

A Case for a Synthesis of Approaches in Teaching Writing: A Case Study in an Australian Primary School



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This paper reports on the result of a case study conducted in 2007, aiming to investigate the teaching of writing in a grade 5 class in an Australian primary school. The paper will report data from classroom observations over six weeks, in which the researcher acted as a non participant observer, and an interview with the teacher at the end of the observations. Data from both the classroom observations, samples of students' texts and the interview indicate that the teaching of writing in this class could be considered eclectic. Despite a strong emphasis on the implementation of the systemic functional linguistic genre-based approach (SFL GBA) to the teaching of writing the teaching practices also drew on the process approach.

Introduction

The study reported in this paper was undertaken in the course of a program of work in Australia funded by the Government of Indonesia. Having studied in Australia in the past, I returned in 2007 because I was particularly interested in learning more about effective practices in teaching English that could be adopted for teaching English as a foreign language in the Indonesian context. The Indonesian government acknowledges the centrality of writing in education and has put a strong emphasis on the teaching of writing and the development of students' writing skills in English. The last two English curricula for secondary schools stipulated that students should be taught to write different text types (give reference for English curriculum). However, my observations in the field (Emilia et al, 2008) as well as informal talks with teachers in different forums have indicated that there is much confusion among Indonesian English teachers about how to help develop students' writing skills. Based on my own observations, through my Master's and PhD studies, I deemed that there had been two main approaches to teaching writing which had had currency in Australia. These approaches are: the process approach and the SFL genre-based approach.

Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

- (i) What approach (es) is(are) used by the teachers in teaching writing?;
- (ii) What benefits and challenges do the teachers find in implementing the approach(es)?

Theoretical framework: Popular approaches to the teaching of writing

Two popular approaches to the teaching of writing have informed the study. The first of these involved the process approach as developed by Graves (1983; 1996), Walshe (1981), Hill (2006) and Hornsby and Sukarna (2007). The second one was the SFL GBA (e.g. Callaghan and Rothery, 1989; Feez, 2002; Gibbons, 2002,2009; Christie, 2005; Martin and Rose 2008), which had been used at different levels of education – from primary up to tertiary, not only in Australia but also in other countries, in Asia and Europe (Derewianka, 2003). Each approach will be outlined below before giving an account of the study itself.

The process approach

The process approach was a new buzzword in the teaching of writing and was widely taken up in Australian schools in the 1980s (Collerson, 1989: 4) and has now been used in both first and second language contexts (Peregoy and Boyle, 1993; Hyland, 2003). The process approach has four basic principles or central elements, including: the process itself, the conference, ownership, and time for writing (Walshe, 1981, Collerson, 1989:2-3; Graves, 1983; 1996; Emilia, 1996), each of which will be discussed below.

The process

Under this principle, writing is treated as a process. “Gone are the days when teachers maintained that one draft was all that students needed to produce” (Richardson, Morgan and Fleener, 2006: 337). It is said that students should learn that professional writers do not just do a one-shot draft to make their message clear. Thus, like professional writers, students need time and opportunity to think about what is to be written, to draft and to revise effectively, to edit and to proofread their writing (Goldstein and Carr, 1996:1, cited in Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006: 277; see also Barchers, 1998: 318-320). The phases of writing include: **Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing** (Richardson, Morgan and Fleener, 2006), or **Seed: Think about it, shape you ideas into possible writing topics, which parallels the prewriting stage; Draft: Think about how you will write this piece then start writing; Revise; Edit; Proofread and Publish** (Hornsby and Sukarna, 2007). These phases, as will be shown later, were used by the teacher reported in this paper.

The conference

This principle simply means that there are opportunities for a student writer to talk about the writing with other students or with the teacher or another adult. This interaction may occur at any stage in the process – even before the writing has begun (Graves, 1983). Regarding conferences, Hornsby and Sukarna (2007) suggest several stages, which were also used by the teacher reported in this paper. These include:

- ✓ **Authorial conference** when the teacher encourages the students to think about some aspects of their writing, such as whether it makes sense, whether the

message is clear, whether the writing sounds right or whether the ideas are in order.

- ✓ **Secretarial Conference** when the teacher encourages the students to pay attention to aspects regarding lexical choice, and sentence arrangements, whether the sentences can be rewritten to make them more interesting and varied.
- ✓ **Editorial conference** when the teacher suggests the student proofread his/her work and check for spelling, punctuation, grammar.

