CHAPTER 2

ATTENDING TO THE SUBJECT IN WRITING TRANSFER AND ADAPTATION

Stuart Blythe

> As composition has sought to understand fundamentals like rhetorical situations, literacy development, and genre theory, it has done so by, first, gravitating toward context. Only later does it self-correct to include the impact of the individual learner.
>
> — Driscoll & Wells, 2012

> A good deal of social theory . . . has treated agents as much less knowledgeable than they really are.
>
> — Giddens, 1984

Writing in 1990, Anson and Forsberg could state confidently that "virtually no research . . . has explored the *transitions* that writers make as they move into new and unfamiliar writing contexts" (p. 204). By *transitions*, they meant the ways that students adapted as they moved from classrooms to workplaces. Just over 20 years later, enough research has been reported to prompt Brent's (2011) synthesis of such studies,[1] which he sorts into three categories: *closing-the-gap*, *glass-half-empty*, and *glass-half-full*.

In closing-the-gap studies, Brent says, scholars study workplace communication in part to describe for instructors the activities that happen there (2011, p. 398). Such studies are motivated by at least two major assumptions: (1) teachers of professional writing cannot merely teach a series of idealized, generic forms, and (2) classroom practices should align with workplace practices—at least to some extent (p. 389). A recent example of a closing-the-gap study includes Hannah's (2011) exploration of legal discourse, which he undertook in order to help technical communication students understand the legal implications of their work. Two other examples include Brumberger's (2007) and Kimball's (2013) explorations of visual design practices and lore among practitioners, educators, and students. As Anson and Forsberg have noted, these studies "explore only in a secondary way what it means to become such a writer" (1990, p. 227). In other words, they show what writers do in a

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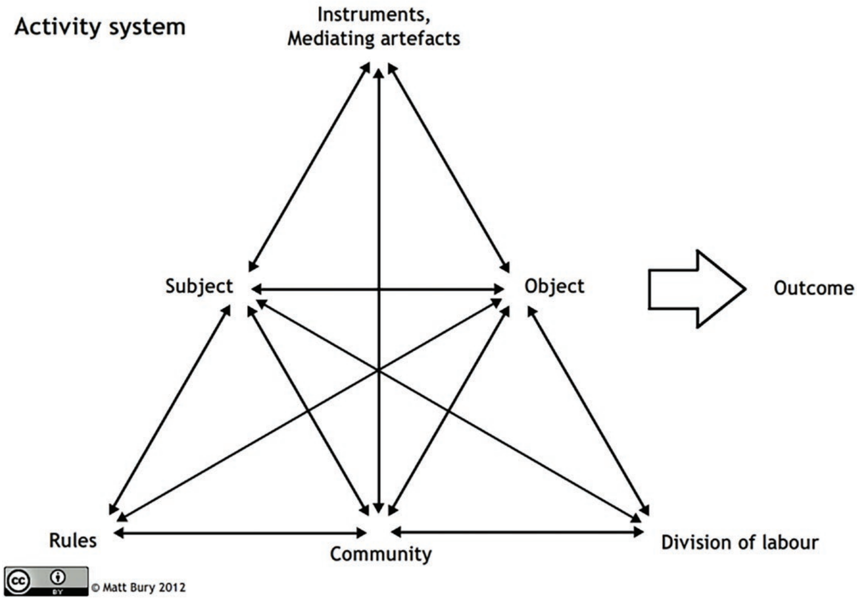

Figure 2.1. Diagram of an Activity System.
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Activity_system.png

given situation without explicitly questioning how a novice may gain entry to it, and perhaps at what costs.

As compared to closing-the-gap studies, Brent says, two other types of studies do question how a novice may gain entry to a new domain. In glass-half-empty studies, scholars conclude that the possibility of transfer seems doubtful, or at least problematic (2011, p. 399). Brent suggests that one reason for such pessimism is the theory that these scholars often invoke. Specifically, studies that fall into this glass-half-empty category are often informed by rhetorical genre theory, activity theory, situated learning theory, or some combination of the three. As Brent argues, these three theories prompt researchers to see rhetorical performances as "deeply bound with particular exigencies" (2011, p. 399). This problem is illustrated by the triangle diagram used to describe third-generation activity theory. Figure 2.1 shows that activity theory includes multiple reminders to examine situational factors such as rules, mediating artifacts, and division of labor. While the triangle offers a powerful heuristic for examining a situation,[2] it does not prompt researchers to consider how a subject adapts from one situation to another. The subject is essentially a black box in the theory.

