Abstract

In this essay, the author explores four fundamental, but contested topics in Genre-based Writing Instruction (GBWI) about which decisions must be made as curricula are developed. Drawing from the three major genre traditions (Hyon, 1996), the author examines the contested topics (naming, awareness/acquisition, pedagogical focus, and ideology) and suggests compromises for L2 practitioners who adopt a genre-based approach.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine four contested topics about which decisions need to be made when preparing for Genre-based Writing Instruction (GBWI), with a particular emphasis on how these decisions relate to L2 contexts. The varied approaches to these topics that appear in the literature or in textbooks may confuse novice students and uninformed teachers who might believe, or have been taught, that there is one approach to genre-based pedagogies. In fact, there are at least three, each of which has something to offer to L2 pedagogy.

What genre will I employ in this paper? Despite my critique of current realizations of “the essay” later in this text, I would still argue that the most appropriate term for this paper and its purposes is an essay, not the modern version(s), but in its original, historical conceptualization, as seen in the work of a number of French and British authors in the 16th and 17th centuries:

... [originally] derived from the French infinitive essayer, “to try” or “to attempt.” In English, essay first meant “a trial” or “an attempt,” as well, and this is still an alternative meaning. The Frenchman Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) was the first author to describe his works as essays; he used the term to characterize these as “attempts” to put his thoughts adequately into writing. (“Essay,” n.d., para. 7)

My essay, which examines, and sometimes critiques, instructional topics in GBWI, includes a brief history of text naming, intended to highlight the confusion faced by L2 instructors and their students about genre names. The three major genre “camps” identified by Hyon (1996), and their theories and related instructional practices, will be woven

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E-mail address: ajohns@cox.net.

1 Some would argue that there are at least four. See Bawarshi and Reiff (2010).
into the discussion that follows. These camps are “The Sydney School,” based upon Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL); the English for Specific Purposes movement (ESP), whose most famous contribution is Swales’ moves analysis (1990); and the New Rhetoric School, centered in North America, that bases its major tenets upon rhetorical rather than linguistic theories. All with implications for L2 writing instruction, these genre camps have been described previously (see Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Hyon, 1996; Johns, 1997, 2002, 2008); thus, readers can consult the earlier work to understand, in more detail, the camps’ nature and motivations.

Also mentioned in this essay will be the rather limited results of a survey sent to the participants in the 2009 Second Language Writing Symposium, many of whom are practitioners in EFL contexts. The survey posed questions to those who teach or teach about genre, and respondents were also asked to include class syllabi and assignments. Participants were asked:

- What is genre, in your view? How do you define the term?
- Can genre be taught? If so, should it be taught differently in L1 and L2 contexts or at different proficiency or academic levels?
- How do you approach the teaching of genre?
- How do you teach teachers about genre, that is, how do you guide their instruction? (Johns, 2010).

Drawing from these sources and my own considerable experience in EFL and ESL contexts, this essay will be organized in the following manner. Four fundamental instructional topics that influence GBWI will be presented, and the dichotomous, sometimes conflicting, views on and decisions about each topic will be discussed. Genre theories and practices from the various camps will be integrated, when relevant. Finally, possible compromises for future teaching of L2 writing in a GBWI framework will be proposed. Though each of the topics is discussed individually, choices made by instructors or curriculum designers about one topic will, of course, affect choices made about the other topics.

The first of these instructional topics is *naming*—that is, what practitioners name the texts and textual examples considered as “genres” in their classrooms. Text naming has been an interest of L2 curriculum designers for many years; and throughout, this naming has been an important source of insight into the theory of writing and texts to which practitioners subscribe. Naming may also influence the manner in which students store schemata for texts in their long-term memories or relate their understandings of genres in L1 to their approaches to genres in L2. This naming discussion will also address how the current, confusing term “essay,” common to classrooms in North America—and now, due to the proliferation of American textbooks and curricula, in some other parts of the world—tends to limit a student’s ability to understand in depth what the term genre can imply.

The second topic relates to a pedagogical and theoretical divide between those curricula that focus on *genre acquisition* and those that focus on *genre awareness*. Genre acquisition requires the direct teaching and student learning of specified text types which are considered by practitioners to be common exemplars of genres. Genre awareness, on the other hand, is a much more slippery approach. It refers to examining the relationships among texts, their rhetorical purposes, and the broader contexts in which texts from a genre may appear.

