Chapter 2

APPROACHES TO WRITING

'We do not write to be understood, we write in order to understand.'
C. Day Lewis

Chapter Preview

In this chapter we explore a number of questions about how writing works and how writers write. In order to answer these questions, we first discuss the complex process of how proficient writers construct meaning into texts. We then provide a detailed examination of various approaches to teaching writing from the 1960s to the present day. We consider the theories that have underpinned each approach. This examination brings us to a social model of writing that frames this book, which we detail in Chapter 3.

Focal Questions

- How does writing ‘work’?
- How do writers write?
- What have been the approaches to teaching writing from the 1960s to the present day?
- What theories of writing have underpinned these instructional approaches?

In our previous chapter, we considered the nature of writing by examining writing in relation to language, exploring links between learning to write and learning to talk, and detailing some significant milestones in the historical evolution of writing.

In this chapter, we continue to investigate the nature of writing, first by looking at how proficient writers write, and second, by detailing instructional approaches to writing and their underlying theories.

Writing is often linked to reading and called ‘literacy’ (see Harris, Turbill, Fitzsimmons & McKenzie, 2001 for details on the teaching of reading). Speaking and listening in combination are often referred to as ‘oracy’. However, since the increase of technology in our lives, there has been an increased understanding among educators-
that to be literate in our present society involves being effective readers, writers, speakers and listeners.

Although the focus of this book is the teaching of writing, it is important to note that we acknowledge that reading, writing, speaking and listening are inherently connected in a variety of complex ways. We also acknowledge that when people discuss writing they may mean various things (for instance, many parents think teachers are talking about handwriting when they comment about their child’s ‘writing’).

For the purposes of clarification and shared understanding, we define writing in a broad, functional sense as encoding and composing meaning into written text, in order to achieve particular purposes. We acknowledge that these texts may include print and visual texts, book-based, environmental and digital texts.

**What Proficient Writers Do**

When writers create texts, they do so for the purpose of ‘making meanings’, usually for particular audiences. This meaning is the construct of the writer or, in the case of a creating a website, many authors. In other words the created text holds meaning for writer or writers of that text. Butler and Turbill (1984, p.14) suggest that neither readers nor writers can in fact exist without a text; ‘Writers must produce [texts] and readers interpret them and the text stands between the two – a bridge as well as a barrier’.

Smith (1982, p.87) suggests an interesting analogy when he suggests a ‘text is a two-sided mirror rather than a window, with writers and readers unable to see through to each other but gazing upon reflections of their own minds’.

To begin looking at what proficient writers do, we ask you to participate in a series of short writing activities that will allow us to reflect on how we as writers go about the task of writing.

*First let’s consider how, why and when we write. It is necessary to do this so we begin to understand the range of writing types there are and how each of these serves different purposes for the different audiences for whom we write.*

**TASK**

Make a table with four columns. In the first column write the heading: what I write.

Now reflect carefully over the past 24 hours and list all the things that you have written using pen, pencil, chalk, keyboard or any other writing implement.
What is in your list? Were there some things you listed that you are not sure could be called ‘writing’ as per our definition of writing as creating meaning into texts.

Discuss your list with a colleague.

When a group of teachers was asked to do this activity, one teacher listed: shopping list, note to son’s teacher, spelling words on the chalkboard, my lesson plan, greeting on a birthday card, address on envelope. Another wrote many of the same things but had also listed: email, student behaviour report.

Many of the teachers found the task difficult and it wasn’t until they began to share their lists that they thought of things that they had forgotten. Some began to argue that things such as ‘shopping lists’ and ‘writing of an address’ were not really ‘writing’, yet they agreed that writing an email or a note could be considered ‘writing’. Let’s take some time to explore these arguments with respect to our definition that writing is creating meaning into texts.

Many of us write a shopping list before we go off to the supermarket. A typical list might be:

- bread
- veggies
- fruit
- eggs and so on

Some might be more specific and write:

- one loaf wholemeal Helga’s toast bread
- vegetables
  - 1/2k carrots
  - 1k washed potatoes
  - half a cauliflower
  - 1/2k beans (don’t get if they are not fresh)
- fruit
  - 4 nectarines
  - 6 granny smith apples
  - 6 bananas, and so on.
Now what is going on here? Has the writer of each of these lists (we could call them ‘texts’) created meaning? And if so, for whom? Are the writers bringing their knowledge of how language ‘works’ to write these texts? In other words, are the writers using their semantic, syntactic and graphophonetic resources to write these texts? We would argue ‘yes’, the writers are creating meaning.