Influenced in part by activity theory, rhetorical genre theory recognizes that genres are always situated within a specific context, which means that even two seemingly similar types of documents (such as Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion [IMRD] reports) can differ significantly from situation to situation. Freedman, Adam, and Smart (1994) wrote that because of this difference, "None of this [workplace] know-how will have been made available through [in-class] simulations, no matter how realistically or elaborately staged" (p. 221; see also Spinuzzi, 1996, p. 299). This glass-half-empty theory implicitly assumes that students will be unable to compare and contrast one setting and another, which runs the risk described in the epigraph by Giddens (1984).

Whereas glass-half-empty studies are pessimistic about the possibilities of transfer, Brent says glass-half-full studies "show increasing interest in strategies that can, if not be transferred neatly to, at least be reapplied to other situations" (2011, p. 409). In this camp, Brent includes at least two kinds of studies (although he does not explicitly identify this distinction). Some studies, such as those by Artemeva, Logie, and St-Martin (1999) and Russell and Fisher (2009), describe classroom practices designed to facilitate professional writing transfer—practices such as online simulations of workplace scenarios. In contradiction to Freedman et al. (1994), Russell and Fisher argue that the spread of computer-mediated communication and classroom management systems make simulations rich enough to aid a student's ability to adapt learning from one setting to another (2009, p. 5). Brent (2011) himself offers pedagogical advice for facilitating transfer, including mindful abstraction, toward the end of his article.

Another kind of glass-half-full study argues that students may accomplish more than glass-half-empty studies suggest. Whereas the first kind of glass-half-full study focuses on affordances created by instructors and learning systems, this second kind of study assumes that previous studies have underestimated, or overlooked, the adaptability that students bring to new tasks. Brent suggests, for example, that "most students seemed to bring to their workplace environment a flexible rhetorical knowledge" (2012, p. 585). Similarly, Smart and Brown (2002) note that the interns they observed, "having previously developed the expert writing practices needed to perform well in academic activity systems . . . were able to be situate and extend—or reinvent—those practices in their new worksites" (p. 122). That is, students were capable of more than some theorists have suggested.

ATTENDING TO THE SUBJECT IN MODELS OF TRANSFER AND ADAPTATION

If it is true that some social theories may incline researchers toward glass-half-empty studies because they treat the subject as a black box, and if it is true

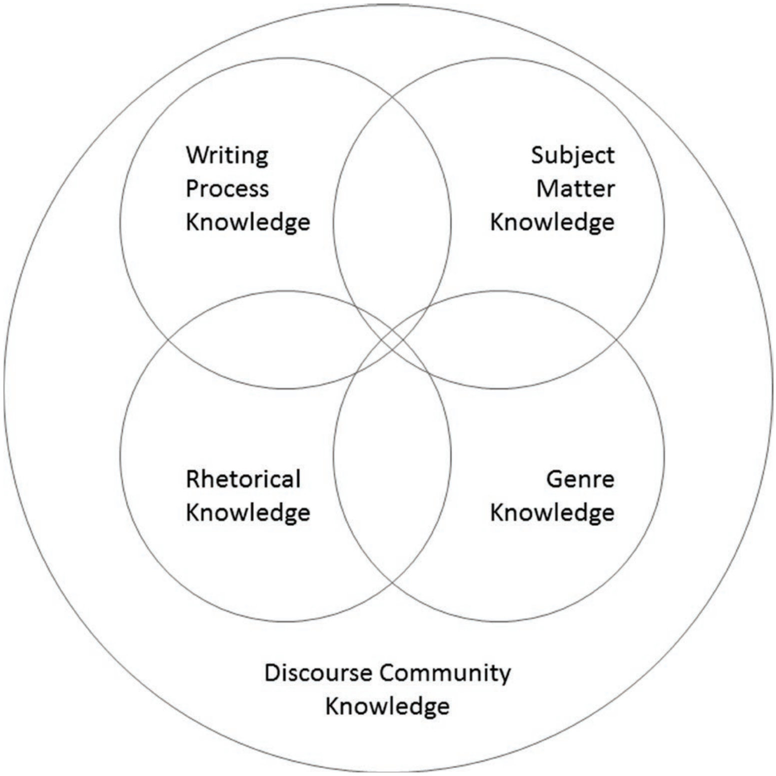

Figure 2.2. Diagram of Beaufort's model of writing expertise (2007, p. 17).

that learners are capable of more than such theories have assumed, then future research into transfer and adaptability in writing—studies informed by social theories of activity or genre—must pay more attention to ways that subjects adapt from one situation to another. Such a model must account for phenomena at several levels: knowledge domains, problem solving, and affordances. In order to engage successfully in a new writing situation, a person must have some grasp of several domains of knowledge, including the subject matter, genre to be produced, and the rhetorical and procedural preferences of a discourse community. In order to put that domain knowledge into practice, a person must be able to solve a problem (or exigence, to use a more neutral term), which includes construing a situation, planning an action, self-regulating as that plan is carried out, and reflecting critically both during and after the fact. In order to be motivated to solve a problem, a person needs to believe that personal and social affordances will make the task possible and worthwhile. Details for these three levels are described in the rest of this section.

