

Applying the ‘Social Turn’ in writing scholarship to perspectives on writing self-efficacy

Kim M. Mitchell

Red River College, Canada
University of Manitoba, Canada

Diana E. McMillan

University of Manitoba, Canada

Michelle M. Lobchuk

University of Manitoba, Canada

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the fit between the cognitive concept of writing self-efficacy and a socially constructed epistemology of writing. Socially constructed perspectives on writing emphasise context and community and include academic literacies, rhetorical genre theory, and the writing across the curriculum movement. These perspectives have been prominent in theoretical discussions of writing since the 1980s. This paper argues that the measurement of writing self-efficacy has continued to prioritise assessing writing self-efficacy as ability to successfully accomplish superficial writing product and process features, while the social context of writing and its resultant impacts on the identity forming, relational, emotional and creative impacts on writing self-efficacy have been largely ignored. The historical context of paradigmatic shifts in writing theory will be discussed with a lens toward proposing a synthesis of three constructionist situated perspectives – activity theory, rhetorical genre theory, and communities of practice – and how these situated perspectives may inform a more complete view of how writing self-efficacy should be assessed and measured. How practitioners may consider the merger of these theories in writing pedagogy will be introduced to inspire future research.

Keywords: writing self-efficacy; social cognitive theory; socially constructed epistemology; academic literacies; activity theory; rhetorical genre theory; communities of practice.

Introduction

In the evolution of writing epistemologies, writing research, which at its origins explored and prioritised writing text as products, evolved to exploring cognitive processes and, more currently, social processes. This evolution is typical of many research movements undergoing paradigm shifts attempting to distance themselves from their epistemologically objectivist origins. Nystrand (2006), in his review, situated the root of the historical context for writing research in the cognitive revolution of the 1960s. In the 1970s, media reports highlighted what was pronounced to be a generalised decline in writing ability in society. A 'literacy crisis' was declared, which placed a spotlight on grammatical correctness, the product elements of writing, thought to be markers of education and social class. It was cognitive process theorists, in particular the work of Flower and Hayes (1981) by defining and describing the recursive processes of planning, composing, and revising, that triggered the recognition that a person sat behind the text produced and that person should be considered in research efforts. Limitations to the cognitive movement quickly became apparent resulting in a push toward perspectives where the writer could be viewed as more than 'an isolated individual struggling to express personal meanings' (Hyland, 2003, p.18).

Writers and writing scholars knew product and cognitive process movements were presenting an incomplete perspective of the complex craft of writing. Cognitive process models failed to explore how language functions in human interaction because they said nothing about how meanings were socially constructed or how forces outside the individual guided motives, built relationships, and influenced writing (Hyland, 2003). There are several defining moments in the shift from objectivist (product) perspectives on writing to constructionist (social) perspectives: the development of the writing across the curriculum movement in the US in the 1970s (Russell et al., 2009); the evolution of genre theory from a movement that looked exclusively at textual features and conventions to a perspective of social action (Miller, 1984); and the academic literacies perspective in the UK which mirrored the North American movements (Lea and Street, 1998) – to name a few. Social

movements focused on describing how writing was socially situated in communities where products and processes would shapeshift from context to context. Collectively, they evolved in response to the recognition that there was no single recipe to develop writing in post-secondary student populations.

Nystrand's (2006) description of the evolution of writing research from product, to process, to social process, mirrored Lea and Street's (1998) seminal discussion of academic literacies, which evolved through three, non-mutually exclusive phases. First, Lea and Street highlighted study skills (or product focused) approaches, where writing errors were viewed as 'a kind of pathology' (p.59). Study skills perspectives were followed by the academic socialization perspective which acknowledged the disciplinary factors in written communication; Russell et al. (2009) related academic socialization to understanding the genres specific to the discipline. Academic socialization, in parallel to the social cognitive movement in psychology, acknowledged writing contexts without addressing their influence. Lea and Street's third movement, academic literacies, recognised the problem of writing transfer between settings and disciplines. When the gatekeepers of good writing (academic faculty) failed to recognise how the tacit nature of their disciplinary considerations and the power relations formed during writing evaluation influenced writing, the consequence was a disruption to student identity.

