widely useful—lengthen its network of influence, its power. What kind of disciplinary network can keep teachers and their students from holding onto a pedagogy/content, a process/product, when it is no longer useful, as many relics of the past are enshrined in the curriculum (and in cardboard reliquaries tacked to classroom walls)?

I would suggest that the answer to the danger does not lie in throwing out the old content wholesale for some post-old process/content. Such slash-and-burn scholarship, fad-and-fix reform, depletes the energies of all involved without enriching and developing teachers as professionals, as Applebee points out in his superb discussion of the effects of tradition on curriculum remaking. Indeed, rapid change is impossible because in large and complex activity systems such as schools, the new "content" (tools) exists with the old in an eclectic bricolage until eventually it gains hegemony—if it ever does.

In my view, the answer lies in patiently creating a longer and wider network of disciplinary influence (power) through assembling and disseminating useful discursive tools based on research. Composition studies has the potential to help (or impede) students and other writers at all ages, in many disciplines, and in many walks of life—activity systems. But we can realize our potential—broaden our network of influence—only if we know more about (involve ourselves as a discipline with) writing processes in many social practices, many systems of activity, many genres. And we must effectively commodify and disseminate that knowledge, that history of involvement.

In an attempt to overthrow the old order (of schooling), the process pioneers invented a new order of schooling. But in both orders the focus remained on rather traditional humanities schoolroom genres: the personal essay or theme, primarily (Connors, "Personal Writing"). In this regard, sociological/anthropological approaches have given us a fresh way of looking at writing, this time writing in a wider range of genres. Process pedagogy based on individual psychology got us thinking about writing in new ways (and about schooling, as it turns out). And it allowed teachers and students to have a new object: student composition-class writing processes. After Emig and the process pioneers, it was difficult for researchers to look at the old modes in
the same way. Sociological/anthropological approaches have given us a fresh way of looking at writing, as a potentially powerful tool mediating a vast range of human social practices.

This approach too will be commodified into textbooks (and perhaps, somehow, even in elementary school wall posters), if it is successful enough to endure. Like the "facts" promulgated in textbooks and classroom materials in other disciplines, the facts of composition, once they make their way out in a system of useful activity, will be translated, simplified, commodified (after all, not everyone who teaches or learns writing can or would want to read essays like the one you are reading). This is already happening with discipline-specific guides to writing and teaching writing, prompted by the expansion of writing-across-the-curriculum programs and writing-intensive courses (e.g., Pechenick). That is good. It shows the usefulness of the approach.

Going "Beyond" Process

What might it mean, as the title of this collection implicitly asks, to go "beyond" process? From the activity-theory perspective I have been developing here, it means to realize that there are many writing processes, study them, (re)classify them, commodify them, and involve students with (teach) them in a curriculum that is sequenced to lead students from the germ cell of insight into writing processes—the PREWRITE/WRITE/REVISE/EDIT my daughter Madeleine was taught—to a progressively wider understanding of writing processes as they are played out in a range of activity systems in our culture(s).

The insights of research into the writing processes (and genres) in place in an activity system (whether corporate, governmental, political advocacy—or school or classroom) can be taught—perhaps very usefully. Such teaching is beginning to occur in technical and business communications, as well as in WAC/WID research and programs, where the insights of core researchers into writing in relevant activity systems are being commodified and used to improve students' uses of writing to enter and transform those activity systems (see for example, Howard; Pechenick). In doing so, the disciplinary network of composition studies is maturing, extending its network of influence (power) by providing useful tools.

Yet research on writing processes in organizations is still in its in-
fancy. There is crucial work to be done. Though there has been important research in the writing processes (genre systems) of nonacademic settings, there has been comparatively little research into the relation between writing processes in activity systems of academic disciplines, professions, families, neighborhoods and activity systems of formal schooling. Most of the research on the writing process has focused on the classroom. But activity systems of formal schooling form crucial boundaries with other activity systems, those of academic disciplines most directly but also with the professions linked to the disciplines and activity systems of business, industry, government, media, advocacy groups, and so on in which professionals work, as well as the families, neighborhoods, and ethnic communities out of which students come. The dynamic boundary negotiations between school and society, formal schooling and culture, are mediated and (always temporarily) stabilized through systems of written genres (and various writing processes). And, as in nonacademic activity systems, those negotiations within and among activity systems constantly (re)distribute power, constraining and affording writing processes. Here we need research on the broader genre systems (and writing processes) of formal schooling to extend and enrich the usefulness of similar studies in nonacademic activity systems. How is the knowledge in use in these wider activity systems commodified at various levels of schooling, as students learn (or fail to learn) how to write progressively more involving genres within the genre system of a discipline or profession?