Free choice of topics

Free choice of topics is considered very important in this approach as it enables students to write what they know and are interested in (Rosen, 1989). It is said that “the easiest place for any writer to begin writing ... is in writing about something s/he knows” (Graves, 1983:13) and “it is the heart of success in writing” (Graves, 1983: 72). With this principle students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own writing so that they have some sense of ownership or control.

Time for writing

In this approach, writing is not just an occasional once-a week affair but an activity which children are able to practise every day and this has certainly had a positive effect on the teaching and on the attitude to writing of both teachers and students (Collerson, 1989: 2-3, see also a more recent study reported by Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006: 275-285).

Criticisms made of the process approach

Concerns with and criticisms of the process approach have been raised, particularly by SFL GBS theorists (see Barton, 1994; Emilia, 1996; Nunan, 1999; Hyland, 2003 on a useful critique of the process approach). These concerns were, among others, as follows:

- ✓ With the free choice of topics, children who do not have much variety in their out-of school experience may tend to write on the same topic again and again.
- ✓ Process writing in many classroom tends to be mainly story writing.
- ✓ Boys tend to write about violence and girls about a story in which they became the subject of interest.
- ✓ The process is not applied across the curriculum, but is used only in the English program.
- ✓ The role of the teacher is that of a facilitator rather than that of one provides explicit teaching about what is to be written. Genre theorists believe that learning to write requires a greater emphasis on explicit teaching. Genre theorists say that students’ metalanguage and mastery of a certain types of texts and written language should be taught , rather than left to emerge (Martin, Christie and Rothery, 1987; Rothery, 1996; Christie and Dreyfus, 2007).

However, over the past 30 years, the elements and definition of the writing process have been reinterpreted and the definition of the process model has evolved in the theoretical literature, so that, it is now regarded quite differently from what it was in its early years, when, for example, explicit instruction, reflection, guided revision, and self-assessment were not commonly associated with the process model (Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006: 279; Hill, 2006). Furthermore, more recent works on the process approach also emphasise the necessity of teaching different genres to students (see the discussion on current perspectives on literacies and learners, edited by Campbell and Green, 2006; see also Owocki, 2001 and Hill, 2006). These sources of concern and criticism can be less justified today, as this study will reveal.

The systemic functional linguistic genre-based approach (The SFL GBA)

The SFL GBA to teaching writing has been developed in Australia, based on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) developed by Halliday (1975, 1985, 1994). The SFL GBA is also called an interventionist pedagogy (Rothery, 1996) or one that involves overt instruction (The New London Group, 2000). The SFL GBA has influenced the entire state educational system in Australia, and has been adopted in primary, secondary, tertiary, professional and community teaching contexts in programs for native speakers of English, ESL and academic literacy programs (see Martin and Rose, 2007:12).

In the SFL GBA, genre has been defined as the ways we get things done through language – the ways we exchange information and knowledge and interact socially (Callaghan, Knapp and Knoble, 1993: 193). Genre has also been defined as “a staged, goal-oriented social processes and it is referred to as *social processes* because members of a culture interact with each other to achieve them; as *goal-oriented*, because they have evolved to get things done; and as *staged* because it usually takes more than one step for participants to achieve their goals” (see Martin, Christie and Rothery, 1987; 1994, Martin, 2000: 4).

Based on their obligatory and optional stages (as well as the social purpose), there are at least eight prototypical genres that are necessary for students to learn, including: Recount, Report, Explanation, Exposition, Discussion, Procedure, Narrative, News Story (Feez and Joyce, 1998b; Macken-Horarik, 2002; Christie and Derewianka, 2008; Martin and Rose, 2008).

The goals of the SFL GBA are basically to help students become more successful writers (and readers) of academic and workplace texts (Hyon, 1996: 700) and to help students make sense, not only of the structure of texts, but also of a wide range of compositional concerns (Brooks, 2002). To realise its aims, the SFL GBA stresses several basic principles that are described below.

Language learning is a social activity

This principle derives from Halliday's theory that learning is, above all, a social process, and knowledge is transmitted in social contexts, through relationships, like those of parent and child, or teacher and pupil, or classmates, that are defined in the value systems and ideology of the culture (Halliday, 1985: 5). This concept of learning is parallel to Vygotsky's view that learning is a social activity, that "Learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with peers" (1978: 90).