Several authors have noted difficulty in translating the 'social turn' in writing into pedagogical practices. Russell et al. (2009) observed how academic literacies have made a stronger contribution to research and theory than to pedagogy. Bauer and Theado (2014) conducted an analysis of articles published in the *Journal of College Reading and Learning* from 2005-2013 exploring the 'social turn' in post-secondary literacy research and instruction and concluded that, despite the social turn in writing theory, a parallel social turn in writing pedagogy had not emerged. Perry (2012) also observed a weakness of social perspectives in their inability to inform writing pedagogy and suggested that cognitive and social perspectives on writing did not need to be mutually exclusive. Perry's suggestion mirrors Reither's (1985) observation: 'we need to know more than we now know, not only about cognitive processes during composing, but also about processes involved in coming to know generally' (p.623).

One of the more popular cognitive concepts explored in writing contexts is writing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Pajares and Valiante, 2006). Self-efficacy, a well-studied motivational concept driving human agency, has been established as a critical factor affecting career choices, course choices, academic progression, persistence in the face of difficulty, and individual performance. The growing importance of the assessment of writing self-efficacy in post-secondary students is evident in the increase in studies measuring the construct since it first appeared in the literature in a measurable format with the seminal work of Meier et al. (1984). In an in-progress systematic review (unpublished data), the lead author has identified 88 papers measuring writing self-efficacy in post-secondary students published since 1984. Of these, 64 have been published since 2011, and 33 of those since 2016. The educational importance of writing self-efficacy cannot be underestimated as strong self-efficacy is required to keep students striving to improve their writing and advance in their disciplines and future professions. However, numerous contextual and social factors threaten to disrupt (or with pedagogical influence, facilitate) the writing experience and these factors have been largely neglected in writing self-efficacy research and measurement.

Literature exploring social cognitive perspectives such as writing self-efficacy and socially constructed views of writing appear to operate in silos, where these bodies of literature rarely merge, cite each other, or learn from each other's conclusions. A 2015 special issue of *Educational Psychologist* aimed to start a conversation about the potential for merging the two perspectives by exploring how 'situative perspectives' could enhance educational psychology research by recognizing that individual goals were situated within the collective goals apparent in the individual's social context or system (Turner and Nolen, 2015). The social movement, for example, could enlighten writing self-efficacy researchers on the contextual factors which limit self-efficacy development. Social cognitive perspectives have a more articulated integration of the role of emotions as they affect writing self-efficacy and performance.

An added complexity is the use of the word 'social' in both movements. The social in 'social cognitive' refers to the mere existence of social influences on learning but still emphasizes the individual in that social context. The word social in 'socially constructed' takes a deeper look at the nuances and intersections of the social context which drive perceptions of experience where the individual cannot be isolated from the social

environment in which they operate. The field of writing self-efficacy research, as Camfield (2016) noted in her qualitative exploration of the concept, 'has not yet reached a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the reciprocal and socially situated nature of the development of writing self-efficacy' (p.3). Similarly, in a review we conducted exploring writing self-efficacy measurement instruments validated in post-secondary contexts (Mitchell et al., 2017), we identified that measures purporting to assess writing self-efficacy focus on grammar and sentence level concerns, or concrete writing tasks such as planning or revision, and concluded that writing context, disciplinary discourse issues, and creativity allowances in writing were gaps in current measurement of the concept. Thus, while most other theoretical perspectives on writing have seen that epistemological 'social turn' from the limited product and process views, writing self-efficacy measurement has not followed suit. Could issues of learning the language of a discipline, power relations within communities, understanding audience, identity and creativity development, and feeling of ownership of the writing – all complex writing issues identified within that 'social turn' – also impact writing self-efficacy?

Our goal in this paper, therefore, is to explore the 'social turn' in writing scholarship as it may apply to writing self-efficacy. The paper will attempt to answer the question: Is there epistemological congruence between a socially constructed epistemology and the measurement of writing self-efficacy, which may allow for the merger of the social perspectives on writing and the social cognitive perspectives on writing self-efficacy? The paper will present a synthesis of Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) with three social theories that we will refer to collectively as 'situated perspectives' in the 'complimentary yet distinct' (Artemeva, 2008, p.162) triad of socially constructed theories which include activity theory, rhetorical genre theory, and communities of practice.