We would also argue that the writers of each of these texts have used language resources to create this meaning. These language resources (after Goodman & Watson, 1998) are:

- **Graphophonic knowledge**, which includes knowledge about the visual patterns and conventions of written language and relationships between sounds and written symbols. This knowledge allows for both lists to be read. Both writers have used spellings of the words that are either conventional spellings or close to them. Knowing how to form the letters (handwrite) and the sound/symbol relationship to be able to write the words was necessary so that each list could be read by its respective reader.

- **Syntactic knowledge** or knowledge of the grammar of the language is also being used. The fact that only the name of the article for purchase is used means that the writer knows that this structure or ‘word choice’ was sufficient for meaning to be created in order for the reader to understand what was intended. This type of writing assumes that the intended reader knows a great deal already about the process of shopping and the ‘things’ one buys at the shops. For instance, it would be unusual to find a shopping list that read, ‘First I must collect the shopping trolley, then I go down the aisle that has all the vegetables and fruit. I will get 6 nectarines and put them in my trolley ...’. We might have to write such a procedural explanation for a visiting Maritan but not for those for whom shopping and supermarkets are very much part of their background knowledge, and so we make the appropriate syntactic choices. Thus the word ‘fruit’ assumes that the shopper will go to the aisle where the fruit is and put what is needed into the trolley.

- **Semantic knowledge** or background of the writer is also being used. The writers not only knew about ‘shopping’ but also what the things they wanted at the shops were called, and the specific brand where needed.

This now brings us to the difference between the two lists. Why is one list far more explicit than the other? Who takes the time to write out such detail? The answer to this question is that it depends on the audience for the writing. The first list is an example of the list that we might write for ourselves. We tend to write broad categories because we know what ‘veggies’ we need, or we will make the final decision when we see what vegetables are available and at what price. The second list is an example of what we might write for someone else who is doing the shopping for us. This person might have
an understanding of 'shopping' but is not as familiar with the type of vegetables that are needed or eaten by the writer's family.

Thus the audience for the writing will make a difference as to how the writing is structured (i.e., is how we use our syntactic knowledge) and how we choose to spell the words (i.e., use our graphophonetic knowledge. For instance, we might think more carefully as to whether the word 'carrots' has two or one 'r' because we don't want the reader to think we are 'bad spellers'.) More on the role of audience later.

TASK

In the second column of your table now write the heading, Why I wrote this. Go down your list and think about the purpose or purposes of each of the types of writing that you listed. When you have finished, write the heading for the third column, For whom did I write? Now complete this column.

Share what you have written in this column with a colleague and consider how the purpose of the writing and its intended audience or reader(s) impacted on the language decisions you made in each writing instance.

When teachers responded to this task they were amazed at how much impact the purpose and audience had on the language decisions they made as they wrote. For instance, several people had listed email as texts they had written. While each email was written with the use of a keyboard and sent via the internet, each varied according to the audience and purpose for that email. One male teacher had written several emails in his 24 hours. He indicated purposes and audiences as:

- share gossip – football mate
- organise touch football players for a game – football team
- try and get some money (sponsorship for the team) – local camera and photo shop owner.

When reflecting back over what impact the purpose and audience had on his language choices in each of these texts, this young footballer simply laughed and said – heaps! However such decisions are often made without us being consciously aware of them. Yet it is important, if we are to understand writing and how we might teach others to write, that we consider the many decisions each of us make as writers when we go about creating meaning into written texts. The purpose and audience for such writing does make a difference to the way we spell (our graphophonetic knowledge), the structure of the writing and the word and word order we choose to use (our syntactic knowledge).
and the background knowledge we draw on or need to find out about in order to write (our semantic knowledge).

**TASK**

In the fourth and final column write the heading *When and where I write*. Go down your list and fill this column out. Note the various places and times of the day that you write.

Consider how your list might differ if you had spent the day as a student in a primary classroom. Discuss what a student might write, why, for whom and when.

This final task reveals interesting information. Teachers found that they wrote at all times of the day, in various places as they needed to do so. Thus, in our daily lives, writing fulfills many purposes. These purposes reflect the cultural and social needs of the contexts in which we find ourselves. Thus we can argue that writing, just like reading, has been a social act for us. All those types of writing in our lists have served social purposes. Writing in the school context is also a social act, serving social and cultural purposes.