Learning occurs more effectively if teachers are explicit about what is expected of students

Under this principle, the SFL GBA suggests that teachers should be more explicit in teaching several aspects, such as how language works to make meaning, the text organization, and linguistic forms that characterize different genres (Feez and Joyce, 1998a: 25). A strong text organisation and linguistic features, according to Christie and Dreyfus (2007), indicate good writing development, normally brought about by explicit teaching.

Students learn under the guidance of the teacher in apprenticeship

Under this principle students learn as apprentices with the teacher in the authoritative role of expert on language system and function (Feez and Joyce, 1998a; Feez, 2002; Macken-Horarik, 2002).

There are several models of the SFL GBA. The model used by the teacher reported in this paper and in the Indonesian curriculum of English, covers:

- ✓ *Building Knowledge of the Field* or *Negotiating Field*, to use Rothery's (1996) term, aiming to build students' knowledge about the topic they are going to write;
- ✓ *Modelling*: when the teacher gives a variety of model texts in focus. The provision of models of appropriate texts is very important for students to learn (Christie, 1989:155);
- ✓ *Joint Construction*: when students write in groups or together with the teacher when the teacher acts as a scribe; and
- ✓ *Independent Construction*: when the students write individually. All these stages, it is said, "do not work as a lockstep sequence for the whole class" (Callaghan and Rothery, 1988: 48) and "there is no right way to sequence teaching learning activities" (Macken-Horarik, 2002: 26). The approach runs in line with the students' condition and context.

Concerns and criticism with the SFL GBA

The SFL GBA has not been without its critics (see the discussion in Christie, 2010). The first issue from those working under the genre pedagogy in North America centres on explicit teaching of the identification and description of the conventions of particular

genres. In this context, Freedman (1994:196) argues that explicit teaching is unnecessary, for the most part, not even possible, and where possible, not useful.

Another issue has been articulated by the process approach advocates, who see the teaching of genre rules as limiting students' creativity and free expression (see the discussion in Sawyer and Watson, 1987; Dixon, 1987; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995). The progressivists also argue that the SFL GBA emphasises only the product, rather than process (as discussed in Nunan, 1999) and see genre literacy as a revival of transmission pedagogy (as discussed in Cope and Kalantzis, 1993a: 2).

However, based on the findings of doctoral study (Emilia, 2005) and a more recent study on the implementation of the SFL GBA in an Indonesian secondary school (Emilia et al, 2008), and also this study, the above concerns are not justified. Regarding the first issue, Emilia's (2005), Emilia et al's (2008) studies and this study found out that explicit teaching is important to help students gain a shared understanding of the different genres to be taught. The teacher reported in this paper, as will be described later, also valued this principle. The second issue on the teaching of genre rules, cannot be justified either. "Making rules and expectations explicit to students does not limit their freedom and autonomy. On the contrary, it gives them the tools to be creative and autonomous. Once students are aware of the conventions of any of the text types, they will be able to manipulate them for their own purposes" (Gibbons, 2002: 68; see also Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995: 160-161). Finally, with respect to the emphasis on the product, the basic principles of the SFL GBA does put emphasis on the process of writing, as can be seen from the stages of the SFL GBA, which can lead to students' awareness that writing is a recursive process.

A combination of process and SFL genre-based approaches

In more recent research, as reported by Hyland (2003: 23, see also the discussion in Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006), it is shown that in today's writing classrooms, including ESL ones, there is typically a mixture of more than one approach and that teachers frequently combine these orientations in imaginative and effective ways. Hyland writes:

Today, writing classrooms ... are typically a mixture of more than one approach and that teachers frequently combine these orientations in imaginative and effective ways. ... By laying out the main attributes of these two orientations side-by side, however, it can be seen how the strength of one might complement the weaknesses of the other (Hyland, 2003: 23).

Hyland goes on to say that an effective methodology for teaching writing, especially second language writing, should therefore incorporate and extend the insights of the main orientations in the following ways:

- ✓ Broaden formal and functional orientations to include the social purposes behind forms;

- ✓ Locate the process concepts of strategy, schema and metacognition in social contexts;
- ✓ Respect students' needs for relevant content through stimulating reading and source materials;
- ✓ Support genre pedagogies with strategies for planning, drafting, and revising texts;
- ✓ Situate writing in a context of audience and link it to broader social structure (Hyland, 2003: 24).