Exploring cognitive perspectives on writing

Bandura's (1997) seminal theory was one of the first to acknowledge that an emotional response to tasks could affect learning. Self-efficacy theory proposed that self-judgement of ability and mastery of tasks could be influenced through interactions that went beyond individual ability and perceptions developed through past experiences. Social and relational factors such as feedback received from significant others (e.g. academic evaluators) through social persuasion, and self-comparisons with peers through modeling

and vicarious experiences, could also have an effect on self-efficacy development. Self-efficacy theory is embedded within Bandura's social cognitive theory which is concerned with the effects of cognitive processes on the acquisition and regulation of behaviour. Indeed, his perspective of social learning was one of the first to consider that there was a person making conscious decisions in social performance situations and that behaviour could not simply be reduced to neuronal conditioning (Bandura, 2006). Bandura's theoretical perspective can be epistemologically situated as constructivism with origins tracing back to Vygotsky. Social constructivism and social constructionism (e.g. Berger and Luckman, 1966), while often incorrectly used interchangeably, differ in that constructivism focuses on the individual knower, while constructionism places that individual in a social context where knowing is negotiated among members of a community (Raskin, 2002). Much of the research conducted exploring writing self-efficacy explores the writing experience as the plight of an individual. Viewing writing self-efficacy as developing through processes of individualism defy what students report about their writing experiences in interview studies where self-efficacy is developed through sense of community (Camfield, 2016).

Researchers have primarily explored writing self-efficacy as a measurable construct in quantitative research; however, research has not been able to consistently connect writing self-efficacy, as a measured variable, to writing performance outcomes. Inconsistent findings may be a function of a mismatch between the existing product- and process-focused writing self-efficacy measures that neglect to consider community influences on writing self-efficacy development, and a written work evaluated for the research study which would have been produced amidst complex, situated social relationships. Some writing self-efficacy research, in an effort to maximise perceived objectivity of writing assessment, has advocated use of standardised testing or timed writing as writing performance activities, both of which are unrealistic stand-ins to the kind of writing demanded from students at the post-secondary level. This means that writing self-efficacy researchers often conduct context-free experiments that draw conclusions demonstrating the researchers expect the real world to behave similarly (Greeno, 1998).

Socially constructed perspectives accept the complexity in the writing context (Nolen et al., 2015). In previous work, the first author (Mitchell, 2018) outlined the broad attributes of socially constructed writing. These attributes are: identity formation as a writer within a

discipline; creativity associated with ideas and novelty of approach; emotions which can both drive and disrupt writing at all stages from planning to feedback; relational aspects which include the dialogic and intertextual relations built with readers and texts, as well as relationships formed with teachers, peers, and institutions developed during the writing process; and specific attributes unique to the context of writing which explore the demands that communities place on writers as they approach their craft. All five aspects of socially constructed writing are tied together through reflective capacity to enrich the writing experience and contribute to growth in self-understanding and metacognition. Thus, because, as Greeno (1998; 2015) notes, the cognitive and the social research perspectives have developed in isolation from one another; perspectives that unite the two movements are needed to provide the greatest understanding. This paper proposes that a merging of social cognitive and socially constructed perspectives is necessary for an advancement of writing scholarship. The next sections will introduce the situated perspectives, and then present a synthesis of these perspectives with writing self-efficacy theory.

Situated perspectives

The situated perspectives to be explored here include cultural-historical activity theory (or activity theory), rhetorical genre theory (RGT), and situated learning within communities of practice (CoP). What these perspectives contribute to the understanding of writing self-efficacy is that they, to varying degrees, emphasize the role of community, including the institutional influences on a community, in any writing experience, and function to examine how context influences writing motives. Respectively, they have complementary purposes: activity theory focuses on activity or pedagogy as well as how communities regulate activities, RGT focuses on motivated, persuasive text production and interpretation, and CoP focuses on community interaction and its influence on development of expertise. All three theories emerged from Russian psychological and philosophical thought. The work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1986), who also has cognitive psychology origins, inspired, through various intermediaries, our current versions of activity theory and CoP, and Mikhail Bakhtin (1981;1986), Russian philosopher and social theorist, writing on dialogism and speech genres, inspired RGT. Rarely are these theories presented in isolation; typically, activity theory is presented in conjunction with RGT (e.g. Russell, 1995; 1997; Bawarshi, 2003). Other authors have attempted to merge the three theories into a synthesis (e.g.

Artemeva, 2008; Brent, 2011). CoP, in particular the works of theory originators Lave and Wenger (1991) or Wenger (1998), are cited in nearly every article about RGT or activity theory. Brief descriptions of each of these theories will follow.