However, we need to make sure students in our classrooms understand the many purposes of writing and not develop the sense that writing is 'just for the teacher' as this young six year old boy had:

Young 6 year old Chris was bored. It was Saturday. It was raining and it seemed there was 'nothing to do'. His mother suggested that he use the computer to 'write a story'. This appealed and he willingly went to the computer, turned it on and readied himself to begin. A puzzled look appeared and he turned to his mother and asked, 'Will I write a "school story" or a "real story"?' His mother, intrigued by the question, probed, 'What is a "school story"?'

'Oh, you know. It starts, "I am _____ I live in a ______. I eat ______."

responded Chris in a very droning tone.

His mother held back a smile and quickly said, 'Write a real story'. Chris began and for the next half hour he wrote a 1000 word 'story' about the 'Day the Martians Landed'. The story reflected many of the TV programs he watched as well as ideas and language he had heard from his parents' reading of Roald Dahl's *BFG*. Chris had used many strategies to write his 'story'. He often thought aloud before he wrote something, sometimes
asking his mother’s opinion about an idea or word choice. He reread his writing, often about to hear the meaning he was creating. He sometimes went back and deleted parts and rewrote. His spelling was not conventional but more ‘invented’ or what we could call ‘temporary’. At this point he didn’t seem to worry about it. (More on the notion of temporary spelling later). When he was finished he wanted a hard copy to read to his mother and other family members. He drew a picture to go with his story and asked his mother to stick the ‘story’ on the refrigerator. As a result of this activity he was very pleased with himself.

What proficient writers do, and how children approximate writing and what constitutes ‘real’ writing, give rise to four key principles of writing:

- Effective writers do a lot of rehearsing (thinking, talking, researching) about what they will write.
- Effective writers use certain strategies to help them write their thoughts and ideas.
- Effective writers draw heavily on their semantic (background) knowledge as well as their syntactic knowledge and their graphophonic knowledge simultaneously.
- Effective writers are typically confident enough to write for a variety of purposes and audiences.

These principles are not dissimilar to those we have listed about effective reading (see Harris et al., 2001, p.24).

Effective writers have ‘ownership’ of their writing. That is, they knew enough about the topic or ‘field of knowledge’ that they are to write about. If not, they knew they have to research the field, talk about it, read about it so that they do have sufficient knowledge to write about it.

The range of strategies a writer uses is made possible because of the language resources at their disposal: the writer’s background knowledge about the content, his or her knowledge of language itself, as well as the ability to encode their meanings into the sound/symbol relationships of the letters needed to create a text. Our explorations so far, too, have highlighted the social nature of writing – the purposes it serves and the forum for interactions it provides.
Approaches to Teaching Writing and their Underlying Theories

Several theories have been put forward over the years in an attempt to explain how writing 'works' and what this might mean for the teaching of writing. We explore these theories within an historical framework. We borrow from another discipline (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.2) in order to identify theoretical developments as 'moments' or shifts in thinking. This approach allows us to highlight that these shifts have no finite beginning or end, and even while we might locate these moments in time, they often lived on after their time was through (such as approaches used in the 1960s living on in teachers who continue teaching into the 1990s and 1980s). Thus our historical overview of the following approaches is based on the ideas that:

- Moments or shifts in thinking are not fixed or bounded in any way but, rather, are blurred and flowing.
- Each moment builds upon and is connected to the ones before and after.
- All moments can operate in the present.
- All moments are necessary and inextricably linked to each other.

It is important for educators to be aware of the historical development of writing research and instruction so we are in a better position to choose the most appropriate and relevant teaching strategies. Writing theories are also useful because they indicate a set of criteria or values used to create that theory. These theories underpin various teaching practices that are found in schools. In order to examine these theories and their respective practices we are going explore a 'potted history' of writing over the past 40 years or so.

The moments or shifts that we identify in this historical overview are:

- Writing as production or encoding
- Writing as creativity
- Writing as process
- Writing as genre

Writing as production or encoding

During the 1960s, reading, writing, spelling, grammar were all seen as disparate skills that needed to be taught quite separately. While many people kept diaries and journals of their personal lives (as we are finding now from autobiographies that are appearing), writing was not seen as a major part of the school's curriculum.

Some of the basic assumptions that seemed to exist during this age were:

- Spelling and handwriting were necessary prerequisites of writing.
- Young children could not begin to learn to write until they had mastered the basic spelling and handwriting skills.
• Basic punctuation and grammar skills also needed to be taught specifically to children. It was felt children needed to practise these skills and once the skills were learned, they could be transferred to the writing task.
• Teachers needed to select topics for children to write, as well as providing basic structures for this writing.
• Once children had a basic knowledge of the above skills, they were expected to remember them, consider the topic, organise their ideas, and write in neat handwriting a one-shot piece of writing that needed to be ‘perfect’. There was little or no time given to ‘revision’.
• These ‘compositions’ were collected, marked by the teacher and returned to the students. Errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation were pointed out to the children usually in red pen. It was expected that the students would learn from having such errors exposed to them.
• The teaching of writing was given a weekly time slot – usually an hour a week. Spelling, punctuation and grammar exercises were usually given daily time and tested regularly.