The third topic is the *major pedagogical focus* of the GBWI curriculum, that is, where the curriculum begins and students’ time and efforts are concentrated. As noted under the discussion of the first topic, some L2 writing classes focus primarily upon specific written text types as examples of genres and their attendant grammatical and lexical elements; alternatively, classes may focus first upon the rhetorical contexts in which texts from genres appear and then proceed to the resulting texts, sometimes viewing evolving genres more as processes than products, buffeted by the contexts and on-going decisions made by writers. Though discussions and analyses of both texts and contexts can be found in most L2 literacy classrooms, practitioners must make decisions about which will receive the most emphasis and what will be the curricular core. The final topic to be considered relates to *ideology*—and specifically to the question of how explicit a discussion of textual hegemonies and other factors relating to the power of certain genres should be in a novice classroom. Should novice or L2 students be “assimilated” first into an academic or professional

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2 Also called “Rhetorical Genre Studies.” See Bawarshi and Reiff (2010), pp. 78–104.

3 Of the 400+ participants, only 22 responded. Of these, 10 were from international contexts. Results of the survey were reported at the Second Language Writing Symposium in Murcia, Spain (May, 2010).

4 Devitt et al. (2004) refer to the contexts as “scenes of writing.”
community or encouraged from the outset to critique the texts and contexts with which they interact and which affect their lives, sometimes negatively?

Decisions about these topics are central, for they provide the focus for much of the GBWI instruction, and, of course, influence what students practice, acquire, and store in their long-term memories, leading to transfer to other contexts.

Issue I: Genre naming

Naming based upon text structures

"Rhetorical modes" and naming. There is a long history in L2 writing of naming texts based upon discourse structures, or “rhetorical modes” that can be readily identified (see, e.g., Bander, 1971); this interest in linking text names to their structures as well as providing structural models continues today in L2 writing for at least three reasons. One reason, certainly, is the importance of recognizing and exploiting text structures for effective reading and writing in a second/foreign language (Grabe, 2009). A second is the continued proliferation of L2 textbooks and curricular materials based upon what are often called “rhetorical modes,” e.g., comparison–contrast or cause and effect. A third comes from some L2 instructors’ understanding of contrastive rhetoric and the long-held argument that texts are structured in different ways among different linguistic and cultural groups, initiated by Kaplan (1966). Thus, text structure is seen by many practitioners, and students, to be central to a second/foreign language writing curriculum.

At the 2009 Second Language Writing Symposium, a group of EFL writing teachers from Asia, themselves L2 speakers of English, argued that for less proficient students in international contexts, texts should be named, structured, and assigned based upon specific textual formats, such as the rhetorical modes described by Silva (1990) in his history of teaching composition: “illustration, exemplification, comparison, contrast, partition, classification, and so on” (pp. 14–15). From these named text structures, they argued, teachers can develop a series of paragraph or essay templates, thereby enabling students to learn—with confidence—the discourse structures of English. In the survey that was distributed after the 2009 symposium, some international teachers continued to argue for genre names based upon these identifiable text formats.

Essays and naming: rhetorical modes. As many practitioners know, text formats (or “rhetorical modes”) may appear in writing assignments, often called essays in L1 writing classes; and, as noted, this practice continues to influence approaches to L2 writing. Thus, one finds a number of textbooks and on-line resources organized according to essays in the rhetorical modes. In literacy classes where specific attention to rhetorical modes is not necessarily prevalent, the term essay may still be the word used for all writing assignments. In a recent article discussing writing, rhetoric, and assessment, Leaker and Ostman (2010) critique this practice as limiting:

> We must reflect further on how essayistic literacy itself constrains, distorts, and even excludes particular kinds of learning. As compositionists, we want to advocate not only for other knowledges and other ways of knowing, but for alternative mechanisms for articulated learning. (p. 711)

Naming and essays: assignments in the disciplines. One significant problem in disciplinary classrooms in many parts of the world is that faculty, who may have specific genre names for their own valued work, tend to be much less specific about their naming of assignments for students, often calling an assigned text, or a question requiring a brief response on an examination an essay, though the written responses required do not resemble the essays found in the students’ writing classes. Graves, Hyland, and Samuels (2010), in their study of undergraduate writing in a Canadian college, found that essay, term paper, or just paper were the most common names for a variety of assigned texts in the disciplines, concluding that “instructors may not be giving sufficient attention to the issue of assignment names” (p. 273). These casual practices with assignments also occur in EFL environments. Here, for example, is what Carlino (2010) says about Argentine post-secondary faculty:

> Literacy practices in universities are new and challenging to undergraduates, for they differ greatly from modes of reading and writing required in high school; but in spite of this, instructors in the disciplines do not make college-level expectations explicit; guidelines are rare and feedback is minimal. (p. 284)
Why discuss rhetorical modes and essays, both of which are undoubtedly considered passé for the informed genre theorist or practitioner? Because in many L2 classrooms, this naming of structured texts, and the inherent problems, can still play an important role. Those who are concerned with the future of L2 GBWI need to take current practices into consideration as they prepare curricula or write textbooks. In addition, these issues appear to be of particular concern to teachers who have been L2 learners themselves and may feel most comfortable with a curriculum in which named and fixed text structures of the type discussed here predominate.