Activity theory

Originating with the work of Vygotsky, expanded upon by one of his students Aleksei Leont'ev, and developed into its current form by Engeström (2001), 'activity' is depicted visually as a triangle with many internal triangles for focused examination of intersecting players in a writing classroom (the 'activity') (see e.g. Kain and Wardle, 2005). Activity theory is the most structured of the three situated perspectives and functions as follows: the subjects of study may be students and teachers, the object might be the pedagogical process of an essay requiring critical thinking that the students are assigned to write, with the outcome being a successfully implemented essay. The tools students access might include pens, paper, computers, library resources, the internet, and their knowledge of course content and disciplinary discourse. The students will use these materials to achieve particular goals for their essay writing. Influencing these goals are rules, including assignment guidelines written by the teacher, conventions of grammar and style-guide implementation, but also larger system rules encompassing the power relations in writing, such as those set for academic probation and progression in a program. The community includes the classroom environment and relationships, the larger academic community of the institution of higher learning they attend, and disciplinary preferences for writing. Lastly, the division of labour for accomplishing the task includes anyone that may be involved in influencing their writing process: peers, tutors, family, and instructional support and grading activities.

The strength of activity theory for researchers is its ability to analyze contexts and power relations to diagnose areas of conflicts and barriers existing within the subjects, the tools they work with, other community members, or intersecting communities, each of which have their own motives (Russell, 1997). Activity theory is a relational theory that can inform pedagogical and policy processes affecting the activity system within intersecting communities. Effects on writing self-efficacy can emerge through any interaction in the activity system.

Rhetorical genre theory

The study of rhetoric and genre traditionally focused on the surface characteristics of texts in order to classify those texts based on forms of discourse, audiences targeted, modes of thinking, or rhetorical situations (Miller, 1984). Miller's seminal paper took rhetorical genre theory (RGT) in new directions by framing genre as social action and articulating that all written genres have a motive and that motive is to (paradoxically) simultaneously evolve and maintain community norms, values, epistemology, ontology, ideology, and power relations (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1993; Bawarshi, 2003; Paré, 2014). Genres dictate the form a writer uses and the acceptable discourse within that form, while at the same time writers are the inventors of that genre and can challenge the norms within the genre; the reciprocal relationship between the boundaries of a genre and the writer's motives within a genre is a relationship known as situated cognition (Bawarshi, 2003). Genres control writers' rhetorical moves, and writers control the presentation of genres. Genres continually evolve as they interact with other related genres or with previous texts written in the same genre (through the Bakhtinian concept of intertextuality). An ongoing conversation (dialogism) develops based on a rhetorical exigence, defined as an urgent objective need, goal, or motive (Artemeva, 2004; Paré, 2014).

Genres belong to particular communities and, as a result, can only be mastered by insiders to that specific community (Artemeva, 2004) through understanding of that community's tacit discourse. The use of language in combination with exploring motives for writing to an audience, and the fact that no two writers will bear the same motives even when writing in the same genre in the same community, has led genre theorists to refer to genre as 'stabilised-for-now' (Schryer, 1993). Genres are continually shapeshifting to fit community needs (Devitt, 2000; Bawarshi, 2003) and change because the space and time the genre occupies has changed the motives (exigencies) of the community (Artemeva, 2004).

The strengths of RGT for writing self-efficacy assessment are its focus on ability to write consistently in a discourse for a genre, the recognition that novices will not instantly be able to manage the genres of their discipline, and the emphasis on interpretive acts of reading and writing and how all texts are responding to previous texts. If a writer has a goal for social action within their writing (e.g. to get a job or receive a grant), that writer

must have enough self-efficacy to believe their writing abilities are strong enough to be successful at that social action. Genres will vary over time, between disciplines, and in how they define the relationship between reader and writer. Consequences will result from failing to execute a genre in the manner expected by the gatekeepers to a discipline (Russell, 1997). Paré (2014) notes that to challenge the norms of a genre, the writer likely needs to have power within a community. Novice writers will question the success of their application of a genre, and any risk-taking modifications attempted within, which may produce reciprocal effects on writing self-efficacy.

Communities of practice

Initially developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) the first iteration of CoP introduced the concepts of situated learning, defined as learning while participating in a practice environment, and legitimate peripheral participation, which explores how novices observe and then trial-and-error the discourses and practices of a community and emerge as full participants. The strength of the CoP model is its ability to help researchers come to understand how novices to a community (newcomers, to use Lave and Wenger's term), become experts (old timers) thus CoP is more amenable to examining how writing contributes to identity development and sense of belonging within a discipline, rather than how writers come to identify as writers.