Knowledge Domains

As Figure 2.2 illustrates, Beaufort (2007) argues that experienced writers put five domains of knowledge into practice. A theory of writing transfer and adaptation should account for these domains:

- Discourse Community: Beaufort describes a discourse community as a group of people with shared goals, interests, values, and means of communication (p. 18).
- Subject Matter: Members of a discourse community share some degree of background knowledge and awareness of current issues.[3] Such knowledge may also include "knowing how to frame the inquiry, what kinds of questions to ask or analytical frameworks to use in order to 'transform' or inscribe documents with new meaning(s)" (p. 19).
- Genres: Members of a discourse community must also recognize, and know how to compose, preferred forms of discourse (p. 20). *Forms* can refer to macro-level issues—such as the organization and purpose of an IMRD report—to micro-level issues—such as a preference for active versus passive voice.
- Rhetorical Knowledge: Members of a discourse community must understand the purposes of a text, the needs and expectations of relevant audiences, and how best to communicate with that audience. And they must be able to do these things within the material and social limitations of a given situation (p. 20).
- Process Knowledge: Given the material and social limitations of a situation, members of a discourse community must know how to proceed through a rhetorical task (p. 20).

Beaufort claims her taxonomy should be seen as a set of overlapping categories: scholars of writing should not assume "either that those categories are fixed and discreet, or that learning is a rote affair, a matter of simply 'banking' such knowledge" (2007, p. 21). This makes Beaufort's choice of a Venn diagram an appropriate image for her model, which provides a rich picture of the concepts and assumptions that writers must call upon. But, like the activity theory triangle, Beaufort's Venn diagram leaves the subject underdeveloped. In a sense, her model accounts for macro-level issues without offering a vocabulary for describing other meso- and micro-level issues, such as problem solving and motivation.

Problem Solving

As Brent (2011) and Billet (2012) note, the literature on learning and problem solving is remarkably consistent—at least in its general outline. Despite the use of "distinct concepts and epistemological positions," Billet writes, most descriptions of problem solving and learning "refer to the same foundational processes; that is, individuals aligning what they experience with what they know and acting upon what they have experienced" (2012, p. 9). A comparison of Billet's model with Anson and Forsberg's (1990) illustrates this point. Billet's model of problem solving has these parts:

- **Construal** occurs when individuals "seek to comprehend, categorize, identify and/or recognize what they encounter" (2012, p. 11)—that is, when individuals attempt to make sense of a new situation by recalling previous, potentially related experiences.
- **Reconciliation** occurs when individuals attempt to align "what is experienced with what [they] know about what has been comprehended, categorized, identified or otherwise recognized" (2012, p. 11)—that is, when individuals attempt to align a new situation with their memories of past experiences (memories evoked during construal).
- **Construction** occurs when individuals "generat[e] a particular response as a result of the reconciliation process" (2012, p. 12). Of many possible responses, one may involve "selectively deciding whether this task is worth investing energy in" (2012, p. 12).

Writing more than 20 years before Billet, Anson and Forsberg (1990) identify similar phases in an intern's transition to the workplace:

- **Expectation** occurs, usually before the internship begins, when "the writer builds a vision, that is, a social construct, of him- or herself working and writing in a new professional setting" (p. 208). Anson and Forsberg's *expectation* sounds like a moment of the phase Billet (2012) calls *construal*. Both phases involve anticipating and categorizing experiences.
- **Disorientation** occurs when an individual realizes that his or her expected construct clashes with the realities of the workplace. "And this in turn can lead to intense frustration and a sense of failure" (Anson & Forsberg, 1990, p. 208). This sounds like a phase that occurs during what Billet (2012) calls *reconciliation*, when an intern realizes that his or her attempt to align a new situation with past experiences may be more difficult than expected.

- **Transition and resolution** occur "as the writer begins to establish a role and forms new knowledge for adaptation" (Anson & Forsberg, 1990, p. 208). As this phase progresses, an intern "may begin to take on greater initiative, understanding what is expected and forming new self-concepts" (Anson & Forsberg, 1990, p. 208). To do this, an intern must of course *construct* a response to the disorientation.

In Billet's and Anson and Forsberg's taxonomies, the initial phases of problem solving occur when an individual perceives a situation and a problem to be solved within it. That person then calls upon memories of previous experiences to try to make sense of the one currently being faced. If a person decides to proceed, he or she creates, executes, and monitors a reaction—a process that Anson and Forsberg call *transition and resolution* and that Billet calls *reconciliation* and *construction*.

