peter KNAPP
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Genre, TEXT, grammar

Technologies for TEACHING and ASSESSING WRITING

Genre, TEXT, *grammar*

TECHNOLOGIES FOR TEACHING AND ASSESSING WRITING

PETER KNAPP

and

MEGAN WATKINS

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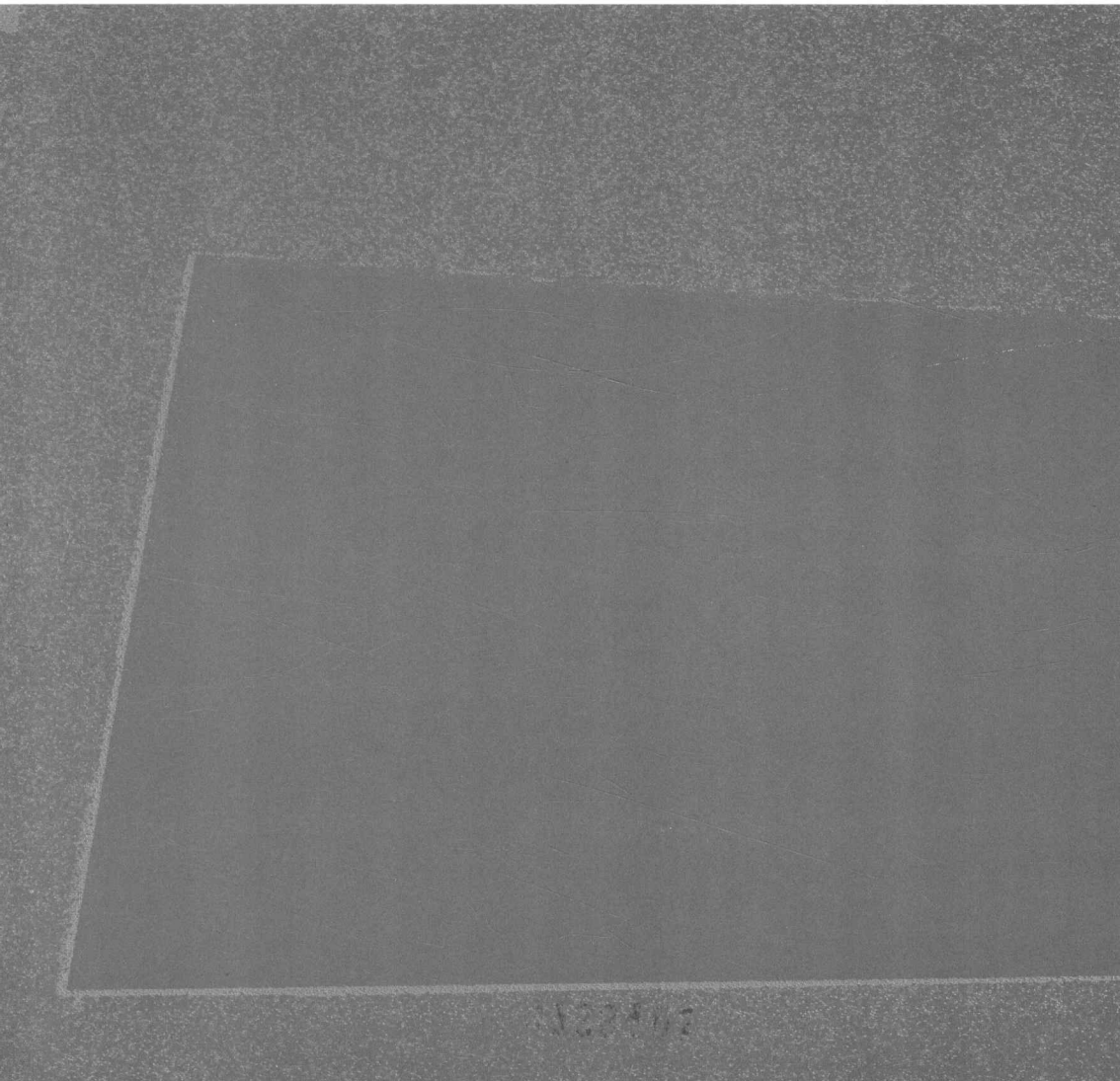

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Foreword

BY GUNTHER KRESS

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The tasks of education are not becoming easier. In anglo-phone – therefore neo-liberal – societies, schools are forced into increasingly paradoxical situations of intense forms of surveillance and control by the State, in environments that are ever more fractured, fragmented and diverse. Economies have long since moved beyond the control of the State and the market is now the dominant force in society. So the two major tasks of schooling in a still quite recent past – the production of citizens and reproduction of labour – have become problematic or have begun to disappear. In the midst of this, schools, schooling and institutional education more generally have to find their own way.