These suggestions indicate that a synthesis between the process approach and the genre-based approach is desirable and possible (see Badger and White, 2000, cited in Paltridge, 2004, who drew together genre and process approaches). Badger and White, like this study, found that the combination of the main principles of the process and genre-based approaches are complementary rather than contradictory.

Method

As indicated earlier, this study was conducted in a grade five class in an Australian primary classroom. The class had 25 children who were all native speakers of English and the teacher was experienced, having been teaching since 1981. In learning to write, children in this class are expected to learn how to do different types of texts, such as Narrative, Recount, Exposition, Procedural and Explanation. The teaching of writing was conducted three times a week in this class, with each meeting lasting about two periods. In addition, the class took once a week for formal lesson of hand writing.

This study used a qualitative case study research design, as this study, in line with one main characteristic of a case study approach, is concerned with "a case" (Gillham, 2000:1), "a small scale, a single case" (Stake, 1985: 278) and "focused on one particular instance of educational experience or practice" (Freebody, 2003: 81), that is, the teaching of writing. The second characteristic, which constitutes an important aspect of case study is that this research employed "multiple sources of evidence - converging from the same set of issues" (Yin, 1993: 32) or "multiple data collections" (Freebody, 2003: 83) including observations, interview and students' texts analysis. This aimed to allow for "in-depth study" (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh 1972; Connole, 1993) or "down to earth" study (Cohen and Manion, 1985, see also Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Multiple data gatherings aimed to enhance the construct validity of the study (Yin, 1993: 39-40) and to gain more rounded and complete accounts on what approaches the teacher used in teaching writing, and what benefits and challenges the teacher encountered in implementing these approaches. In the interest of space, this paper will present only data from observations in an Australian primary classroom (grade five) and an interview with the teacher.

Classroom observation, carried out upon the recruitment of participants and the signing of the consent form, was conducted for six weeks in which the researcher acted

as a non-participant observer. Observation was conducted twice a week, to observe strategies used and their outcomes as well as the challenges encountered by the teacher in using the strategies. I made notes over the observations on what was said and done by both the teacher and the students in the “interactional setting” (Morrison, 1993, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 305; Allwright, 1988: Allwright and Bailey, 1991). Samples of the students’ works were also collected during the observations. Some of the sessions were video-taped to enable the researcher to describe the class and to record her reflections and to watch the video of the lesson for further analysis (Allwright, 1988). The researcher assured the teacher and students that all the videotapes could only be accessed by the researcher and used for research purpose.

At the conclusion of the observation an interview, lasting for 15 minutes, was conducted with the teacher and was audiotaped. This interview aimed to find out the teacher’s opinions and understanding of the approaches to the teaching of writing she applied in the classroom and the strengths and challenges in implementing the approaches. A guided or semi-structured interview was employed to obtain the information required, while at the same time permitting the participant’s freedom in the nature of responses and descriptions illustrating concepts (Field and Morse, 1985; Kvale, 1996).

Data from observations and interview were analysed to address the research questions. The transcribed data were examined and sorted into categories using thematic analysis (Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 1998). Then the data were presented in a condensed body of information. A “data triangulation” (Stake, 1995: 112; Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Nunan & Bailey, 2009), was finally conducted, to make a contrast and comparison of all the data from different sources to enhance the validity of the conclusions of the study.