The terms used to describe the phases of problem solving begin to paint a picture of subjects working within novel or familiar domains of knowledge. This description could be taken even further with Bandura's (2001) social-cognitive model of human agency. Bandura's model has four parts:

- **Intention** is a representation of a future course of action and a "proactive commitment to bringing it about" (2001, p. 6). In this phase, a person constructs a plan in response to an exigence and also decides whether such a plan is worth pursuing at all. This could be considered a first sub-step in Billet's (2012) construction phase and Anson and Forsberg's (1990) transition and resolution phase.
- **Forethought** occurs when the intention is converted into "motivators and regulators of behavior" (Bandura, 2001, p. 7). If a subject decides that a response is worth pursuing, he or she anticipates the most advantageous way to act on her intentions.
- **Self-reactiveness** occurs when a person carries out intention through those motivators and regulated behaviors (Bandura, 2001, p. 8). This is similar to what Schön (1983) would call reflection-in-action. Self-reactiveness occurs as a person continually monitors behavior.
- **Self-reflectiveness** occurs a bit later than self-reactiveness. Self-reflectiveness is the metacognitive capability that occurs when an individual "reflect[s] upon oneself and the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions" (Bandura, 2001, p. 10).

Whether one would want to use Bandura's categories in addition to Billet's would of course depend on the level of detail, the granularity, needed to describe human behavior in a particular study. A researcher could decide even to go one step further.

Personal and Social Affordances

First introduced by Norman (1990), an affordance is a perception that leads a subject to believe that an action is possible. Under this definition, an affordance is not objective; it is perceptual. The important question is whether a subject perceives that certain factors will make the effort worthwhile. If, as Billet says, individuals must "selectively decide whether a task is worth the trouble" (2012, p. 12), then they must perceive in most cases that a task can be accomplished through their own efforts. Personal affordances are those beliefs, those habits of mind, that may incline a person to act. Driscoll and Wells (2012) offer a helpful description of such habits of mind. Personal affordances also include concepts relating to self-efficacy and writing (see, for instance, Maimon (2002) and McCarthy, Meier & Rinderer (1985)).

Not only are there internal, psychological affordances (such as self-efficacy), but also the situation itself may provide affordances—assuming that the subject perceives them. As Billet argues, a subject's ability to adapt must be mediated "both internally (i.e., intra-psychologically) as well as inter-psychologically (from suggestions beyond individuals)" (2012, p. 6). In the case of a new intern, that student needs to perceive that resources are available to help—resources such as mentors, generic models, and reliable sources of subject matter content. In other words, a subject must perceive that he or she is up to the task, not only through his or her own abilities, but also because the situation will make it possible to employ those abilities fruitfully.

Assembling the Model

Taking into account problem solving and personal and social affordances, a more detailed picture of the subject can be developed and placed at the center of Beaufort's (2007) diagram. Figure 2.3 offers a sense of an individual subject acting within the five domains of knowledge. The boxes to the left in the figure are like an inset on a map. This figure is an attempt to "open" that black box which has remained closed in some social theories of activity. By opening that box, researchers may be able to construct a more detailed understanding of how subjects adapt to new writing situations. This possibility is demonstrated in the remainder of this chapter.

SEEKING EVIDENCE OF TRANSFER AND ADAPTATION IN VIDEO JOURNALS

Brent (2011, 2012) argues that transfer and adaptation will be visible if researchers look in the right places and in effective ways—an assertion similar to Anson

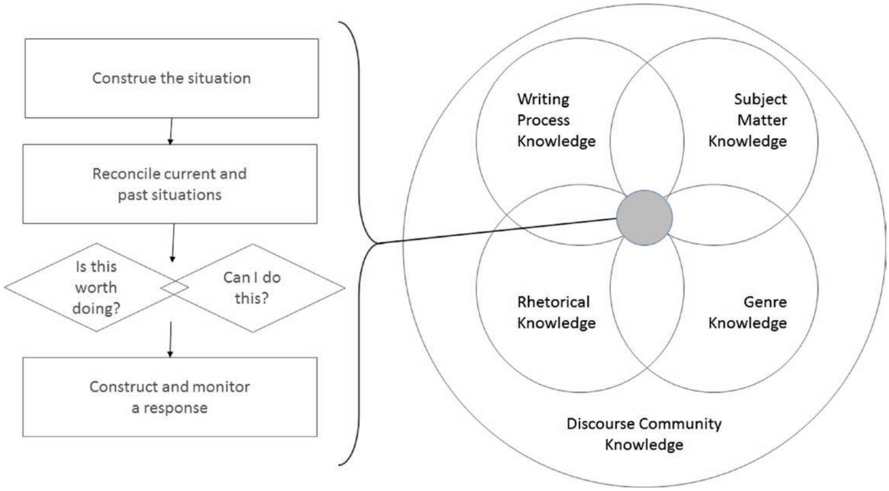

Figure 2.3. Attending to the subject within Beaufort's model of writing expertise. Based on Beaufort's (2007) model of writing expertise.