Text structures and the Sydney School. A richer, more context-driven approach to linking genre naming to text structures comes from the work of the “Sydney School” and is based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), first outlined in Halliday’s (1978) *Language as a Social Semiotic*. Much of the SFL research and curriculum is devoted to providing diverse students at a number of educational levels with access to the identified genres of the dominant culture, thus empowering students to participate effectively in that culture (Kress, 1991, p. 10). SFL practitioners note that text structures and language vary from context to context, but, importantly, “within that variation, [there are] relatively stable underlying patterns or ‘shapes’ that organize texts so that they are culturally and socially functional” (Feez, 2002, p. 53). Contending that the acquisition and use of written discourses with stable textual patterns in appropriate contexts will successfully socialize students, the Sydney School researchers and curriculum designers have identified eight “Key Genres,” indicating the schematic structure and language (“register”) of these texts and their major “stages,” or principal text functions, which are directly related, in the pedagogies, to the social purposes and locations in which the texts appear. These Key Genres are *recount*, *information report*, *explanation*, *exposition*, *discussion*, *procedure*, *narrative*, and *news story* (Macken-Horarik, 2002, pp. 21–22). In addition, a “Teaching Learning Cycle” (Feez, 1998) has been developed to facilitate student comprehension and practice as they work towards competency.

The SFL experts have produced a popular, accessible, teacher and student-friendly curriculum, one that, according to one 2009 SLWS survey respondent teaching GBWI in Spain is “the only approach I know which makes explicit what is needed and why, and allows you to make explicit your evaluation of student texts” (IR2).5

There is no question that SFL curricula are both popular and accessible in various parts of the L2 writing world and have contributed significantly to the discussions of the nature of genre and genre naming, as well as the interaction of identified genres with certain contexts. As Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) note:

> ... the research and debates within SFL genre approaches have been crucial in establishing how genres systematically link social motives and purposes to social and linguistic actions. By arguing for genres (and thus certain text types) as a centerpiece of literacy teaching, SFL ... scholars have debated ways in which genres can be used to help students gain access to and select more effectively from the systems of choices available to language users for the realization of meaning in specific contexts. (p. 37)

Naming as variable and contested

At the other end of the naming spectrum is the work of some of the North American New Rhetoric theorists, a number of whom resist arguments for textual stability and a primary focus on text structures. Prior (2007), for example, objects to the fact that “there remains a tendency [among genre theorists and researchers] to freeze writing, as though it entered the world from some other realm, to see writing as a noun rather than a verb” (p. 281). One reason that “freezing writing” is a problem for New Rhetoricians is because, in their view, there is no prototypical scene or context for a particular genre. In critiquing one theorist (Linell, 1998), Prior (2007) notes that this writer “imagines a culturally prototypical scene of writing rather than studying the actual scenes. In [some theorists’] scenes, the writer is always alone, the text is always permanent, the reader is always somewhere else, making meaning on her own” (p. 282).

For Prior (2007) and some others in the New Rhetoric camp, then, all writing should be seen first as a process, “a stream within the broader flows of semiotic activity” (p. 282). This “process” is not to be confused with the Process Movement (see Johns, 1997), where writer cognition is viewed as central; instead, it is a rich, sometimes

5 The researcher numbered the respondents. The IR2 = International Response 2, the second to be analyzed.
overwhelming, contextualized experience, “understood as historical and chaotic, as open and complex, and as evolving” (Prior, 2007, p. 283). Thus, rather than viewing texts from genres as fixed and structured, Prior (2007) and others (e.g., Russell, 1997) contend that genres should be seen as multi-modal, process-based and “fundamentally constituted in varied activities and artifacts involved in trajectories of mediated activities” (Prior, 2007, p. 283).

Though this New Rhetoric view is challenging for the practitioner, it should give L2 writing instructors pause; for as writers know from their own experiences with producing texts, there are many and varied influences upon the text product, and a context that may result from a chaotic and extended writing process as well as from external, intertextual factors. This essay, for example, began very differently from the way it appears here, principally because it was critiqued and many suggestions for revision were made. In addition, I continued to be influenced by my own reading and the writing experiences of my current EFL students as I attempted to revise. Useful studies of those endeavoring to write in different contexts and under different conditions provide evidence for the complexity and chaos that can be involved in producing a single text (e.g., Freedman & Adam, 2000; Tardy, 2005).