Moreover, the complex writing processes and genre systems of classrooms are part of wider genre systems of schools and school systems and national education systems, through which writing (processes) is conditioned in myriad ways institutionally. For example, one crucial but little-studied aspect of the genre systems (and writing processes) of classrooms is their relation to earlier and later classrooms, the movement from K through college—and beyond. The genres of student writing are all reified into a single letter, written on the genre of the report card, which is in turn reified and incorporated intertextually into the genres of transcripts, then diplomas and certificates, then job applications, then school and district and state and national grade reports, then press reports, then other genres of public (political) discourse. School writing (processes) is inevitably conditioned by the need of all industrial societies, whether communist or capitalist, to accomplish the division of labor, to sort students, though that sorting of course
can be carried out in different—better and worse—ways (Marshall, "Schooling").

This sorting in response to activity systems beyond the classroom and beyond wider activity systems of formal schooling begins early and continues through workplace writing processes. To take one early example, Madeleine's teacher had her students prewrite Monday, write Tuesday, revise Wednesday, edit Thursday, and (I learned) grade Friday to meet a district-imposed requirement for progress reporting—the indirect result of the district's boundary interactions with a school-management company, which was in turn profoundly influenced by certain texts of an activity system known as Total Quality Management.

For Madeleine's teacher to change that pedagogical practice, to broaden the ways she treats the writing process, she would not only have to become aware of the range of writing processes to which she could introduce her students, but she would also have to affiliate (network) with other people who could help her change those reporting (sorting) structures (genres) to allow her to restructure the ways writing takes place in the classroom in relation to other classrooms. In other words, the genre system (and writing processes) of grade reporting would have to change so that the students could approach writing in different ways. Of course, that is possible—but not for an individual teacher. It would take a network extending to other teachers and, likely, to administrators, parents, PTAs, school boards, state departments of education, and, perhaps, to legislators and their electorates. To fundamentally alter the writing process in that classroom would take a longer (that is, more powerful) professional network, one that can influence school systems and universities and those other activity systems with which activity systems of formal schooling negotiate power.

Ultimately, teachers must participate in the sorting system or leave teaching, even if teachers have primary control of the assessment system. Because finally they must "teach to the test," they need "a test that is worth teaching to," a way of sorting students that allows students to learn about and develop a range of writing processes (and genres) as they expand their involvements with the various activity systems of their culture, to enter and transform those systems. How can our discipline help to restructure the education system to us to help students (and their teachers, families, friends, and future coworkers) do that?
The Future of Process(es) Approach(es)

There is what some might see as an irony in the way a movement that has as its motive encouraging "real" writing—active, dynamic process—has often been commodified into what looks like a static product. However, as I have tried to suggest, I see no irony, only a process of broadening influence. Hence the task is not to toss out "the process approach," by demarcating a "post-process" era. For in all organizations that interact usefully with other organizations over time, there must be commodification of their discourse to facilitate that interaction. Whatever discourse might replace "the (current) process approach" will also be commodified if it is to have an ongoing usefulness to those outside the core researchers.

The task rather is to extend the activity system of the discipline of composition studies, to offer to teachers and students more and more refined tools for helping people in and entering various activity systems to write and learn to write and transform their activity through writing. Our discipline's motive is to provide tools (commodified knowledge) to other activity systems, so they can better understand and use this marvelous tool called "writing together," to harness for good the variety and power human beings have in this protean technology. And to do so we might do well to understand the (power) relations mediated by the genre systems (writing processes) of school and society.

The most obvious way to see the interaction of activity systems of schooling with boundary activity systems is by studying the ways upper-level students negotiate the boundaries between the genres (and writing processes) of upper-level professional schooling and the genres (and writing processes) of entry-level professional positions. There have been some remarkable recent studies of internships (Winsor; Anson and Forsberg; Dias et al.; Freedman, Adam, and Smart), which describe students/professionals in transition, struggling to make sense of professional networks" writing using the tools they picked up in their schooling. Similarly, studies of the transition from undergraduate to graduate education (Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman; Prior; Blakeslee) have broadened our understanding of the complex play of power and identity with writing processes in complex hierarchical professional networks.

As one moves to earlier levels of schooling, where the classroom
genres and wider institutional genres of sorting are correspondingly diverse and complex, the task of tracing the interactions of school and society through writing (processes) is more difficult. Many studies of writing across the curriculum, including some fascinating longitudinal studies (e.g., Haas, "Learning"; Winsor), emphasize the importance of examining the interplay of activity systems of school, discipline, and work.

When we move to the levels of schooling at which the pioneering research in writing process took place, secondary school and the first year of higher education, there have been relatively few studies that take into account the intertextual genre systems of schooling and the play of power and identity those systems mediate. (The problem is even more pronounced at the elementary and preschool levels [but see Dyson; Green and Dixon].) Part of the difficulty comes from the very persuasiveness of institutional constraints at these levels. It is hard to see the effects of institutional sorting systems on writing and learning. The recent tendency has been to examine the macrolevel constructions of class, race, and gender without looking at the ways the genre systems of formal schooling mediate those constructions, the micro-level social (writing) processes through which power is constantly (re)negotiated and (re)stabilized. As James Marshall put it fourteen years ago, "To speak of composing processes without reference to the schooling which shapes them may well be to isolate an effect from the cause" ("Schooling" 118).