Wenger's (1998) description of the concept of negotiated meaning among participants in a community is reminiscent of the reciprocal way genres and contexts mutually interact with one another in the RGT notion of situated cognition. Members of communities simultaneously use genre and rhetoric to manipulate and negotiate meaning, while at the same time being hemmed in by their context (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1993; Devitt, 1993; Wenger, 1998; Devitt, 2000). Negotiating meaning creates conflicts when boundary crossing occurs between communities – as Lea and Street (1998) observed when describing the student who received two diverse evaluations on two papers written for two disciplines using similar rhetorical strategies. Boundary crossing when learning to write in new genres can have an impact on writing self-efficacy. The primary tool we use to immerse ourselves into a new community is language (Bruffee, 1986). How language (and writing) practices brought in from other CoPs affect the CoP under examination, through changing how meanings are negotiated and how identities are developed, are how

transformation and change take place. Transfer of writing ability, only tenuously possible as best, has a large impact on writing self-efficacy in particular in CoP transition zones such as from discipline to discipline, high school to first-year, undergraduate to graduate work, and university to workplace writing (Russell, 1997).

Negotiating a synthesis of social cognitive and socially constructed theoretical perspectives

The brief description of the three situated perspectives (activity theory, rhetorical genre theory, and communities of practice) serves as an introduction to how these perspectives can be merged to create a new perspective of writing self-efficacy. Cognitive theories are lacking in the ability to contribute to our understanding of the complex contextual issues that influence student development of identity, genre knowledge, and practice-based competence through writing. Constructionist theories are lacking in concrete solutions about what to do when facing the blank page with nothing but a prompt or a vague idea to guide the writing. They also lack in solutions for teaching complex aspects of writing such as voice or disciplinary discourse, which they acknowledge are tacit and rarely taught (Lea and Street, 1998; Mitchell, 2018). Cognitive theories continue to frame writing as an individual act (Greeno, 2015). Cognitive theories hypothesize that people create mental representations of external future states and make self-efficacy judgements as a result (Bandura, 1997; Greeno, 1998). Process theories of writing suggest steps for tackling a writing task – steps that are critical for novice writers to find a starting point for their writing. But the reflective requirements to assess if an action is having a positive effect on ability and, therefore, an impact on writing self-efficacy, is a bridge that is supplied by constructionist thinking (Bruffee, 1986). Constructionist theories can also ask critical questions about components of process writing, such as: Where do our goals come from? What ideas are valued? How do we know what needs revising in our writing? (Devitt, 1993). If social cognitive and social constructionist theories are blended together through an 'interweaving' of individual self-efficacy processes and the structures of the context of the writing (Turner and Nolen, 2015), how will they intersect with one another and develop a more complete picture of writing self-efficacy to guide research and pedagogy?

Self-efficacy theory explores the factors that drive motivation to write, to improve upon writing, and to persist in educational programs. Cognitive process models can be used to

guide students through concrete planning, composing, and revising activities of writing. Constructionist perspectives fill the gaping holes in these theoretical perspectives because they attend to the context of writing, creativity allowances, and the relationships formed in the writing process. The components that structure constructionist writing (Mitchell, 2018) defined earlier, included identity, creativity, emotions, relational aspects, and context, with identity at the core of the model. Next, we use the components of this model to tie the theoretical perspectives together. The five domains of the model are tightly wound together through reflexive thought and that reflexive thought must be guided consciously by educators who assign writing in their classrooms.

Developing an identity in an activity system or CoP is marked by understanding the discourse of that system. Learner identities shape motivation and because identities are situated, motivations are also situated (Nolen et al., 2015). In beginner writers to a discipline, identity conflicts will abound and these conflicts are a result of boundary crossing from one CoP or activity system (context) to another (e.g. high school to university). Students need to recreate their identities when they begin to appropriate the genres of the new system (Russell, 1997). Incomplete development of an identity in a system will likely lead to low self-efficacy when writing within that system. Having self-efficacy to write in an activity system may be a marker of identity development.

If identity can be successfully appropriated through writing, emotional investment in the community will result in creative and passionate management of the genres of that community. Emotional response cannot be separated from cognition as Bandura's inclusion of emotional arousal in self-efficacy theory attests. This emotional investment, as Phelps (2014) conjectures, may be enhanced through the boundary crossing that occurs between the professional activity systems and the personal activity systems. As Russell et al. (2009) observe, use of personal or non-academic genres can contribute to development of an intellectual stance for writing in the discourse of a discipline.