Naming and the future of GBWI

Bhatia’s inclusive model. What, then, do we do about the core issue of naming in the L2 writing classroom? Given the emphasis upon, and the need for, an understanding of text structure by L2 writers, combined with the argument that genre production should be viewed within a chaotic, multi-modal process, where can curriculum developers turn as they create pedagogies? As in the case of the other topics discussed here, I will suggest a compromise, one that takes into consideration writer processes, systems of texts, and the varied contextual influences upon them as well as the need expressed by L2 instructors to give students confidence through teaching them text formats. Practitioners can turn to the English for Specific Purposes movement, which, by its very nature, is designed be pragmatic and to “explicit[ly] address specific target needs” (Belcher, 2009, p. 3), in this case, the students’ need for scaffolded guidance using structures, combined with the importance, in genre theory, of seeing beyond structures to what Prior (2007) or others in the New Rhetoric movement view as the chaotic nature of processing genres.

Using ESP as a mediating force, we can begin with the work of Bhatia (2002), as shown in Appendix A. In this model, entitled “Levels of genre description” (p. 281), Bhatia accounts for the “rhetorical modes” that are so often linked with the paragraph or essay structures, calling these modes “generic values,” that is, methods for developing ideas and arguments within larger texts from a genre. Like many current genre theorists, Bhatia recognizes that authentic texts tend to be mixed: they often do not follow a rigid format and may contain more than one rhetorical mode. For example, a writer of a memo or legal brief may use definition, narration, and comparison/contrast within the same text product. In Bhatia’s model, genres are named by a “discourse community” (see Swales, 1990), that is, a group that shares valued genres as they communicate. What is also useful about this model is the mention of genre colonies: the view that genres are related to each other through their purposes, intertextually and contextually, a notion central to the work of many genre theorists, particularly in the ESP and New Rhetoric Schools (see Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 50). Bhatia (2002) and Swales (1990), in particular, contend that what a text is called by those who both honor and make use of it within their professional, academic, or cultural discourse communities is crucial to understanding the character of a genre and its social value.

Instructional decisions for the future of GBWI

How can we take students from discourse modes or varied text structures to the more complex nature of genres as evolving, contextualized artifacts? Teachers can begin with the named texts in the students’ own languages and cultures. Many students are already quite aware of certain familiar genres from their own cultures, and they can use these L1 genres to hypothesize about what the purposes of these genres are, the occasions for which they are read or written, processes that might be used to read and write them, influences upon the texts, their linguistic and structural conventions, and the elements that make them uniquely suitable for the particular occasion where they appeared. For example, in Johns (1997, pp. 39–45), suggestions for analyzing two everyday genres in the students’ first languages and cultures, the wedding invitation and the obituary, are made. Once this analysis of an L1 genre is completed, students can begin to analyze texts from comparable genres in their L2, proceeding to other genres that they may need to recognize, read, or produce in their second or foreign language.
To solve the problem of “the essay” or the “term paper” assignments within their academic classes, two types of activities seem to be successful. The first is practice in extracting from academic faculty the information students need to understand what a loosely-named assigned text, e.g., an “essay,” in their classroom requires (Johns, 1997, pp. 48–50). Approaching disciplinary faculty can be a daunting task, but providing practice in the L2 writing classroom in interviewing faculty does assist students not only to approach their instructors but also to reassess their assignments. After students have analyzed their assignments with the help of faculty, they can use Bhatia’s model as a guide for determining the “generic values” (or discourse modes) they might employ to organize their responses. A second suggestion focusing on naming develops students’ metacognition: they reflect upon their assignments from various classrooms and their writing processes, asking themselves questions such as: “How is this ‘essay’ different from this one in my writing class? What influenced the writing of this essay? What happened as I attempted to complete the assignment that changed my mind about what to write?”

These activities have the same goal: they assist students to ask questions about text naming and what it implies within a community of readers and writers, and to apply their findings to a specific assignment so that they can approach the processing and production of their responses in a manner that is satisfactory not only to them, as writers, but to their audience(s).

**Issue 2: Genre learning vs. genre awareness**

A second instructional decision, closely related to naming and its relationships to text structures and conceptions of genre, is whether students should be asked to learn text types, as some L2 writing instructors and “Sydney School” practitioners suggest, to relate these types to prototypical contexts; or instead, whether they should be encouraged to develop genre awareness, that is, to view genres as flexible and evolving. At one extreme of genre learning is a classroom where essays or paragraphs with strict formats in the rhetorical modes are central (e.g., cause/effect, comparison/contrast, extended definition) and structure is often taught as fixed and almost universally transferable. One particularly popular approach to learning text types as fixed is the Jane Schaffer Method with which L2 students may be familiar (see “Jane Schafer Essay Format,” n.d.). In the Sydney School pedagogies, though presented in a much more sophisticated manner and allowing for more text variety, the Eight Key Genres are viewed as relatively fixed and prototypical for certain contexts in the dominant culture, and the assumption appears to be that they can be transferred not only to other English-speaking cultures but to EFL contexts as well. If inappropriately presented, these text types could be memorized as rigid formats, rather than as problem-spaces open to critique and change. According to some cognitive theorists, “low road transfer” is what we can expect from the pedagogies that encourage students to learn fixed text formats and apply them, as is, to certain writing contexts. This type of transfer is described by Salomon and Perkins (1989), as “[involving] the spontaneous, automatic, transfer of highly practiced skills, with little need for reflective thinking” (p. 118).