Discussion: Approaches and strategies used in the teaching of writing

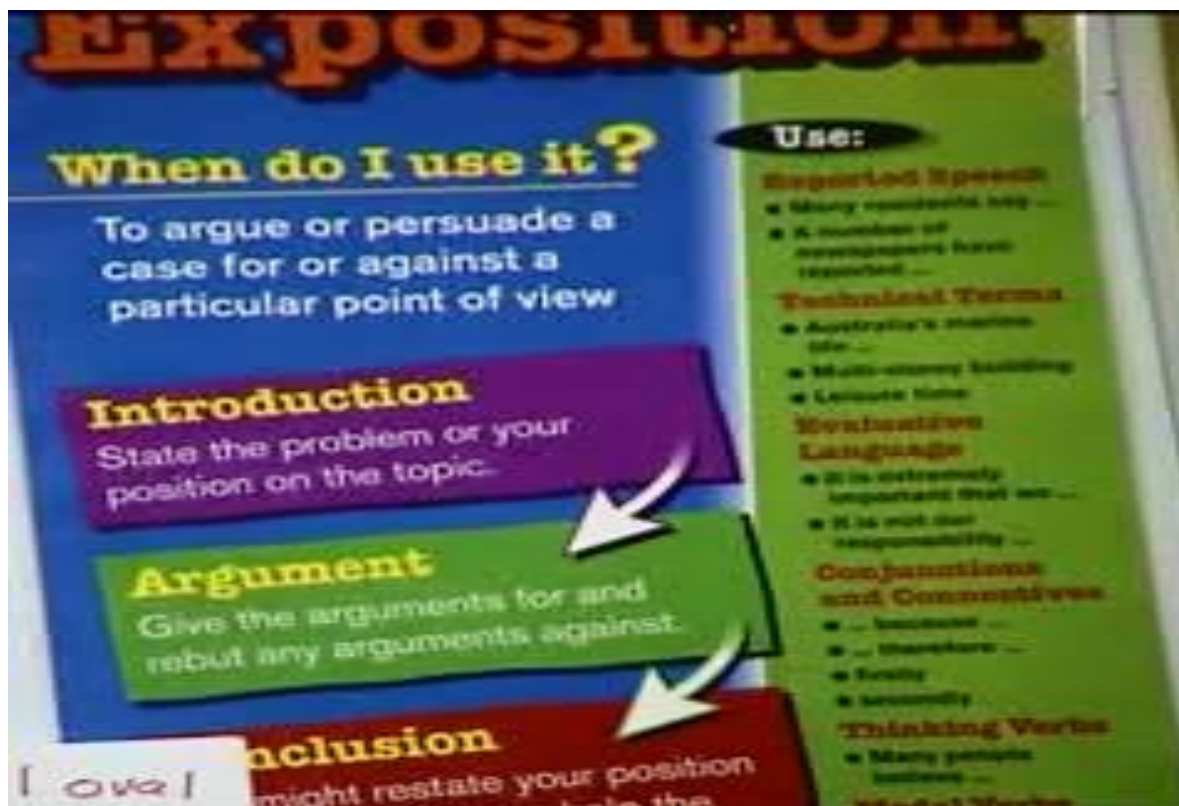
Physical environment and pedagogy

Regarding the approaches used by the teacher in teaching English writing, the observation data indicate that the teacher used a synthesis of the two approaches popular in Australia currently - the process and the SFL genre-based approaches as discussed above. This is consistent with previous observation by Hyland (2003), Preach and Honeycutt (2006) that today, writing classrooms typically reveal a mixture of more than one approach and that teachers frequently combine these orientations in imaginative and effective ways. The influence of both approaches was obvious in the classroom as can be seen from three main aspects below.

The first aspect is the physical environment. Conspicuous was the availability of sources and materials or visual aids drawn from both the process and the SFL genre-based approaches around the classroom. The influence of the process approach could be identified from the poster on the principles of conferences suggested by Hornsby

and Sukarna (2007), covering authorial, secretarial, and editorial conferences. The implementation of conferences was also obvious from the trays, containing students' texts. The top tray was labelled "Read me" indicating that the texts should be read by the teacher, the lower trays were respectively labelled "Revise me" meaning that the texts should be revised by the students, "Edit me" that the texts should be edited and "Proofread me" that the texts should be proofread. Apart from showing the emphasis on the conference, this also suggests that writing is taught as a process, consistent with the point argued by the theorists of the process approach (Graves, 1983; 1996; Hill, 2006) (and actually the SFL GBA, as suggested by Feez, 2002; Christie, 2005) where the students go through the process of writing, starting from drafting, revising, editing, proofreading.

However, a strong emphasis on the implementation of the SFL GBA was also clear, evidenced by visual aids on the social function and schematic structure as well as model of various genres (such as Narrative, Recount, Exposition, Procedural, Explanation, Discussion) that could be used as a reference or a model, as suggested by SFL GBA (Macken-Horarik, 2002; Christie, 2005; Christie and Derewianka, 2008). An example of the visual aids can be seen in Figure 1 below on the social function, schematic structure and linguistic features of an Exposition.