Yet cross-national studies of writing in schooling are beginning to give researchers some perspective and insight into the different ways genre systems of schooling condition student writing (processes) (Vahapasi). Written assessment systems (and their lack) produce genre systems that mediate students' interactions with other students, teachers, administrators, governments, and employers in myriad ways.

In France, for example, Christiane Donahue's comparative research into the genres of student and teacher reading and writing in the transition from secondary education to further schooling suggests that the examination systems (baccalaureate and concours) explicitly structure the genres of student writing in each discipline, though the genres are still more numerous than in U.S. composition classes, where the genres are relatively few but tacitly and comparatively vaguely structured (the essay, the research paper). The writing process is based not so much on revision but on repetition, as students write the genres numerous
times to prepare for the examination. Through frequent repetition, students learn to write the classroom genres quickly, with more explicit plans, greater syntactical parallelism and repetition, more nuanced comparisons and intertextual reference. The editing process is accomplished through quick editing in the copying from a pencil brouillon to an ink examination paper. These school writing processes are conditioned by an education system that is highly structured at the national level, with consistent teacher expectations for students, teacher training using writing, and funding, with greater funds going to designated zones of educational need (Donahue).

In England an examination system of course-work portfolios has grown up over the last twenty years in secondary education, through the influence of James Britton and his colleagues. The portfolios require students to write in a range of generally defined genres. Teachers negotiate the topic and explicit genre of most portfolio pieces with the students and work with them over a two-year course to develop their writing. The students write fewer but much longer pieces than American (or certainly French) students, but the expectations are much higher for the individual pieces. Emphasis is on personal growth without emphasis on process as process, though there is a "hard edge" to the process instruction because the teachers collaboratively grade the student portfolios. Each students portfolio must be judged by the teachers of that course in the school, then a sample of the portfolios goes to progressively higher levels so that there is consistency in grading at the district and national levels—a process called "moderation."

This examination system has led to widespread and profound change in process-writing pedagogy. There is much less presentational teaching and far more small-group and individual instruction. There is much more professional collaboration among teachers to set and maintain high standards because the reputation of the school staff and the teaching profession as a whole depends on their collaborative handling of assessment. A professional career path for teachers is fostered by the moderation and inspection system—handled by classroom teachers. A system of teachers and university teacher trainers has grown up in many parts of the UK that has spread and refined the pedagogy of personal growth through this "hard-edged" writing-process approach (Russell, "Collaborative"; Russell, Lewis, and Riggs; Freedman and McLeod)

In South Africa the vast transition to an ethnically integrated edu-
cation system, combined with extraordinarily complex language issues (there are nine official languages), is producing a widespread rethinking of the role of writing (processes) in education. Under apartheid, the separate and vastly unequal schooling produced the most fundamental barriers to any writing process: many students lacked writing materials (even pencils and paper) and books. Now that institutions of secondary and tertiary schooling have been opened, classes are sometimes huge (an introductory college literature course with six hundred students) and the writing that teachers are able to read is greatly limited. Sometimes writing is limited only to timed examination papers, which has the effect of delaying selection—but not changing the eventual outcome of selection.

In response to this crisis, teachers are searching for ways to allow for some effective intervention in students’ writing processes and a selection system to facilitate that (as well as greater financial resources). For example, there is now a mobile writing center that tours schools, offering students the kind of writing enrichment that bookmobiles provide for readers. Students can find there the writing and reading materials and the expertise that can give them (and their teachers) a richer sense of the writing necessary to enter more fully into the system of schooling through writing (Moore; Shezi).

The People’s Republic of China (Li) is also experiencing a sea change in the role of writing (processes) in schooling. For some two thousand years writing and writing instruction were based on memorization and close imitation of classical (and, in the last fifty years, Maoist) literary models in a relatively few genres. Students learned to write these genres for national examinations, which controlled entrance into further education and leadership positions. As in France, the education system and teacher training are highly centralized. In the last ten years, as part of a drive for modernization, school writing has shifted emphasis from character building to skill training, from literature to communication. For example, in the 1995 examination, for the first time students had to discuss a social issue, medical malpractice. This shift is forcing teachers to rethink the purpose of writing and writing instruction. They may have to develop new pedagogies that will reshape the school writing processes of students in response to new institutional constraints and affordances—and a far richer range of genres (and social practices) that use writing.

These few and preliminary cross-national comparisons of school-
based writing processes suggest the importance of stepping back from the writing process as taught in one's own activity system of schooling to see, with some perspective, the plural sociologies of various networks of people and purposes and tools, including that most protean tool, writing, in the relation between school and society.

The process pioneers began research that reconstructed the object of writing instruction as students, human beings, and not merely texts. That work has been extended to the writing processes (and dynamic genres) of organizations, the sociologies of activity systems, to use the activity-theory formulation. To make lasting changes in writing and learning, composition studies must broaden its study of the microlevel circulation of discursive tools (and power) between school(s) and society(ies) and extend its own tools' usefulness in the activity systems of our culture(s). In doing so, the commodification of writing processes is not an irony to be lamented but a sign of composition's influence to be understood and used, one hopes, for good.