

Introduction

Over the last 10 years there has been considerable change in literacy curriculum both in Australia and internationally. Genre-based approaches to writing, which emerged in Australia in the late 1980s, now underpin primary English syllabus documents in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong. Genre-based approaches are far removed from the naturalistic models of language learning (Barnes, Britton and Rosen 1971; Krashen 1981, 1984) that framed approaches such as whole language (Smith 1975, 1983; Goodman 1986; Cambourne 1988) and process writing (Graves 1975, 1978, 1983; Walshe 1981a and b), which dominated the teaching of writing throughout the late 1970s and well into the 1990s. These progressivist approaches, closely aligned with Piagetian principles of developmental psychology, viewed language learning as essentially an individualised phenomenon and, as such, reacted against the formal instruction of grammar and textual form. Genre-based curricula place a strong emphasis on an explicit teaching of grammar and text, and their widespread adoption in recent years is

testament to their effectiveness in improving students' literacy outcomes. To many teachers, however, who either attended school or received their teacher training when the naturalistic models of language learning prevailed, genre-based curriculum can be quite daunting, especially given its focus on the teaching of grammar. This book is designed to provide assistance to this generation of teachers who, in a sense, 'missed out' on learning about grammar and to act as a guide for the next generation of teachers in effective ways to program, implement and assess genre, text and grammar – what we consider to be the three key technologies for teaching writing.

In developing this genre, text and grammar approach we have drawn on a number of different theoretical perspectives of language and language learning. By and large, genre-based approaches to writing are based on a functional model of language; that is, a theoretical perspective that emphasises the social constructedness of language. The development of a functional approach in Australia is due first and foremost to the influence of M.A.K. Halliday (1978, 1985) whose work has sparked a wealth of applied research in language education well beyond the usual scope of applied linguistics. The approach that is followed in this book is indebted to Halliday's profound insights into the social aspects of literacy, although our work does not pretend to strictly follow systemic-functional linguistics. We have been similarly influenced by the work in critical linguistics and social semiotics of Gunther Kress (1982, 1985, 1989), who originally proposed the notion of *genre* as *social process*. We are also greatly indebted to the linguistic research in *genre theory* by J.R. Martin (1986, 1987, 1992) and Joan Rothery (1986). While the approach to genre, text and grammar that we have pursued is different in significant ways from their original work, we nevertheless would not have developed the *process/product* model of genre without it. The model for genre, text and grammar proposed in this book builds on our earlier work presented in *Context-Text-Grammar* (1994). In our work on genre, text and grammar, we have always attempted to make the ideas and theories that inform contemporary linguistics and semiotics relevant and accessible to classroom teachers. In our previous book, as here, we have been motivated first and foremost by our close contact with teachers and the demands made on them in their classrooms, rather than searching for a model compatible with the technicalities of recent linguistic and semiotic theories. We have tried, therefore, to understand the problems teachers

and students face in understanding how language works, and have applied some useful theoretical positions towards solving some of those problems.

In this book we focus specifically on genre, text and grammar from a pedagogic perspective. While emphasis is given to the primary years of schooling, both our approach to genre and our cross-curriculum focus means this is a useful text for teaching writing well into the high school years and beyond. In Chapter 1 we provide a rationale and brief theoretical outline of the approach to language underpinning this book. It deals with each of the three technologies of writing we utilise in this approach: genre, text and grammar; different perspectives on each and why it is useful to have these categories in the teaching of writing. Chapter 2 is essentially a glossary of grammatical terms. It is designed as an easy reference explaining all the terms that are used within the genre-based grammar which we propose. The focus of Chapter 3 is the teaching of genre, text and grammar. It firstly provides an account of previous approaches to teaching writing, examining the shift from progressivist to genre-based methodologies. This is followed by an outline of the approach to teaching writing that we advocate, highlighting the four integrated elements of content/language, structure, grammar and assessment, and a set of key principles that we feel frames effective pedagogic practice. Chapters 4 to 8 then deal with the five fundamental genres of school writing: *describing*, *explaining*, *instructing*, *arguing* and *narrating*. In the first instance, each is described in terms of its distinctive grammar and textual structures. Each chapter proceeds to exemplify the teaching/learning of the grammatical and structural features of the genre through typical units of work. The final section of these chapters provides a diagnostic approach to assessing genre, text and grammar. We demonstrate how genre-specific criteria can identify strengths and weakness in typical pieces of student writing and suggest some practical strategies and interventions to address specified areas of need.

As indicated, our main objective in writing this book is to assist teachers in the difficult process of teaching their students how to write. While our focus is practice, we have tried to meld theory and practice in an approach with the clear pedagogic intent of equipping students with a generative set of knowledge and skills to both write effectively and to play knowingly with textual form.

A GENRE-BASED MODEL OF LANGUAGE

The model of language outlined in this book is based on the view that language is processed and understood in the form of texts. A text can be any meaning-producing event, be it a book, a film, an advertisement, a phone conversation and so on. A text can be seen from two key perspectives: a thing in itself that can be recorded, analysed and discussed; and also a process that is the outcome of a socially produced occasion. Most people like to talk and think about texts as products, which is why the notion of a text type is quite prevalent in literacy studies. In this book, however, we focus our attention on the latter notion of text as a social process because we have found it to be a more productive and generative approach from the point of view of teaching students the core skills of literacy. In this chapter we will outline our theoretical perspective on texts and compare it with some of the more product-oriented notions of text.

HOW DO WE LEARN TO USE LANGUAGE?

Language is both natural and cultural, individual and social. Debates over the past 30 years have often polarised language into either natural or social domains. To treat such a fundamental human activity in this way is unproductive.

Progressivism, the dominant perspective on teaching language and literacy in the 1970s and 1980s, promoted language as an entirely natural individualistic phenomenon and thus relegated language learning to the personal domain. This created all sorts of problems for teachers. How can language be taught when it is totally within the private domain? The best that can be done is to foster its 'emergence' in individual students. Teaching became more like managing or facilitating, with 'learning experiences' planned in the hope that they would draw out the appropriate language. This process has maximum effect in only a limited number of cases; for many students it produces very little language development and effective learning.

As adults it is easy to think that our own facility with language is 'natural'; we simply can't imagine our everyday lives without it. Our knowledge and use of language and grammar operates at an implicit level; it appears to us to be neutral and unproblematic. In other words, our knowledge about language is transparent and this deceives us into thinking that there is nothing to know, or that whatever there is to know can be effortlessly 'picked up'.

There is also a view that learning to speak and learning to write are identical processes (Cambourne 1988, p. 45). Learning to speak is seen to be entirely natural – children acquire speech simply through immersion – a view that overlooks the immense teaching role played by parents and siblings (Painter 1991). Writing, so it follows in this view, can be acquired through a similar process of immersion in the written word. However, not only is the 'immersion view' totally implausible as an account of what actually happens, it is also the case that speech and writing have a fundamentally different organisation in structure, grammar, function and purpose (Halliday 1985). Immersing students in writing (whatever that could mean) for one or two hours a day is an inadequate teaching and learning strategy. Learning to write is a difficult and complex series of processes that require a range of explicit teaching methodologies throughout all the stages of learning.