and Forsberg's (1990). In both cases, researchers claim that transfer will be visible if one looks for "an ongoing process of adapting to a social setting, involving not only the idiosyncratic textual features of a discourse community but a shifting array of political, managerial, and social influences as well" (Anson & Forsberg, p. 225). In this section, I will use the concepts developed previously to analyze a collection of screencast video journals created by professional writing interns during the 2011–2012 academic year. These interns represent two different professional writing programs—my own at Michigan State University and another the University of California, Santa Barbara.[4]

In both cases, the interns were required to use screencast software to create regular video journal entries. They were encouraged to use screencast software called Jing®, which at the time enabled students to create audio-video recordings from their computer screens. Using Jing, students could present any number of windows on their computer screen and narrate as they went along. Interns at one campus were each required to create six journals throughout the semester. Interns at the other campus were required to create three. In all, more than 120 separate video journals were created.

Students had some flexibility in creating their video journals. They were given a handout with a series of prompts (see Appendix B). Among those prompts were these:

- Document your work on a particular writing task. Possible tasks include such activities as writing an introduction or conclusion, searching for credible information, deciding how to organize information, and managing multiple documents.
- Document your reaction to feedback from your supervisor.
- Document and reflect on a classroom-workplace disconnect by completing sentences like these:
  - In . . . class, I learned . . .
  - But at work, it's different because . . .
- Here's how I've resolved that disconnect . . .

Students were also given a few guidelines for creating the screencasts. Specifically, students were encouraged to mix images and words and to show something new (i.e., the on-screen images should change) at least every minute—preferably more. Students were also encouraged to show themselves in action. For example, instead of simply saying, "I wrote a press release" and showing the finished press release, students were encouraged to say, "Here's how I began to write a press release" and then to show examples (if they looked for examples) and talk about the features they noticed in them. A student might even say something like, "Given what I noticed, here's how I started writing," and then type an intro paragraph.

The rationale behind using video journals comes from Geisler and Slattery (2007) and Swarts (2004). Namely, the affordances of screencasts change the dynamic of what gets recorded and how it is understood, because screencasts (which Geisler and Slattery call *video screen capture*) can gather a variety of phenomena simultaneously, including keystrokes, mouse movement, transitions between various windows, and student commentary. (See also Vincelette & Bostic, 2013.) As Figure 2.4 illustrates, students could show multiple files as they talked about their work. The window to the left in Figure 2.4 shows a document that a student was asked to edit, and the window to the right shows a memo that the student wrote for her supervisor in response to that editing task. During the video, the student described her editing process and explained why she made the changes and wrote the queries that she did. Through this process, we hoped that using screencasts to create a journal entry, or simply turning on the screencast software to record writing activity, "would make visible phenomena that might otherwise have gone unnoticed" in traditional journals and work logs (Geisler & Slattery, p. 187). That is, screencast journals promised to alter the dynamic of traditional work logs and internship journals.

The screencasts replaced traditional work logs but supplemented other relatively standard assignments during the semester: namely a learning goals memo, a mid-semester progress report, and a final reflection. In other words, the data

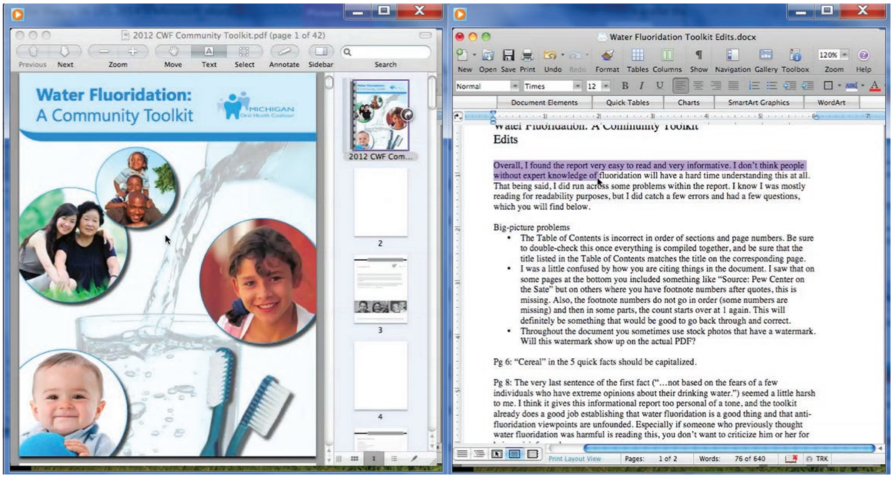

Figure 2.4. Screencasting enables students to narrate as they show multiple files, point to specific places in those files, and even create new files.

for this study are similar to data gathered by Anson and Forsberg (1990) and Smart and Brown (2002). In addition, students in the internship courses were required early in the semester to read Anson and Forsberg (1990) and complete a quiz on the reading. Students were asked to respond to four questions:

1. Anson and Forsberg say that interns went through "a cycle of transition" that included three phases. Name those three phases and describe each one briefly (a couple sentences for each).
2. Have you experienced, or are you experiencing, any of the three phases that Anson & Forsberg describe? If so, which? What's happening? Or what happened?
3. During interviews with Anson and Forsberg, some students reported feeling occasional frustration. What caused their frustrations? How did they overcome them?
4. How might reading about the experiences of students described in Anson and Forsberg help you anticipate what will happen in your internship?

