

## C Session Abstract

### ***Plenary Session: Writing in multiple contexts: Vygotskian CHAT meets the phenomenology of genre***

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Texts largely structure the activity of the modern world and--a fortiori--the post-modern world, with its reliance on hypertextual networks. But they do so always in contexts--often in multiple contexts. Texts are given life through activity, through contexts of use. And to study them without studying their contexts (as has often been the case) is to separate writing from its very being. Yet the problem of theorizing context and context-and of operationalizing the theory in empirical research--is one of the thorniest but most important in writing studies. Socio-cultural theories of literacy using Vygotsky and genre theory have been developed in the last 25 years in North America research and applied in a number of fields: primarily organizational (business, technical, and scientific) communication and education (Bazerman & Russell, 2003).

In this paper I sketch out elements of a theory of multiple contexts based on a synthesis of Vygotskian cultural-historical activity theory (growing out of his notion of tool mediation) with a theory of genre as social action (Miller, 1984, 1994) (growing out of Alfred Schutz's phenomenology). The relationship between CHAT and genre as social action has been developed in various ways by many North American writing researchers to provide a principled way of analyzing written texts in their human contexts. I will illustrate my approach to this synthesis with examples from my group's research on higher education and workplace pedagogy: studies of the genre systems of history for undergraduates, and studies of online multimedia simulations we developed to represent engineers' communicative activity within and between complex organizations.