Picture 1. The social function, schematic structure and linguistic features of an Exposition

For the proofreading stage, the teacher asked the writer to do a peer conference. The comment was among others:

Peer conference with John (pseudonym) ... to help John (August 27, 2009).

The comments above, given at different phases of the writing process, were appropriate and beneficial as they enable students to understand that they can concentrate on different aspects of writing at different times in the process which makes the writing task nonthreatening (achievable) as reported by Peregoy and Boyle (1993:71-73) (see also the discussion in Callaghan and Rothery, 1988 about what the teacher should do in conferencing). Through the process of writing, the teacher could assist students with strategies for generating ideas (Peregoy and Boyle, 1993). These activities also indicate the teacher's sound understanding of theory and her capacity to translate theory into practice. Moreover, the teacher's comments above also show her attempts to conference at the different stages in the process of writing (Graves, 1983, 1996; Calkins, 1986; Hill, 2006), and both in groups (of eight) and individually, which, according to Calkins (1986) could allow the teacher to observe what works and what does not work for each child as a writer. Finally, the teacher's suggestion to a student writer to peer conference to help others also reflects a classroom practice relevant to both the process and the SFL genre-based approaches, which acknowledges the value of peer conferences. In Indonesian EFL contexts, with large class sizes (generally more than 40), peer conferences constitute a significant help for students and allow the teacher to pay more attention to those who really struggle (Emilia et al, 2008).

However, despite the obvious influence of the process approach on classroom activities as described above, there were also activities influenced by the SFL GBA. First of all was the conference when the teacher paid attention to the structure of the text (asking the students to think about Beginning, Middle and End) and grammar. This coincides with the suggestion from the SFL GBA theorists that the teacher should lead the students to have a good control of the schematic structure and linguistic features of a text (Anderson and Anderson, 1997a,b; Christie, 2005; Emilia, 2005; Christie and Derewianka, 2008).

Other activities relevant to stages in the teaching cycle of the SFL GBA, as proposed by Feez and Joyce (1998a) and Gibbons (2002,2009) were: (i) Building Knowledge of the Field, where the teacher explained about the topic that the students were going to write and asked the students to do research; (ii) Modelling: explicit teaching about the schematic structure and linguistic features of the text that students were assigned to write; (iii) Joint Construction: by writing together with the students a model text in focus and (iv) Independent construction, when the students wrote a text independently. The teacher some times skipped the joint construction, shows her understanding that "the teaching cycle does not work as a lockstep sequence for the whole class"

(Callaghan and Rothery, 1988: 48) and “there is no right way to sequence teaching learning activities” (Macken-Horarik, 2002: 26; Feez, 2002).

These classroom activities could lead to the students’ capacity to write different genres. An example of students’ texts is presented in Table 1 below. The text is a Narrative, written by Jim (pseudonym), categorised as a high performer by the teacher.

Table 1.
A sample of students’ texts (A Narrative by Jim)

Title	My Dancing Competition Date: 27/4/07
Orientation	Once upon a time there was a girl named Alice. She loved dancing and was great at it. On the 27 th of April, she had to do five dances. Alice was brilliant at tap dancing. It was also her favorite. At the competitions all her five dances were tap, she had a friend doing a duo with her. They were dressing up as circus performers.
Complication	They did lots of flexible things but when she was doing her karthwheel her skirt fell off!
Evaluation	She was soooo embarrassed so she ran off stage and started to cry while the audience were crying of laughter. Alice’s partner was more than happy to do the dance by herself. When the dance finished Alice’s partner ran straight to her. Her eyeliner was dripping down like a clown because of her tears. She decided to quit the other 4 dances and became one of the audience. When she walked into the theatre people were still laughing but she was strong and walked in. All the dances she saw weren’t very good.
Resolution	She changed her mind. SHE WOULD DO THE DANCE !
Coda	The night ended up being better than it would of (have) been. The End

The text above, shows the writer’s good control of the schematic structure of a Narrative. The text has five elements of structure, as suggested by the theorists of the SFL GBA (see Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Gibbons, 2009), including:

- ✓ **Orientation:** *Once upon a time there was a girl named Alice.*
- ✓ **Complication:** *They did lots of flexible things but when she was doing her karthwheel her skirt fell off!*
- ✓ **Evaluation:** *She was soo embarrassed... .*
- ✓ **Resolution:** *She changed her mind. She would do the dance.*

- ✓ **Coda:** *The night ended up being better than it would have been.* The writer successfully ended the story.