Developing an identity is also an antecedent to developing expertise in a community, activity system, or context (Wenger, 1998). Developing mastery, a source of self-efficacy, in a particular activity system cannot happen by only focusing on the mastery of writing process components – although providing suggestions to novice students on how to manage writing processes must also be considered. Writing processes will differ in every

community, and every writing genre, and these must be taught by members of the community (Hyland, 2003). Identity development, expertise, mastery of a discipline's genres are all connected experiences. Genres, although they appear to some students as rigid rule-based busy-work in classroom environments, can be modified, but it requires the mastery of that genre and an identity in a discipline to see the flexible capabilities of the genre and develop creativity within it (Artemeva, 2008; Paré, 2014).

Thus, mastery of a genre allows for creativity where the apparent rules of the system can be altered and genres mixed-and-matched. Breaking the rules of a genre and its discourse within a discipline is particularly challenging for novices where attempts to change a genre are often viewed as errors rather than innovations (Devitt, 2000). Student writing of essays in classrooms is its own genre. Certainly, the genres that exist in the relationality of the classroom are most rigid for undergraduates, which is a factor that should be brought to awareness simply for its resultant impacts on pedagogy. Students quickly realise that conformity to the genre is expected and this realization will have impacts on writing self-efficacy in the creative domain. The rules of genre are also rigid for doctoral students where tensions in the doctoral activity system are constantly in motion between the perceived rigidity of genre and the expectations of making an original contribution (Paré, 2014).

Writing functions best through dialogic interactions within a community, and intertextual relations in reading literature that inspires ideas. Hence, why the relational aspects of writing are emphasised in constructionist perspectives (Mitchell, 2018), but are absent or tokenised in cognitive process perspectives which conjure images of 'the struggling writer alone in a loft, seeking inspiration' (Paré, 2014, p.A-90). As Paré (2014) says, when we look at relationships in writing, 'the rhetorical situation suddenly becomes quite crowded' (p. A-89). Readers reconstruct texts for their own use based on their own needs, transforming information for their own time and space, which may take ideas to a place the original writer may never have intended. However, writers often doubt their ability to engage in such interpretation or believe that the rules constrain them from transforming knowledge in this way. Ultimately, these fears can have compounding effects on the lived experience of writing-self-efficacy.

Bandura (1997) acknowledges relationality in self-efficacy theory through sources such as vicarious experiences, including modelling and self-comparisons with others, and social persuasions, such as feedback. But self-efficacy theory's vision of feedback is transmissional and unidirectional. Constructionist perspectives suggest that feedback needs to be iterative and dialogic in order to be effective. Self-efficacy is fostered by developing ties with peers and instructors in the writing process. During the early stages of entry into a discipline students are left with no choice but to appropriate tools of writing processes from other activity systems, may that be high school or other academic disciplines, and these choices, previously successful, may lead to failure in the current context (Russell, 1997; Lea and Street, 1998) with resulting impacts on writing self-efficacy.

Exploring constructionist models of writing and how they intersect with writing self-efficacy has potential to contribute much to our understanding of persistent problems in writing scholarship such as: 1) transfer of knowledge from theory to practice (Miller, 1984); 2) understanding related issues of writing transfer, such as why students seem to need to re-learn how to write with every new assignment or why they struggle with the writing requirements of their profession as newcomers to the workplace (Miller, 1984; Russell, 1997; Lea and Street, 1998; Artemeva, 2004; Brent, 2011); 3) how teaching writing in a generic introductory format to students as they enter programs is failing to introduce them to the disciplinary discourses (Russell, 1995; Mitchell, 2018); and 4) how power relationships between students and faculty affect writing self-efficacy (Lea and Street, 1998).

The above synthesis provokes thoughts of four pedagogical implications that fit with situated perspectives and merge with social cognitive perspectives on writing self-efficacy.

1. If, as Russell et al. (2009) state, using personal genres of writing can influence identity development in a discipline, thought must be given to developing assignments that incorporate or springboard from personal experience. Allowing the personal within academic writing means relinquishing the belief that academic writing is objective writing with an invisible author. Flexibility in instructional expectations for student genres of writing build writing self-efficacy.

