Teaching ESL writing: 3 perspectives

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knowledge of 5 things:

- Content knowledge
- System knowledge
- Process knowledge
- Genre knowledge
- Reader knowledge

What is the most important?

FOCUS ON TEXTS
FOCUS ON WRITERS
FOCUS ON READERS

Three approaches to writing.....

1 Focus on texts

- Writing is a rule-based structure
- Independent of contexts, writers or readers
- Good writers are good at grammar

1.1 Texts as objects

- Writing is a rule-based structure
- Independent of contexts, writers or readers
- Good writers are good at grammar

Classroom practices

- Familiarisation
- Controlled writing
- Guided writing
- Free writing

Conduit metaphor

Assumptions of texts as objects

- Meaning is contained in words
- Mind to mind transfer of ideas through language
- Need only coding and decoding skills
Is accuracy enough?

- Accuracy only one feature of good writing
- All texts code writer’s assumptions about readers’ knowledge
- Have to balance what needs to be said with what can be assumed

1.2 Texts as Discourse

Texts are attempts to communicate with readers

Discourse

- Forms are resources to accomplish goals.
- Language in action
- Linguistic patterns point to wider contexts
- How do texts work as communication?

What is genre?

Genre is a term for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations.

Problem – Solution narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am a teacher of IFL writing</td>
<td>My students couldn’t express themselves in writing</td>
<td>I adopted a genre-based approach</td>
<td>Now they can all write beautifully</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jim Martin

Genre is a staged, goal-oriented activity

An Explanation: describe a process or how something works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>Many animals like hedgehogs, badgers and mice hibernate during winter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steps</td>
<td>This is because it gets much colder and darker during the winter months. Food becomes harder to find. Therefore, they find a safe place to sleep and store energy until the plants start to grow again and food is more plentiful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Features of explanations...

- Generalized participants
- Timeless present tense
- Temporal connectives – next, then, after that
- Causal connectives – because, therefore, consequently
- Mainly doing/action verbs

Goal: Banana Muffins

Materials: bananas, oil, sugar, egg, flour & milk

Steps: 1. Preheat oven to Gas 5 or 220c.
2. Mix bananas, oil, sugar, egg & milk
3. Mix in flour
4. Spoon into non-stick muffin tins and bake for 15 - 20 minutes.

Result: You have 10 golden banana muffins
Features of instructions:
- In chronological order
- Very direct, in simple present or imperative
- Short, simple sentences
- Signs post indicating sequence, e.g. first, next, while, etc.
- Using mainly doing/action verbs

Grammar:
- Not traditional, abstract grammar
- Grammar is a resource for producing texts

Pedagogy:
Making grammatical choices explicit allows students to write effectively. Raising students awareness, encouraging them to notice, reflect on, and produce well-formed texts.

Teaching-learning cycle:
1 Developing the context
2 Modelling and deconstruction
3 Joint construction
4 Independent construction
5 Linking to other texts

Purpose and settings:
Examples and revealing stages and features

3 Joint construction
4 Independent construction
5 Linking to other texts
Teacher-learner collaboration

Scaffolding
Independent performance
Potential performance
Reduced teacher involvement
Increased learner independence
Considerable teacher contribution
Learner's entry level
Existing competence

The Gradual Release of Responsibility

Level of TEACHER Support

Criticisms and counters
- Said to crush creativity by imposing models on students.
- Not inherently prescriptive
- Genres DO constrain us—as our choices are made within expected patterns.
- By understanding how texts are organised we can teach writing more effectively

2 Focus on writers

Writing is a process....
- What do good writers do when they write?
- Writing is a process of discovering and forming ideas.
- Writing is problem solving and not an act of communication.
- Based on cognitive psychology

Flow chart tells us:
- Writers have goals and plan extensively
- Writing is constantly revised
- Planning, drafting, revising and editing are recursive
- Plans and texts are constantly evaluated

Writing involves.....

Prewriting
Drafting
Revising
Editing
Publishing

Writing involves.....

What do I want to say?
How do I want to say it?
Who will read it?
What do I need to know to start?
Who can I talk to about it?
Writing involves...

Prewriting
Drafting
Revising
Editing
Publishing

Are my thoughts organized? What do I want to develop? In what order do I want to say them? Who can read this and offer advice?

Have I used complete sentences? Are my spelling and punctuation correct? Have I formatted it properly? Does it all make sense? Has someone checked my work?

Does it need illustrations or tables? How can I best present it? Put it online or on paper? Who do I want to read it?

Problems?
Overemphasis on psychological factors
Fails to make language explicit
Fails to make feedback explicit
Restricts teachers role to feedback
Not all writing is similar

Problems?
Delpit: Invisible curriculum
Adherents to process approaches to writing create situations in which students ultimately find themselves held accountable for knowing a set of rules about which no one has ever directly informed them. Teachers do students no service to suggest, even implicitly, that ‘product’ is not important. Students will be judged on their product regardless of the process they utilized to achieve it. And that product, based as it is on the specific codes of a particular culture, is more readily produced when the directives of how to produce it are made explicit.

Process vs product
While a process approach will certainly make it possible for apprentice writers to become more effective at generating texts, this may be to little avail if they are not aware of what their readers expect to find in those texts. (Chris Tribble)

3 Focus on readers
Who are you writing for?
What does he or she know?
What does she believe?
How will she understand your text?
Will she agree with your ideas?

Writers anticipate reader knowledge and reactions
Emphasis on the interaction between writers and readers
Process of writing is creating a text we assume reader will recognise
Process of reading draws on assumptions of writer intentions

Unfamiliarity of expectations
What is seen as logical, engaging, relevant or well-organized differs across cultures

Context includes the reader

Academic English texts tend to:
Be explicit about structure and purpose
Uses more and more recent citations
Focus on actions rather than actors
Be cautious in making claims
Package processes as things
Spell out steps in argument and connections between sentences

Second language writers

Nominalization
Impersonalization
Connectives
Hedging
Citation

Writer or reader responsibility?

Discourse communities
A way of joining writers, texts and readers together
John Swales – groups with collective goals
Ann Johns – groups with common interests

Barton’s definition
A discourse community is a group of people who have texts and practices in common, whether it is a group of academics, or the readers of teenage magazines. In fact, discourse community can refer to the people the text is aimed at; it can be the people who read a text; or it can refer to the people who participate in a set of discourse practices both by reading and writing.

Different strokes for different folks
Social sciences: analysing and synthesising multiple sources
Sciences: describing procedures, defining objects, and planning solutions

University textbooks
Academic word list

Disciplinary specific frequencies & meanings

a) Consist means ‘stay the same’ in social sciences and ‘composed of’ in the sciences.
b) Volume means ‘book’ in applied linguistics and ‘quantity’ in biology.
c) Abstract means ‘remove’ in engineering and ‘theoretical’ in social sciences.

Economics specific words

6.2 million word corpus from economics and finance, 837 words which had a specific meaning, even if they had a general meaning too.

Ha & Hyland (2017)

Hyland & Tse (2007)

4m words

6.2 million word corpus from economics and finance,
Audience analysis

A. What do I know About the topic?
B. What does my reader already know about it?
C. What does my reader not know?
D. What is my reader’s attitude likely to be?

Customer bought some biscuits.
There was a cockroach in one.

For A:
Customer bought some biscuits.
There was a cockroach in one.

For B:
The company will apologize, refund the price.

For C:
Customer is probably very angry, she will want compensation.

Conclusion

Writing is not just words on a screen
Writing is the expression of personal meanings
Devise activities to make these features explicit
Teachers need to research texts
Writing is a social practice

Goodbye and thanks for coming