WHAT THE DATA SUGGEST ABOUT TRANSFER AND ADAPTATION

In this section, evidence of transfer and adaptation is presented primarily in vignettes. One of the challenges inherent in presenting data on transfer is the fact that such data is often best understood in narrative form. To find indications of construal, reconciliation, and construction, one needs to look for stories in which characters (subjects) face some challenge and attempt to resolve it. For that reason, this section is arranged into vignettes, which are grouped into sets that best illustrate certain aspects of problem solving, though the vignettes typically show more than one type of action.

Indications of Construal and Reconciliation

The screencasts show how students understand their attempts to construe and reconcile new writing situations. Some accounts from the screencasts illustrate this clearly, although they do not reveal what influenced each act of construal—that is, they do not indicate what kinds of previous knowledge students are calling upon. The next two vignettes illustrate this point.

- One of Emily's primary responsibilities at her internship was to seek ideas and write stories for an organization's newsletter. In one article, she wrote about a town that acted in a way that opposed the values that her organization promotes. As she construed the situation, Emily thought newsletter readers might be interested in this conflict between the town's actions and her organization's values. Her supervisor disagreed, saying that newsletter articles should be "positive." The articles should not describe situations that might present a challenge to the organization's mission and values. Emily discarded her first article and then wrote a new one.
- Irene described writing a letter to alumni of the on-campus program for which she worked. Irene started the letter by inviting them to send information. Her version of the letter began, "We miss having you on campus and would like to know what you're doing." It then invited readers to fill out an enclosed form. Next, the letter described a recent event sponsored by the program. Irene believed this to be the most effective arrangement of the letter because, as she construed the situation, she worried that readers would be uninterested in the event and not read the entire letter. She worried that they would miss the invitation to send in the response card, which she construed as the primary purpose of the letter. Irene's supervisor disagreed and asked that the order be changed. He wanted the event description (which he called "the give") first, and the invitation (which he called the "ask") second. Because he referred to "the give" and "the ask," it seems likely that Irene's supervisor had a generic arrangement in mind. Although

Irene was not convinced that the supervisor's arrangement was best, she revised the letter according to his preferences.

Although the two preceding cases do not reveal exactly *where* each student gained the knowledge that she used to construe the task, they do reveal students' conscious efforts at understanding the rhetorical situation and constructing an appropriate response. In other cases, students identify the previous knowledge and experiences that they called upon in order to construe a rhetorical situation.

- Janice worked for a state senator during her internship. One of her most common tasks involved responding to constituents' letters. Janice said that learning about "*ethos, pathos,* and *logos*" was important for her. She claimed that she had learned about these concepts in a sophomore-level introduction to professional writing class, and that she had later encountered the concepts in two other professional writing courses. She explained that she was always careful to have each letter address the reader's comments and questions (*logos*), use credible sources of information (*ethos*), and convey a sense that the senator understood the constituent's concerns (*ethos* and *pathos*). In this case, Janice used past lessons to guide the construction of constituent letters.
- Hillary was asked to create an online feedback-reporting form that would allow members of a steering committee to gather and eventually analyze information. The form gathered feedback submitted by people on campus and presented it in tabular layout for the committee to use. Hillary said that her process of composing and testing the form was influenced by lessons she had learned about usability and web design in a core professional writing course on web authoring. Hillary perceived that lessons about usability could be adapted from a previous situation (testing websites) to the current situation (testing a form).
- Ed's task in his internship was to review and revise a set of fundraising letters for a local public broadcasting station. His supervisor wanted to know two things: (1) whether the letters could be worded and arranged more effectively, and (2) whether each letter was being sent at the most appropriate time. To do that, Ed began by recalling how a junior-level course on writing for non-profits had taught him to start a job by reviewing an organization's communication assets because a lot of "the values of the organization . . . comes out in the communication materials." He also said that he had learned basic principles for writing fund appeals and that the course "has definitely been one of my best resources" during the internship.