Some current research supports the Salomon and Perkins (1989) assessment. For example, in her study of the use of model, “fixed” essays in a writing classroom, Macbeth (2009) found that although the models “provided relief” to her novice L2 students, they were problematic for instruction and transfer to other learning situations because “they offer formal, generic representations of practices that are far from generic or formally structured. [Unfortunately], they convey these practices as stable, reliable, and vividly so” (p. 45).

From their own work (see, Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, pp. 173–208), it appears that the New Rhetoricians would encourage students to develop “high road” or “far” transfer of learning, meaning that they can “successfully apply old knowledge to a new problem” (Willingham, 2009, p. 74). Thus, if genre awareness is approached with this point of view, students should be able to appropriately apply old learning to the new, perhaps by completely discarding or revising a view of texts developed in a previous writing context. Not surprisingly, Russell and Fisher (2009), like other New Rhetoricians (e.g., Beaufort, 2007), make the distinction between pedagogies that support genre learning/acquisition with the repeated analysis and practice of fixed text formats and those that support genre awareness, described by Beaufort (2007) as providing “guidance to structure specific problems and learnings into more abstract principles that can be applied to new situations” (p. 151). These New Rhetoric approaches could assist students in recognizing that processing texts from a genre can often be complex (Prior, 2007) and that, in the end, “genres are socially situated and culturally embedded [carrying with them] the beliefs, values, and ideologies of particular communities and cultures” (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 195).
Instructional decisions for the future of GBWI

If models of text structures and aspects of genre learning are important in supporting L2 writers, as has been noted by Macbeth (2009), how do we take students from these models, perhaps based upon “discourse modes,” to high road transfer, that is, the ability to assess a situation for a genre and make decisions about what is appropriate in the text produced? Two approaches will be suggested here. One is implied by Carter (2007) (see Appendix B), who proposes that texts from genres in academic disciplines can be classified under four types of macro-genres, and another, adapted from Devitt, Reiff, and Bawashi’s textbook, Scenes of Writing (2004).

Carter’s (2007) work can assist L2 academic writing teachers by enabling them to produce a curriculum that encourages rhetorical flexibility, yet classify texts according to their purposes and macro-structures. Thus, for example, students can examine the structures of an academic introduction for a text calling for empirical enquiry (see Swales, 1990), mapping these structures into introductions in their first languages or to L2 introductions in the sciences, nursing, or the social sciences. Their writing assignments can involve producing an introduction that varies somewhat from what they have modeled and mapped, depending upon the situation in which they are asked to write. Another Carter (2007) macro-structure category, problem-solving responses, appears not only in business, social work, engineering, and nursing, but also in less academic genres such as opinion editorials. Using opinion editorials from their L1 or L2, students can be asked to discover where a problem is discussed in the text, its causes, and the solutions, then approach analyzing, and producing, varied genres with problem/solution responses in their disciplines. They are applying their prior knowledge of problem–solution responses to new texts that have traces of the old, as is the case in many genres (see Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1993). L2 students do need relief from what often appears to be new and unanalyzable texts from the target language communities which they are attempting to enter. Thus, either moving from L1 or L2, students can use Carter’s macro-structures in order to bring order to the apparently chaotically organized texts they encounter in their classrooms.

Though a number of New Rhetoricians do not discuss pedagogical applications, fortunately, there are those, such as Beaufort (2007), who do. This practitioner encourages high transfer through assisting students to learn abstract concepts related to genres, using them as “mental grippers for organizing general domains of knowledge that then can be applied to local situations” (Carter, 2007, p. 151). Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) suggest how these “grippers” can be instantiated as students begin to work with an assignment or a text from a genre they have collected. Their list of “grippers,” italicized below, has been augmented here with questions that my students use relating directly to an assignment in one of their disciplinary classrooms:

- **Relationship(s) to the Carter macro-structures:** You have been studying and writing about the four general types of textual responses in academic classrooms. In what discipline has your assignment been made? Does the assignment name any of the academic genres related to the macro-structures in the Carter list? For example, is your assignment a case study, a project report, a business plan, or a proposal? If so, your written product may follow a problem–solution response to which you have already been exposed. Later, ask the faculty member who gave the assignment what it is called and how it should be organized.
- **Task problem space:** Does this task remind you of other tasks you have completed, either in your first or second languages? How is it similar to this previous task? How is it different?
- **Task specifics:** Further, what content is valued in this assignment? What concepts appear to be important? What sources should you be using and how should these sources be cited (see Hyland, 1999)? Are classroom readings and lectures to be integrated? What referencing style (e.g., APA, MLA) does the instructor prefer? What will give the text coherence, e.g., headings or transition words and phrases? That is, what will you do to be writer responsible (Hinds, 1987), leading the reader through the text?
- **Writer’s role and purposes:** In this writing task, who are you as writer? Is your role “student,” or do you have another role? What are your purposes as writer, e.g., to draw from sources to make an argument?
- **Audience:** Who is the audience for the assignment? If it is the instructor, how will you appeal to that audience? What do you know about this audience, whatever it is, that you can use to guide your writing? How will the instructor evaluate this paper? What are the criteria upon which she/he will depend?

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6 Melzer (2005), who studied more than 800 undergraduate writing assignments in the United States, found that in the vast majority, the instructor was the students’ audience.
• **Language and writer’s stance**: What language register is important to this assignment? For example, should you “hedge” your claims (Hyland, 2009)? What stance can you take about the content—and what will that stance look like, in terms of language? Will you be reporting, critiquing, evaluating?

• **Process**: You may have learned one “writing process” in your previous writing classes; however, different texts and contexts may require different processes. Is there any indication in the assignment of what writing process you should use here? Where will you begin? With a model for a successful text? With class notes, readings, other sources? What, or whom, should you consult as you process the text? How much time do you have to complete this assignment? How will you parcel out this time? If you draft all or part of the assignment, when can you see the instructor to determine if you are following the right path towards the product? Is there any opportunity for peer review by fellow students?

Drawing from research in cognitive psychology, Willingham (2009) argues that students need *continuous, distributed practice* of the skills and abilities that are central to high transfer, which is encouraged by these questions. As shown here, students can draw from their past textual experiences and practices to create what Devitt et al. (2004) call a “problem-space.” Then, they can use the topics and questions posed to explore and to reflect critically upon the assignment—and upon their own processes as readers and writers. During and after their processing of writing tasks, then, they need to consider, through reflection, questions such as the following:

• How were my writing processes in completing this task the same as, or different from, the processes I used in previous tasks? What sources and people did I draw from? How did these people, or sources, influence my revisions? On what features of this task did I devote most of my time? Why?
• What will I do differently with the next assignment? For example, what questions might I ask of the instructor? Who else will I listen to as I complete the assignment? How much time and effort will I devote to various sub-tasks, like searching for sources, revising, or editing?

L2 writing instructors, in particular, need to encourage questioning of a task and critical reflection that augments student “mindfulness” or metacognition (see Beaufort, 2007, pp. 151–152), leading, if possible, to high transfer of their thinking and learning to new, or evolving, genres, writing processes, and writing contexts.

**Issue 3: Pedagogical focus**

In a paper entitled “Genre in the Classroom: A Linguistic Approach,” Flowerdew (2002) suggested that there are two general approaches to theorizing about and teaching genre: the “linguistic” (SFL and ESP) and the “non-linguistic” (the New Rhetoric). Though he has modified his argument considerably, making it more complex and suggesting that the New Rhetoric and ESP may be converging (see Flowerdew, 2011), the issue of pedagogical focus continues to be relevant and contested, as conference participants found when experts from the various theoretical “schools” appeared together on a American Association of Applied Linguistics panel I chaired (see Johns et al., 2006).

The contestedness relates directly to the curricular core: whether text, however described, or processes and contexts should be the major focus, a question that has been implicit in the discussion of the two GBWI topics, naming and acquisition/awareness, presented so far. Representing the ESP School with a “linguistic” orientation, Hyland (2004, 2009) begins with large corpuses from a variety of disciplinary texts and argues that a great deal can be surmised about a genre, a writing context, or a community of writers from features of the community’s valued genres. In his contributions to genre studies, Hyland (2009) investigates, among other things, disciplinary citation practices, reporting verbs, hedges, self-mention, directives, and lexical bundles. In his ESP pedagogy, then, Hyland (2003) begins with textual corpora, arguing that

Genre-driven courses … will take texts as the starting point but provide opportunities for learners to develop text-generating strategies. The guiding principle is that literacy development requires an explicit focus on the ways texts are organized and the language choices that users must make to achieve their purposes in particular contexts. Genres offer a focus for understanding the types of texts that students will need in a given situation. . . (2003, p. 75)
Systemic Functional Linguistics (the “Sydney School”) also begins its pedagogies with texts, called “configurations of meaning that are recurrently phased together to enact social practices” (Martin, 2002, p. 269). The Eight Key Genres have been identified by social purpose (e.g., retelling events to inform), by social location (e.g., personal letters), by schematic structure, and by stages (orientation, record of events, reorientation) (see, e.g., Macken-Horarik, 2002). Because these Key Genres are central, they are reenacted continuously, and the classroom becomes a “cline of apprenticeship” (Martin, 2002, p. 272) as students move to more complex, staged texts that are avenues to gaining power within a culture.