2. Defining what it means to be creative within an academic assignment is valuable to beginning writers. It could mean that what we picture as the pinnacle of academic writing – the essay or literature review – is not the only way to establishing knowing. Most students will not go on to write literature reviews in their professional careers. Alternative forms of writing dispersed across a curriculum, such as digital storytelling, creative non-fiction, or podcast scripting, might be just as effective for learning to write in the discourse of a discipline.
3. While it is known that iterative feedback is the most effective for improving writing, what prevents its academia-wide implementation in undergraduate classrooms is the time-consuming, labour intensive, nature of using multiple feedback rounds and drafts. Exploration of effective and efficient peer feedback processes and other relational feedback mechanisms can build self-efficacy and community identity and are necessary to make this form of writing pedagogy standard practice.
4. Students only confidently know how to use the writing processes of the last assignment they successfully wrote. Scaffolding is a Vygotskian constructionist pedagogy but involves actively teaching the cognitive processes of writing in planning, composition, and revision as they apply to a specific assignment. Processes differ in small tacit ways between courses, assignments, and the genres students are asked to write. The complexity of these processes increase as students progress to more senior years in their academic program and cross boundaries into graduate school. These process differences are not obvious or intuitive for all students.

While attempting to measure a concept in objectivist science, measurement tools are built from a theoretical standpoint on the concept being assessed. A socially constructed theory or standpoint may influence item development on quantitative measures. This paper was developed within the context of the doctoral work of the first author within the discipline of nursing education. Previous work on writing self-efficacy which identified a gap in measurement of the concept (Mitchell et al., 2017) led to an exploration of socially constructed and situated perspectives on writing (Mitchell, 2018). This past work triggered the question of whether there might be an epistemological incompatibility between Bandura's self-efficacy theory and socially constructed theories on writing, a question which inspired this paper. This work will culminate in the development of a measure of

writing self-efficacy that considers self-efficacy theory and socially constructed perspectives on writing.

Writing is an identity-building initiation into a profession which has profound impacts on personal efficacy in a writing context. As Russell (1995) suggests, a discipline must be acutely aware of what defines good writing in their activity system in order to influence pedagogy. The exploration presented in this paper describes how socially constructed and social cognitive perspectives on writing can intersect and inform researchers and theorists hoping to understand writing experience as lived by students. Educators must see the value of what students bring to their writing from other communities of practice or their personal activity system (Camfield, 2016). Both constructionist and cognitive perspectives are needed to best inform pedagogy for writing. That both perspectives originate in some fashion from Vygotskian philosophy adds credence to their possible compatibility. Context is critical to the planning and implementation of writing pedagogy and socially constructed perspectives can provide the tools that educators and researchers need to assess their writing contexts.

References

- Artemeva, N. (2004) 'Key concepts in rhetorical genre studies: an overview', *Technostyle*, 20(1), pp. 3-38.
- Artemeva, N. (2008) 'Toward a unified theory of genre learning', *Journal of Business and Technical Communications*, 22(2), pp. 160-185.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981) 'Discourse in the novel', pp. 259-422, in M. Holquist (ed.) and Emerson, C. and Holquist, M. (Trans.) *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1986) 'The problem of speech genres', pp. 60-102, in Emerson, C. and Holquist, M. (eds.) and McGee, V. W. (Trans.) *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bandura, A. (1997) *Self-efficacy: the exercise of control*. New York, NY: W. H Freeman.

- Bandura, A. (2006) 'Toward a psychology of human agency', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1(2), pp. 164-180.
- Bauer, L. and Theado, C. (2014) 'Examining the 'social turn' in postsecondary literacy research and instruction: a retrospective view of JCRL scholarship, 2005–2013', *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 45(1), pp. 67-84.
- Bawarshi, A. (2003). *Genre and the invention of the writer: reconsidering the place of invention in composition*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Berger, P. L. and Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Berkenkotter, C. and Huckin, T. (1993) 'Rethinking genre from a sociocognitive perspective', *Written Communication*, 10(4), pp. 475-509.
- Brent, D. (2011) 'Transfer, transformation, and rhetorical knowledge: insights from transfer theory', *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 25(4), pp. 396-420.
- Bruffee, K. (1986) 'Social construction, language, and the authority of knowledge: a bibliographical essay', *College English*, 48(8), pp. 773-790.
- Camfield, E. (2016) 'Mediated-efficacy: hope for 'helpless' writers', *Journal of Developmental Education*, 39(3), pp. 2-11.
- Devitt, A. (1993) 'Generalizing about genre: new conceptions of an old concept', *College Composition and Communication*, 44(4), pp. 573-586.
- Devitt, A. (2000) 'Integrating rhetorical and literary theories of genre', *College English*, 62(6), pp. 696-718.
- Engeström, Y. (2001) 'Expansive learning at work: toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization', *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), pp. 133-156.