- Karen was asked by her supervisor to create a list of concerts and promoters for the upcoming year. The music promotion group for which she worked wanted to know what other groups were doing. Although Karen began by creating a text-only list, she eventually created a spreadsheet in Excel. In one of her screencasts, she compares the columns of her Excel spreadsheet to the sections of a research paper. Column headings, Karen says, are like subject headings. And the text in each column is like paragraphs in a section. In construing her writing task, Karen construes connections between one genre and form (the research paper) and another (the Excel list of tour promoters and acts).

In cases such as these, the screencasts suggest that students do draw upon their memories of previous experiences and genres. Sometimes, though, students' attempts to construe and reconcile a new task were not so successful, at least not immediately.

- Sally reported that she had been asked to write a press release at her internship. Because she had learned to write press releases in an advertising class, she felt that she understood the genre. She construed her current writing task as something nearly identical to a previous writing task. Sally created a text that was divided into sections such as news facts, quotations, and links for more information. It was essentially a collection of lists with information that someone else could use to combine into a story. When Sally showed this press release to her supervisor, she was surprised to hear the supervisor ask for a "traditional" press release. Instead of lists, the supervisor wanted Sally to write an article—in narrative, journalistic style—that other media outlets could quickly adapt. Sally's attempt to construe the situation misfired, so she had to reconcile her previous expectations with her supervisor's feedback. In response, Sally constructed a more traditional press release that read like an article.

Similar to Irene's case, Sally had misconstrued the genre expectations of her supervisor. Sally said that this experience taught her something about genre knowledge and construing new writing tasks. In the future, she said, she would "ask first" when writing a genre for the first time in a workplace, even if she thought she had written that genre elsewhere before.

Indications of Construction and Self-Correction

Many of the screencasts offer evidence that students consciously monitor their responses and self-correct as they go.

- Karen, who had been asked to compile a list of major promoters of live music, began by cutting and pasting from promoters' websites into a text-only file. Eventually, Karen realized that her text-only file would not be the most useful format for her employer, so she opened an Excel spreadsheet and created her own "note-taking structure." This suggests that Karen was monitoring her work as she went along, and that she was willing to self-correct when she believed it would be necessary.
- In Sally's first screencast, she described sending a draft to her supervisor because "she [the supervisor] hadn't given me much direction about it, so I didn't really know exactly what she was looking for." The video shows how Sally sent the draft with a note that said, "I have attached what I have so far for the New Hires article. I wasn't sure how many of the quotes you wanted me to include from the press release and how long you wanted the article to be, so if you want me to change anything I can do that." Sally attempted self-correction here by calling upon her supervisor. In other words, Sally suspected that she needed to self-correct, but she did not know how to tell for sure. As a consequence, she called upon her supervisor.
- Like Sally, Janice sought to begin a process of self-correction by contacting her supervisor. She said she had been instructed "to contact the policy analyst for the democratic staff [and gain knowledge from her]." After the call, Janice wrote her response. But "when I sent it in for approval, . . . my supervisor said 'you know, you didn't really answer his question.'" Although Janice said that this response was initially unexpected, she recognized the supervisor's point. Janice agreed that she had not really answered the question.

In cases such as these, students self-correct either through their own assumptions (in Karen's case) or by submitting their work to others. When students submit work to others, they are calling upon what they perceive to be social affordances.

Indications of Social Affordances

The fact that students so often submit their work to supervisors for feedback suggests that supervisors are perceived as social affordances. They are a part of the social setting that makes self-correction possible.[5] Students draw on other types of social affordances, as well.

- Irene told of being asked to write a newsletter article but being given no other direction, so she called on affordances familiar to her. "I did what I do a lot with our social media anyway," she said, which was to go to the offices of the college newspaper and start researching the countries represented by the center for which she worked. In order to write an article with "a different spin," Irene started looking for countries that are "underrepresented" in the part of the world covered by her program. She soon found a story about a band from that part of the world. She saw that they were on tour, so she found their blog and put together a list of questions that she sent to them via email. "I got their email address, which I felt like a creep doing because I had to stalk them through Facebook and MySpace," Irene said. In other words, Irene perceived that she had a number of networked affordances that would enable her to write an article, even when the assignment was "vague." These were affordances that she had called upon in previous tasks (what she "did with social media anyway").

- Whereas Irene used social media, Ed used several print resources to learn about fundraising. Ed consulted Warwick's (2001) *How to Write Successful Fundraising Letters* and Flesch's (1963) *How to Write, Think, and Speak More Effectively*. Through those books, Ed said he gathered genre knowledge, which he combined with his study of actual rates of response to the letters that his employer sent in the last year. Ed eventually spoke about "accomplishing a partnership with the reader" of a letter and creating "a strong you-and-I relationship." Mention of a you-and-I relationship suggests that Ed had adapted knowledge gained from the texts he consulted. It is the kind of jargon common in texts about fundraising.