Not surprisingly, the text-driven pedagogies from ESP and SFL are critiqued by those who focus first upon evolving processes and contexts. Coe (2002), representing a number of New Rhetoricians, is suspicious of the “linguistic” approaches (ESP and SFL). He has commented that “I have grave doubts about research and pedagogical practices that, after defining genre as the relationship between text type and recurring situation, proceed by inferring situation from textual features” (p. 197).

Thus, New Rhetoricians, who concentrate much more on the writing situation than, for example, language register, begin pedagogies with analyses of genres as a “mediated interactions within a context” (Prior, 2007, p. 94); for, as Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) note, “genres situate and distribute cognition, frame social identities, organize spatial and temporal relations, and coordinate meaningful, consequential actions” (p. 95).

Activity theory and, by extension, Prior’s (2007) multi-modal, process-based “mediated activities” (p. 283) take the historical and sometimes chaotic contexts for genre production to new heights. Genre becomes “an ongoing, dynamic, accomplishment of people acting together with shared tools, including—more powerfully—writing” (Russell, 1997, pp. 508–509). The end result is a successful text produced for a specific situation, by a purposeful writer who is constrained by his/her processes, role vis-à-vis a particular audience (e.g., teacher/student, manager/employee), and previous experiences with genres.

Instructional decisions for the future of GBWI

Which of the pedagogical choices is most widely circulated among L2 contexts? The two “linguistic” pedagogies that begin with, and often concentrate upon, text and language register are the best known and the most successful in reaching their goals with L2 populations, as indicated in the survey of 2009 SLWS participants. For the SFL (“Sydney School”) camp, the populations are, for the most part, novice and L2 learners, especially in public primary and secondary educational systems. For ESP, the considerable successes and most of the research have taken place among graduate students (see, e.g., Swales & Feak, 1994) and professionals (see e.g., Bhatia, 1993).

The New Rhetoric approaches from North America appear to have had limited success in achieving their goals among the populations where this camp is best known: in first year writing courses in North America. From all indications, they have not made many inroads outside of North America, either. There could be a number of reasons for this: the pervasive nature of “the modern essay” in North American L1 and some L2 literacy classes, despite critique of this form by the experts; lack of training among the inexperienced instructors who, in many cases, actually teach the courses and find text-based (“rhetorical mode”) curricula more accessible; and, of course, the difficulties posed by the abstract nature of any genre awareness curriculum.

How should future teaching of the text/context issue be organized? It appears from the comments by professionals in L2 contexts that responded to the 2009 SLWS survey and from the successes of ESP and SFL that curricula should, in fact, begin with texts and their structures, particularly among novice students; but then, using some of the suggestions made by the New Rhetoricians, a curriculum must move towards an integration of theories and practices that value analysis of context, complex writing processes, and intertextuality. Research into high road transfer suggests that students should view texts as both temporarily structured and evolving, that they should draw from prior knowledge of texts but be open to the demands of a new situation or assignment. Carter’s (2007) contribution to our understandings of textual macro-genres and Bhatia’s (2002) levels could enrich this emphasis upon textual variety, rhetorical flexibility, and, one hopes, varied processing, reflection, and high road transfer. Bawarshi and Reiff (2010), who speak of genre as “a rich analytical tool for studying academic [and other] environments,” describe pedagogies (pp. 189–210) which may require some adaptation to L2 writing contexts but are worthy of our consideration. What is being suggested here, then, is to begin with text structures and then to move rapidly to viewing genres as socially mediated entities, something this writer has discovered to be best accomplished in academic contexts in an adjunct environment (Johns, 2001).
Is the teaching of genre inherently ideological? There are experts in applied linguistics and writing students that would answer “yes” to this question. Benesch (2001), for example, has argued that English for Specific Purposes approaches are ideologically “accommodationist” in that they promote the textual hegemony and the learning of certain genres that, in turn, exclude L2 students from the academic cultures that they are attempting to enter. Luke (1996), extending this critique to include the other “linguistic” theory, SFL, contends that text-based, accommodationist approaches can only lead to an uncritical assessment of a particular discipline (or profession) (p. 314). Thus, these experts would argue, the text-based approaches of ESP and SFL are, at best, accommodationist ideologically and, at worst, assimilationist. They allow for little or no critique, resulting in “a socially situated product perspective” (Casanave, 1992, p. 82) and even the memorization of a list of acceptable text features in a template.