The implicit beliefs about writing and the teaching of writing that are revealed from these assumptions and practices are that writing is a tool for communication that comprises a series of predetermined skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar. These skills can be isolated into some predetermined order. Once isolated and sequenced into sub-skills, they then can be taught.
While it is difficult to find a clearly espoused ‘theory’ of writing per se underlying these practices in this age, it is clear that these teaching practices reflect a pedagogy that is often referred to as the ‘traditional approach’ (see Green & Campbell, 2003, p.132). The underlying learning theory has its origins in a behaviorist theory of learning (Vialle, Lysaght & Veremščina, 2000, p.1).

**TASK**

If you were a teacher teaching in a framework of writing as production or encoding, how might you answer the following questions?

- What is writing?
- What are the skills of writing that need to be taught?
- How is writing best learned?
Writing as creativity

The 1970s saw a shift in the way writing was taught, particularly in the early years. Teachers began to focus on 'creativity' and viewed writing more as one of the 'arts', that is, as a form of personal expression.

Much of this focus originated from Britain with the release of a major report, *Language for Life* (Department of Education & Science, 1975), chaired by the late James Britton and known as the Bullock Report.

Britton's (1972) theory argued that humans use language in two major roles: as a participant and as a spectator. As a participant, he argued, we are involved in the world around us, and we anticipate that what happens around us will conform with our previous experiences (when it doesn't, meaning is blocked and we begin to seek information). The language we use as a participant, in the first instance, is the face-to-face interaction in our everyday worlds. Britton referred to this as 'expressive language'. However, when we need to know more, Britton argued we move from the expressive into more 'transactional' language. This language is informative and more explicit and used to explain, question, report, record and theorise. A second role we humans take on, Britton proposed, is that of a 'spectator'. In this role, we use language as 'art'; that is, as 'a means of evaluating and embodying individual feelings and experiences' (Murray, 1988, p.12). Britton referred to this as 'poetic' language. In practice, we move from one role to another, Britton argued, and, as we do so, we build our language repertoires.

Britton's theory emphasised the importance of all the modes of language (that is, listening, talking, reading and writing) and the role that language played in learning and in our lives. This was a quite a different emphasis from language simply being a set of predetermined skills to be learned. However, while accepted as the basis for the development of new curriculum (see, for example, the NSW Department of Education's *Language 1974 Curriculum*), it was difficult for teachers to translate this theory into practice. It was even more difficult for teachers to use it to evaluate students' writing.

Murray (1988, p.12) suggests that Britton's major contribution resulted in 'literature and children's own talking, writing and drama now having a place' in the classroom. This was particularly evident in the early years. A clear connection between talk and writing emerged. Teachers of young children began to realise that what could be said could be written and what could be written could be read by the writer. This approach was coined the 'Language Experience Approach' (see Wilson, 1979).

The teaching of writing saw the need to allow our students to 'talk their way to meaning' before asking them to write. For instance, in Science, students were encouraged to observe an experiment, talk about what they saw, and then to write what they saw. 'Composition' became 'creative writing' and teachers were encouraged to 'set the scene' for developing their students' imagination and creativity before asking them to write.
While this was a considerable step in writing instruction, there was still little understanding about connections between spelling and writing, grammar and writing, and reading and writing. These connections were to come in the next shift in theoretical thinking about writing.

**TASK**

If you were a teacher teaching in a framework of writing as creativity, how might you answer the following questions?

- What is writing?
- What are the skills of writing that need to be taught?
- How is writing best learned?

**Writing as process**

By the beginning of the 1980s, teachers seemed to feel that the teaching of reading was 'under control'. Most classrooms seemed to be filled with lots of books – children's literature as well as new reading programs that looked and sounded far more interesting and relevant to children than the old 'Departmental Readers'. Colourful 'Big Books' were everywhere – all with the 3 Rs – rhyme, rhythm and repetition. Teachers read to their students across the primary years and children seemed to also be reading more.

Walsh (1981) argued that the 1980s saw a revolution in the teaching of writing. This revolution, he argued, grew out of insights gained from research into what 'real' writers do; that is, research into the processes that proficient writers go through as they construct meaning into texts. These insights were applied to what children could do when given similar writing opportunities. Thus teachers were introduced to the notion that writing was a process and that there were various phases in this process.