Communication is marked by all these forces. Forms of writing are now deeply different to what they had been even 20 years ago, in grammar, syntax and in textual form; email and texting are changing levels of formality and thereby 'manners' of writing more quickly than anything else has done in the last century or two; the screen both imposes and makes possible entirely different forms of 'composing' and of reading; image and writing jostle for attention and supremacy on pages and on screens.

Teachers bear the brunt of these tensions, contradictions and insistent new demands. Like some other professionals, they seem ever more peculiar in their continuing commitment to those whom they serve. In our research in schools in London – and there would be no difference to this anywhere in Australia – whether in Science classrooms or those of English, one thing is absolutely clear: teachers want to do what is best for the young people in their classrooms. They want, by hook or by crook, to give them the best possible start in their adult, social and working lives.

One big difference between the teacher of Science and the teacher in the English classroom is precisely the matter of 'communication'. The ability to communicate fully in all important ways is the single most significant prerequisite for full participation in social, economic and cultural life. In an era when screens of all kinds are shunting the print media into lesser prominence, writing remains crucial. Yes, image has already displaced writing in many places in public communication, and yet writing remains the preferred form of the elites – economic, social, cultural and political. And writing is still the most important means of access to the vast repository of knowledge of literate cultures. Those facts alone demand that students in school should gain the fullest, deepest, and richest means of using the cultural technology of writing. Equity of access and full participation both rest on that.

But for that to be truly the case, teachers themselves need the resources that show what this technology is, how it works, how it can be used – whatever the purposes and aims of those who have need of it. Not all of them come to school with that knowledge, and certainly not all come with equal understanding. And so a sine qua non of equitable provision and outcomes is that this cultural resource must be available to all: clearly, openly, explicitly, with no mystifications of any kind.

That is what this book has set out to do; and it is what it provides. That is the aim of its authors. They have a vast store of experience to draw on, which shows everywhere, whether in the examples used or in their manner of setting forth their materials. I admire their hands-on, let's-get-this-job-done attitude: here are theorists who know what is needed, and practitioners who are clear about the need of real understanding. Both practical use and theory are set out in clear, yet rich detail.

Both authors have a well-earned reputation through the real usefulness of their work in precisely this area, not only in Australia, but in the UK, North America and South Africa. I am certain this book, which builds on their knowledge and experience in many ways, will be a constantly valued resource and a great success. It fully deserves to be both.

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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.

Acknowledgments

The approach to genre and grammar used in this book was first developed for the New South Wales Metropolitan West Region Literacy and Learning Program, *Genre and Grammar Resource Materials*. Versions of each of the chapters on the genres of school writing first appeared in Knapp and Watkins (1994), but have been revised to include more detailed information on aspects of genre, text and grammar, and sections on a diagnostic approach to assessment. The teaching ideas in Chapter 5 – The Genre of Explaining – are drawn from *Far Out* by Watkins and Knapp (1998).

Gunther Kress (Institute of Education, University of London), Dr Helen Nicholls (Advisor, Ministry of Education, New Zealand), Greg Noble (School of Humanities, University of Western Sydney) and Robyn Mamouney (New South Wales Department of Education and Training) read and made significant editorial contributions to the text. Andrew Rolfe, previously Literacy and Learning Consultant to the Metropolitan West Region of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, contributed to an early draft of Chapter

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We are indebted to the following teachers – Jennifer McKeown, Fiona Ardus, Jane Brincat, Peter Bradshaw, Trish Haynes and Tanya Rose – for providing the opportunity to conduct research and work with students in developing the approach for use in infants and primary classrooms.

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CHAPTER 1

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.

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