Moreover, in terms of linguistic features, the text shows the writer's confidence in employing different linguistic sources to help the text succeed in fulfilling its purpose, that is to teach lessons, to entertain, and to explore social values (Joyce & Feez, 2004: 23; Christie & Derewianka, 2008) or a moral value (Gibbons, 2009: 109). These linguistic features can be listed below.

- ✓ It is sequenced in time, and this is signaled by a range of time connectives: *once upon a time, On the 27th of April, .*
- ✓ It uses the past tense; *...There was a girl... ; They did lots of flexible things... .*
- ✓ It uses many action verbs which express material processes that describe what happens: *She did lots of flexible things; She walked into the theatre; .*
- ✓ It also uses mental processes that give the reader information about what participants are thinking or feeling, such as: *She loved dancing; She changed her mind.*
- ✓ It uses descriptive language to describe people and things: *She was so great at it ...; Alice was brilliant at tap dancing; She was so embarrassed.*

Regarding the students' writing capacity, it was noted that of course, not all children wrote equally well, because individuals differ and some were more proficient than others. Most had some understanding of the schematic structures that were required in writing genres, even if they did not always write them with equal confidence.

The teacher's perspective

Data from the interview with the teacher support those from the observations in that the teacher was aware that she did not limit her teaching to one approach, but again, a synthesis of the two contemporary approaches in Australian schools. She explained

I like whole language (which is the umbrella of the process approach), I like to integrate reading and writing into enquiry learning, in the senior and the middle section of the school, the grade five, I think we should concentrate on the content. ... We do use the SFL GBA in our instruction and the children are expected to learn how to do Narrative and Recount and Exposition and Procedural and Explanation.

This statement indicates several points. First is the teacher's awareness that she taught using a mixture of more than one approach, which is not unusual in writing classrooms today (Hyland, 2003; Paltridge, 2004; Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006). Her statement regarding the concentration on the content for grade five students shows her understanding of the necessity and urgency of students writing in the content area. This is an appropriate way to avoid the criticism of earlier process writing classrooms where there was an over emphasis on Narratives or Recounts, as the critics (Rothery, 1986;

Cope and Kalantzis, 1993) have put it. The last statement, to do with the SFL GBA, suggests her confidence and belief in the SFL GBA and her consciousness of the value of teaching different types of genres, as suggested by SFL genre theorists (Gibbons, 2002; Feez, 2002; Macken –Horarik, 2002; Christie and Derewianka, 2008; Martin and Rose, 2008).

Moreover, interview data reflect several important aspects regarding the teaching of writing.

First of all is the teacher's belief in the importance of the availability of the visual aids around the classroom as a reminder or model. She stated:

I think I use the chart and the examples of work and I keep them around the room because I think children may need them, they need a visual reminder... I've got here what we should be aiming for.

This supports Christie's (1989; 2005) position on the importance of the provision of a model text for students to learn. This is consistent with the argument from Barnes (1999) and Migdalek (2002) in EFL context, that "with the available model, students can have a clear concept of the desired goal, be able to compare their work with the model and to decide how to close the gap between the two," (Barnes, 1999: 263, see also Migdalek, 2002; Gracia, 2009 for a similar discussion).

Apart from the importance of the provision of models, the teacher believed in the benefit of feedback for the students to make their writing better, as suggested by both the process and the genre-based approaches. She said:

I use visual aids to help the children stay focus, then the feedback, I think they need the feedback, otherwise why do it... I want the feedback to be positive and let them know that I hear what they are saying and I like what they are saying. But I also want to say "you could do better or why didn't you mention this, or you could go further". So, I think that's a part of being a teacher.

The statement above seems to reveal the teacher's awareness of the value of feedback as a key component of teaching writing, which has been shared by the theorists of the teaching of writing (see Hyland, 2003; Coffin et al, 2003; Hyland and Hyland, 2006; Macaro, 2003). Macaro (2003: 238) says that "Feedback is to a teacher as swimming is to a fish". Feedback will determine whether the students revise, as Beach and Friedrich (2006) mention: "It also became clear that the nature and quality of the teacher's feedback during the composing process is critical to whether students revise." The last point about the role of the teacher to assist students to go further is also consistent with the learning theory from Vygotsky, on the zone of proximal development, that "Learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with peers" (1978: 90).