Social affordances are so important that their absence can significantly affect a student's work. This was evident in the videos produced by Gwendolyn. In her first video of the semester, Gwendolyn said she was waiting for the director of the non-profit to return from vacation. In the meantime, she said, she was doing grunt work such as cleaning out file cabinets. She claimed that this situation was "a little frustrating." By her second video, Gwendolyn said that "things are starting to move along, which I'm so grateful for." She had to assemble a list of media contacts. She showed how she searched for that information, and what she did when she could not find information right away. In the third video, it seems probable that Gwendolyn will not have any significant writing tasks. In two cases, she is allowed to try to revise documents that already exist: a flier and a brochure. Because Gwendolyn compares the existing draft to her revision, viewers can see the work for themselves. The revisions seem half-hearted. They are not as fully developed, or visually attractive, as the originals. Gwendolyn points out that the group she works for already has a person on the team who designs the brochures and fliers. Gwendolyn knows that her flier is just a demo "to show them sort of what I could do." By the fourth video, it is obvious that her fliers were not accepted. She said she did not get to design new fliers for another campaign. By the end of the semester, Gwendolyn simply hopes that, at best, she can create something to put in her portfolio.

Gwendolyn's story is remarkable because of its lack of affordances. Of the 10 students completing internships that semester, Gwendolyn was the only one who never mentioned feedback from a supervisor. It seems that she was hired to do office work and that her writing tasks were never genuine—at least the writing tasks she documented in her internship videos and reports were not. Although she may have been motivated to construe, reconcile, and construct, the videos suggest that Gwendolyn never perceived an adequate set of affordances to motivate her (she was only revising texts that the group already liked) or to self-correct (she never mentions calling on others, or on other texts, to help her create her revisions).

CONCLUSION

If schools of thought such as activity theory and rhetorical genre theory underestimate the subject, while cognitive theories underestimate context, then we need ways to meld the study of subject and context. One way to achieve this would be to integrate sets of terminology. For example, activity theory and problem solving. Figure 2.1 shows common terminology from activity theory. The terminology I have used in this paper (construing a situation, reconciling it with previous situations, deciding whether action is worth taking, and then monitoring that action) can be seen as an extension of the activity theory diagram. Specifically, the terminology unpacks the "Subject" in the diagram. Another way to meld subject and context—a way I'm only able to suggest here—could be to adopt an ecological approach to the study of writing transfer and adaptation. According to Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, and Papper (2008) such an approach acknowledges that "the writer is always interdependent with a web of semiotic-material practices" (p. 395). In such a model, *interdependence* becomes a primary term, one that places subject and context in relationship to one another. The nature of those relationships depends on *feedback,* on ways that people react to the social and physical settings in which they work (p. 396). Both Billet (2012) and Bandura (2001) include terminology to describe ways that individuals monitor and adjust their behaviors. In other words, their theories attend to feedback. The fact that these sets of theories share an interest in feedback and adaptation suggests that an ecological theory of writing, combined with an ecological approach to research, would be a stronger, more detailed approach than any separate theory described in this chapter. As researchers continue to study writing transfer, therefore, we need to take up an ecological mindset.

NOTES

1. Transfer is tied up with one sense of our mission in US higher education. As Derrida (1992) noted, citing Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), universities are designed to legitimate two groups: members of its academic disciplines, and members of professions (pp. 4–5). When it comes to legitimizing members of its own disciplines, faculty have a rather free hand. In my own program, for example, my colleagues and I are authorized to define and enforce the terms by which potential colleagues (graduate students) become actual colleagues (doctors of philosophy). When it comes to "creating public titles of competence" for undergraduates, things are not always so clear (Derrida, 1992, p. 5). In the case of professions such as engineering, nursing, and accounting, the public titles of competence (the ones that really count in the workplace) are granted by a professional organization or the state. Worries about transfer are, in part, worries about that second mission.
2. Readers of this chapter may be interested in Spinuzzi's (2011) essay on the "object" of activity theory research. Spinuzzi argues that "activity," the object of study in activity theory, was more clearly bounded in the past that it is now.
3. Knowledge of discourse community and subject matter has been the crux of at least one glass-half-empty argument. E.D. Hirsch, Jr. (1983), argues that "important aspects of reading and writing skills are not transferable" because such skills require subject matter knowledge unique to each situation (p. 164). Process knowledge seems unimportant to Hirsch. Instead, writers must grasp the "subtlety and complexity of what can be conveyed" within a particular topic, as well as "the amount of relevant tacit knowledge that can be assumed in readers" (1983, p. 165).
4. My partner in this research for the past couple years has been Madeleine Sorapure at the University of California, Santa Barbara.
5. Students often mentioned positive feedback from supervisors, as well. Emily, who had to discard a newsletter article and write a new one, received from her supervisor a forwarded email from a constituent praising the most recent edition of the newsletter. Along with forwarding the message, the supervisor had written, "Kudos!"

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