There is research among those that stress ideology indicating that L2 students can suffer academically, culturally, and personally from accommodationist approaches and the textual hegemonies of the university or professions. Casanave (1992), for example, described a Latina student who, with much sadness, left her sociology graduate program and its genres, because it was separating her from her family and culture. Rodriguez (1983), a bilingual child of immigrants to the United States, also speaks with some sadness, in Hunger of Memory, of his eventual social and psychological separation from his family as he became initiated into English-speaking academic discourses and cultures.

In contrast to the “accommodationist” or “assimilationist” text-based, linguistic instructional approaches, some New Rhetoricians seem to take on critical pedagogy with vigor. Coe, Lingard, & Teslenko (2002), in The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre (pp. 6–7), promote classroom inquiry that leads directly to student critique of powerful genres. Questions from the introduction to this volume have been revised for this essay to be more appropriate for L2 novice students. In a critical activity, students might ask:

- What does this genre we are studying constrain against in terms of communication? What purposes does it serve as part of this assignment?
- What are the values and beliefs that this genre seems to perpetuate? Do these values seem to reflect the discipline or profession that underlies the class in which you are enrolled? Are these your values? Why or why not?
- In real life (that is, outside of the classroom), who is permitted to use this genre? Who cannot use it?
- Who are the audiences for this genre [in real life]? How do you know? What language, text structure, visuals, or other clues do you have to the nature of these audiences?
- How could you negotiate this genre (and the assignment) to make it more responsive to your needs and interests, if at all?

Instructional decisions for the future of GBWI

For L2 students, it seems most appropriate to begin by considering how a text from a genre might be structured, how it relates to other texts, where it might appear, what writer processes might be involved, and what other contextual elements (e.g., the writer’s role, the audience, the influences of other texts) might be central to understanding the nature of text products from a genre. After students have completed these analyses, they can, and probably should, turn to critique. This argument parallels the one made for student completion of a summary or paraphrase of a text so that they understand it, and its contexts and purposes, before they can begin to evaluate the text. In my experience, some novice students tend to critique a text or a situation before they understand it thoroughly.

Conclusion

When I began writing this essay, I had intended to report on my survey of literacy instructors conducted at the 2009 Second Language Writing Symposium. However, the survey responses were few and the results were, for the most part, predictable. Most L2 instructors in EFL contexts argued for the teaching of fixed text structures, either through the traditional rhetorical modes or through adapting SFL or ESP. Thus, I turned to exploring the on-going concerns about issues relating to teaching of genres in L2 classes that in most academic publications continue to take the back seat to other, perhaps more interesting pursuits such as corpus studies, qualitative studies of graduate student writing, or theorizing about genre as metaphor. All of this is important work, of course. Particularly useful to the L2 instructors...
have been the case and qualitative studies (e.g., Prior, 1998; Tardy, 2009) which give insights into what may be involved in high road transfer.

However, there has not been sufficient concern about, or research on, L2 novice students and the GBWI that is appropriate for them, instruction that draws from the best in the various theoretical schools and is true to the complexity of the concept of genre. To assist in that discussion, I have attempted here to present a true essay—one that explores and suggests decisions about instruction that should be considered, particularly in L2 environments.

Appendix A

Levels of Generic Description (Bhatia, 2004)

Appendix B

Disciplinary macro-genres

1. A problem-solving/system-generating response
   Disciplines: business, social work, engineering, nursing
   a) Identify, define, and analyze the problem,
   b) Determine what information and disciplinary concepts are appropriate for solving the problem,
   c) Collect data,
   d) Offer viable solutions, and
   e) Evaluate the solutions using specific discipline-driven criteria.
   Genres: case studies, project reports and proposals, business plans.

2. A response calling for empirical inquiry (An IMRD paper)
   Disciplines in the sciences, nursing, and the social sciences
   a) Ask questions/formulate hypotheses,
   b) Test hypotheses (or answer questions) using empirical methods,
   c) Organize and analyze data for verbal and visual summaries,
   d) Conclude by explaining the results.
   Genres: lab reports, posters, a research report or article.

3. A response calling for research from written sources
   Disciplines in the humanities: English and other literatures, classics, history
a) Critically evaluate the sources “in terms of credibility, authenticity, interpretive stance, audience, potential biases, and value for answering research questions,” and
b) Marshall evidence to support an argument that answers the research question.

Genre: “The quintessential academic genre: the research paper” (MLA style)

4. A response calling for performance
   Disciplines: art, music, composition (writing)
   a) Learn about the principles, concepts, media, or formats appropriate for the discipline,
   b) Attempt to master the techniques and approaches
   c) Develop a working knowledge and process, and
   d) Perform and/or critique a performance.


References

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