- Flower, L. and Hayes, J. (1981) 'A cognitive process theory of writing', *College Composition and Communication*, 32(4), pp. 365-387.
- Greeno, J. G. (1998) 'The situativity of knowing, learning, and research', *American Psychologist*, 53(1), pp. 5-26.
- Greeno, J. G. (2015) 'Commentary: some prospects for connecting concepts and methods of individual cognition and situativity', *Educational Psychologist*, 50(3), pp. 248-251.
- Hyland, K. (2003) 'Genre-based pedagogies: a social response to process', *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12(1), pp. 17-29.
- Kain, D. and Wardle, E. (2005) 'Building context: using activity theory to teach about genre in multi-major professional communication courses', *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 14(2), pp. 113-139.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lea, M. and Street, B. (1998) 'Student writing in higher education: an academic literacies approach', *Studies in Higher Education*, 23(2), pp. 157-172.
- Lea, M. and Street, B. (2006) 'The 'academic literacies' model: theory and applications', *Theory into Practice*, 45(4), pp. 368-377.
- Meier, S., McCarthy, P. and Schmeck, R. (1984) 'Validity of self-efficacy as a predictor of writing performance', *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 8(2), pp. 107-120.
- Miller, C. (1984) 'Genre as social action', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, pp. 151-167.
- Mitchell, K. (2018) 'Constructing writing practices in nursing', *Journal of Nursing Education*, 57(7), pp. 399-407.

- Mitchell, K., Rieger, K. and McMillan, D. (2017) 'A template analysis of writing self-efficacy measures', *Journal of Nursing Measurement*, 25(2), pp. 205-223.
- Nolen, S. B., Horn, I. S. and Ward, C. J. (2015) 'Situating motivation', *Educational Psychologist*, 50(3), pp. 234-247.
- Nystrand, M. (2006) 'The social and historical context for writing research', pp. 11-27, in MacArthur, C. A., Graham, S. and Fitzgerald, J. (eds.) *Handbook of writing research*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Pajares, F. and Valiante, G. (2006) 'Self-efficacy beliefs and motivation in writing development', pp. 158-170, in MacArthur, C. A., Graham, S. and Fitzgerald, J. (eds.) *Handbook of writing research*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Paré, A. (2014) 'Rhetorical genre theory and academic literacy', *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 8(1), pp. A83-A94.
- Perry, K. (2012) 'What is literacy? – a critical overview of sociocultural perspectives', *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 8(1), pp. 50-71.
- Phelps, L. (2014) 'The historical formation of academic identities: rhetoric and composition, discourse and writing', *Canadian Journal for Studies in Discourse and Writing*, 25(1), pp. 3-25.
- Raskin, J. (2002) 'Constructivism in psychology: personal construct psychology, radical constructivism, and social constructionism', *American Communication Journal*, 5(3), pp. 1-17.
- Reither, J. A. (1985) 'Writing and knowing: toward redefining the writing process', *College English*, 47(6), pp. 620-628.
- Russell, D. (1995) 'Activity theory and its implications for writing instruction', pp. 51-78, in Petraglia, J. (ed.) *Reconceiving writing, rethinking writing instruction*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Russell, D. (1997) 'Rethinking genre in school and society: an activity theory analysis', *Written Communication*, 14(4), pp. 504-554.

Russell, D., Lea, M., Parker, J., Street, B. and Donahue T. (2009) 'Exploring notions of genre in 'academic literacies' and 'writing across the curriculum': approaches across countries and contexts', pp. 459-491, in Bazerman, C. et al. (eds.) *Genre in a changing world: perspectives on writing*. Denver, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.

Schryer, C. F. (1993) 'Genre as record', *Written Communication*, 10(2), pp. 200-234.

Turner, J. C. and Nolen, S. B. (2015) 'Introduction: the relevance of the situative perspective in educational psychology', *Educational Psychologist*, 50(3), pp. 167-172.

Vygotsky, L. (1986) *Thought and language*. (Kozulin, A., ed. and trans.) Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Author details

Kim M. Mitchell is Coordinator of Research, Scholarship, and Quality Assurance in the Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences and Community Services, Red River College, Winnipeg, Canada and doctoral candidate in the College of Nursing, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. Email: kmmitchell@rrc.ca.

Diana E. McMillan is Associate Professor in the College of Nursing, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada.

Michelle M. Lobchuk is Associate Professor in the College of Nursing, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada.