4. Genre-Based Literacy

4.1 Genre-Based Literacy: basics

- Genre-based Literacy is an approach to teaching writing developed within the Systemic-Functional tradition.
- In the 1970s, much teaching of writing focused on how to write sentences, improve handwriting, spelling, punctuation (and whether the ideas were good).
- The genre-based literacy approach developed in Australia during the 1980s.
- It pushed the explicit teaching of school genres (recount, narrative, report, essay, etc.) in terms of:
  - Typical generic structure (what information should appear in what order)
  - Typical linguistic patterns (register) for each genre, and each stage of the genre
- In Australia, by the 1990s, school textbooks in areas such as History, Geography and Science had significant content telling students how to write the reports etc. they needed to write.
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4.1 Background: Halliday’s Basis

- 1960s: Halliday given large grant in London to develop a kind of Linguistics that can be useful to language teaching.
- 1976: Halliday, consultant to the Australian Language Development Project, proposed that language development should involve:
  - learning language: learning how to speak and write effectively
  - learning through language: using language to learn other disciplines.
  - learning about language: conscious learning about such matters as phonology, the spelling system, grammar and registers, as part of the activities of school learning.

- 1978: Started a Masters in Applied Linguistics programme at Sydney University to teach teachers how to use Functional Grammar in their work.

4.1 Background: Generic Structure

- 1972: Labov starts exploring the structure of texts in terms of their “generic structure”


- 1978: Hasan explores use of “generic structure” in an SFL context

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4.1 Background: Martin and Rothery

- 1979: Joan Rothery and Francis Christie (teachers) enrol in Masters in Applied Linguistics at Sydney Uni, studying SFL for teachers.
- 1980: Joan Rothery and Jim Martin prepare “working papers” setting out a functional approach to analysing student writing in terms of genre, discourse and register:
  

- Existing method of teaching writing focused on improving grammar, punctuation, spelling and handwriting. Focused on eliminating errors, not on how to write a good text.
- New approach pushed the idea that explicit teaching of how to write different school genres was important.
- “Genre theory offered a model of teaching that stressed explicit identification and teaching of the stages of the target text or ‘genre’.” (Christie and Unsworth 2006)

4.1 Background: Development

- Basic principle set out more clearly in:
  

- Descriptions of a range of genres found in primary and secondary school, e.g.,
  

- Resources prepared for teachers (teacher’s manuals)
  

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4.1 Background: Impact

- Genre-based literacy had an impact on curriculum developments in Australia, from the 1990s.

- Some impact on the *Language in the National Curriculum* project in the UK (e.g. Carter 1990)


- In more recent years, some impact in North America


(From Christie, and Unsworth 2006)

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4.2 Method: The Teaching Learning Cycle

1. An example of the target genre (e.g. narrative, explanation, report, though others were identified) is introduced to students
2. The social purposes of the text are discussed, as well as the fields of experience or knowledge normally constructed in using such a genre.
3. The various stages of the text are then analysed, and given functional names, and some of the language features involved in construction of each stage are identified (e.g. the choices in process type, conjunction, modality or topical themes).
4. Once some “deconstruction” of the text had been accomplished, teachers then guide students to write examples of the target genre as a joint or shared activity.
5. Eventually, students independently research and write examples of the genre
6. At this stage aspects of the language features of the text are again discussed in order to build a strong understanding of the nature of the texts. The whole teaching-learning sequence would last for a number of lessons. (See Martin 1999 for a detailed discussion of the genre based pedagogy.)

(From Christie, and Unsworth 2006)
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4.2 Method: The Teaching Learning Cycle

- Described by Martin:
  

- Online description by Ellis:
  

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4.3 Whole School Genre Maps

- What generally happens in schools or university is that the academic genres are taught in a number of content areas without any coordination.

- An important idea in the theory is that the teaching of academic genres needs to be organised over the whole curriculum:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Reception</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Expose</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposition</td>
<td>Expose</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Expose</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
<td>Teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recount</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Consolidate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

White, B. and Custance, B. (2003), Genre Mapping across the Curriculum in SACS A. Adelaide, South Australia: Catholic Education South Australia

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4.4 Method: Example

• Often, the text in question will be analysed in terms of SFL:
  – How does the writer use Theme / Thematic Progression to develop the text?

“In this first example, two teachers in a school located in a low socio-economic area introduced their 7-year-old students to a number of aspects of the grammar as part of a unit on work on milk production. The main aim of the unit was to teach students how to write a sequential explanation. Within this, the classroom teacher, Louise and Donna introduced the students to some of the key grammatical features of this genre. A characteristic of this class was not only the age of the students but the high proportion of ESL learners in the class, over 70 per cent in fact. There has been scepticism about the value of explicitly teaching any grammar to children of this age, particularly ESL children, but the outcomes of this work surprised many people, not least Donna and Louise.”


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4.2 Method: Example

• “In the early part of the teaching-learning cycle (about 10 weeks), the teachers ensured that the children built the field knowledge needed to write their sequential explanations as ‘experts’,
  • A range of activities was undertaken, such as watching videos, visiting relevant websites, and cutting out pictures of dairy products and discussing the kinds of products they were made from.
  • They read a big book on how cows produce milk and deconstructed an explanation of milk production.
  • They sequenced photos from a milk factory that they visited later in the unit when the teachers felt they had built up a level of technical understandings to really understand what was happening at the milk factory.
  • They used flow charts, which they added to as they built up their technical language, such as suction cups, refrigerated delivery trucks, homogenized, pasteurized.
  • Earlier work done on other genres proved very helpful in helping students understand the purpose and schematic structure of sequential explanations.
  • Within that rich context of exploration and slow building of field knowledge, and using set sentences, Donna and Louise developed the children’s abilities to identify and name the functional groupings of participant, process and circumstance.”
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4.2 Method: Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Circumstance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The trucks</td>
<td>take</td>
<td>the milk</td>
<td>to the factory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To identify these elements, the class used prompt questions, starting with the process – What action is going on here? – then participants – Who or what is taking the milk to the factory? The trucks take what to the factory? – and finally the circumstances – Where does the truck take the milk? These and other key questions were revisited on many occasions in order to consolidate the children’s understanding, so that, in time, they identified the groupings independently. Colour coding of these three functional groupings – red for participants, green for processes and blue for circumstances – was introduced as an additional way of drawing students’ attention to these categories.

Once students had a solid understanding of these categories, they engaged in a number of activities to explore the mobility of each of these groupings. Table 5.2 was used as the basis for looking at what Donna and Louise identified at this point as ‘varying sentence beginnings’.

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4.2 Method: Example (continued)

- They showed how the Participants could be moved round the clause (e.g., “the milk is taken to the factory by trucks”).
- Gradually an awareness of “active/passive” is built up.
- Then they do exercises of rewriting the text, using some passive clauses, and showing how the Thematic pattern changes.
- Then other resources for changing theme (Adjunct fronting) are shown.
- Gradually, the students build an awareness of how texts can be written, manipulated, improved, etc.