Regarding other principles of the SFL GBA, such as explicit teaching, the teacher said that explicit teaching reminded her and the students of “why we ‘re doing it and what it means to be giving them.” This comment is consistent with the SFL GBA suggestion that the teacher should explicitly explain about pathways (Feez and Joyce, 1998a: 73) which the students should take during the course of the lessons.

Moreover, about the stages of the SFL GBA, such as Building Knowledge of the Field, the teacher said:

I think if I don't spend time developing their ideas, then what they write is shallow....

This statement is relevant to the purpose of the stage, that is, as the name suggests, to build the students' knowledge about the topic they are writing, as Gibbons (2002) argues. The students' strong background knowledge of a topic, as revealed in Emilia (2005) can lead to the creation of an analytical text, showing the writer's critical thinking and critical literacy.

In terms of the criticisms or issues that have been levelled against both the process and the SFL genre-based approaches, the description above demonstrates this teacher's capability to address the issues. From this study it seems that the criticisms are not justified. On the issue of creativity and prescriptivity in particular, the teacher was aware not to always dictate which genre to use as the grade five students had already learned many genres. Hence in this grade the students were given freedom to choose the genre they wish to use. She stated:

... I don't dictate. Some times I might, I might dictate it has to be a Recount or a Procedural text, but usually they select because for grade four and five they have been taught different genres and the idea is they use them and they apply what they've been learning in the younger grades

One thing that needs a brief mention regarding this teacher is her belief in the necessity of continuous learning for a teacher. She argued:

I think that you keep learning as a teacher, I don't think you ever stop. I don't think you ever get to a point where you said “OK, I can do it now”.

This comment is consistent with the point that “good teachers are continuously learning” (Jacobson, 1998:29) and the point from critical pedagogy theorists, that not only the students, but also the teacher should become the subject of knowing and the teacher, like the students, is an apprentice, someone who is also seeking (see Freire, 1985; Freire and Shor, 1987; Gadotti, 1997). Regarding this, the teacher believed that professional development is central to lead to teachers' comprehensive understanding of current concepts and development and best practices to scaffold the students in learning to write.

Challenges of the implementation of the process and genre-based approaches

Data from observation indicate that the teacher reported in this paper did not seem to face any challenge. The physical environment, the teaching learning process and the sample of students' texts indicate that there did not seem to be a problem. The samples of students' texts in particular suggest that the teaching learning process could lead to students' capacity to write a quite successful text. However, in the interview the teacher said that there was a challenge, especially to do with conferencing with students in terms of the time allocated and the number of students in a group conference. The teacher commented:

...Oh yes, it's very challenging - the time, the number of children in the grade. At the moment I've got eight children in a group and that is too many. It takes me too long to get through their eyes. ... So, I am thinking if I make changes and I might only have four children in a group.

Conferencing warrants further investigation, especially on how many students should be involved in a group conference and how long the conference should last with individual students and what aspects should be emphasised in each conference.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on a small part of the results of a study of the teaching of writing in a primary classroom in Australia. The findings of this study, which may not be generalisable to other settings, support previous research on the teaching of writing, in that the teacher observed in this study tended to use a synthesis of more than one approach, namely the process and the SFL genre-based approaches to teaching writing. This was evident through both classroom physical environment, such as the presence of visual aids or reminders around the classroom (posters on stages of conferences, trays of students texts for the different stages, visual aids on the schematic structure and model texts of different genres, such as Narrative, Recount, Exposition, Procedural, Explanation), samples of students' texts, and classroom activities, what was done and said by both the teacher and the students, informed by the theory of both the process and the SFL genre-based approaches. These activities were the conference, writing taught as a process, explicit teaching on different aspects of a genre, building knowledge of the field, modelling, independent construction. The paper has also shown that it is imperative that the teacher have a clear and comprehensive understanding of theories and effective practices to help students succeed in their learning.

It thus sounds wise to recommend that professional development for teachers, English teachers in particular, be conducted regularly to help the teacher gain sound understanding of the most recent theories, concepts and best practices in the teaching of English. This will enhance teachers' capacity to help students succeed in their learning. Further research should also be conducted to investigate several aspects to

do with conferencing with the students and activities in each stage of the process of writing and each stage of the SFL GBA.

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