The model proposed by Walsh sought to explain how writers undertook the process of writing – the steps they took, the issues they grappled with. This model is shown in Figure 1.
Three categories were proposed in the model: pre-writing, during-writing and after-or post-writing. However, it was emphasised that the process is recursive. This means that while a writer begins with some pre-writing activity (and the degree will differ according to the nature of the writing) and that there is a time when the writer writes, not all writing will go through the phases in a lock-step-sequential manner. For instance, if writing a shopping list, one may do some research (look in the cupboards to check what is needed). But this is where this process may end. It will not matter whether the words are spelt correctly or not. So editing and revision are not done as they are not necessary. However, if one was writing an essay for a university class, one would spend quite some time pre-writing: taking notes, researching, and so on. A first draft may be written. From this point there are many avenues for the writer. One is to hand it in as it is – rather risky. Another is to read over it carefully and begin the revising and editing process. During this time one might realise that there needs to be more information about a particular aspect, so the writer may move backwards in the model above and do more reading, talking and researching, before returning to the draft. This
could go on for some time before the writer moves forward to begin the next phase of writing, and setting out the essay in a particular format and then dispatching it to a reader – in this case an examiner. Some time will pass and eventually the writer receives feedback to the writing. The response to the writing then impacts on the writer's view of her or himself as a writer in either negative or positive ways. This view of the writing process was taken up by educators and the challenge was how to provide opportunities for children to experience writing as a process. This challenge changed the pedagogy for writing in many ways. These included:

- Time was allocated daily for 'writers' workshop', in order to provide opportunities for children to draft and revise their writing.
- Children were encouraged to develop their own topics for writing from their own individual and differing experiences and knowledge.
- Children were encouraged to write for meaning in the first instance and not worry about spelling or grammatical structure – a first draft.
- Children were encouraged to 'invent' the spellings of words they didn't know. These spellings were often referred to as 'temporary spelling'.
- Teachers tried to work with children in small group or individual conferences to assist them in revising their writing, extending the writing and generally improving the quality of the draft. These conferences were seen as opportunities to teach children that which they needed to learn at a time when they were ready to learn it (teaching at the point of need).
- Teachers were encouraged to become close observers of and participants in their students' learning to write.
- Assessment of the children's writing was viewed over time with a focus on the child's control of the process as well as on the product.
- Teachers aimed to find 'authentic audiences' and 'real purposes' for their children's writing.
- Final products were put out to be read, either in 'published' small individual books or class books. These were displayed in the class libraries for all to read.

The writings of Graves (1983), Turbill (1982a, 1982b), Cambourne (1988), among many others, demonstrated that young children could write before they had learned the prerequisites skills of handwriting and spelling. It was shown that children learned to spell and handwrite while they were learning to write. Teachers were encouraged to become close observers of children at work. We heard as well as saw children unravel the graphophonic mystery as they 'invented' their spellings in their attempts to write.

As teachers observed their students, they began to understand the connections between writing, spelling and reading. It became apparent that if we wanted our young writers to write, they had to be immersed in the language of books – they had to be read to and
they had to read. Although the children tended to write ‘talk written down’, teachers aimed to have children use the language of books. This meant that children had to hear and read quality literature and not just ‘reading primers’ whose language was stilted and controlled (e.g., ‘I am Sam, I am Pam. See Sam run, See Pam run’).

An important connection made at this time was that readers and writers draw on the same language resources. The ‘three cueing systems’ (Goodman & Watson, 1998) that were so strongly endorsed with respect to reading during the 1970s — graphophonic, syntactic and semantic knowledge, as we previously described in this chapter — were shown to be the same language knowledge that students used to create meaning into texts.

This understanding provided an important foundation for identifying connections between reading and writing. For example, Butler and Turbill (1984) demonstrated that the writing process could be mirrored in the reading process and vice versa. They proposed that writing and reading were both ‘acts of composing’. Readers, using their background knowledge and experience, their knowledge of grammar and the sound/symbol system of English (i.e., their semantic, syntactic and graphophonic cueing systems), compose meaning from the text. Writers, using their background knowledge and experience, their knowledge of grammar and the sound/symbol system of English (i.e., their semantic, syntactic and graphophonic cueing systems), compose meaning into text. They developed a table to demonstrate the similarities of what readers and writers do in each of three different phases, i.e., before the act of reading and writing, during the act and after the act (Butler & Turbill, 1984, pp.11-14). We include this table in Figure 2.

While this table may be over-generalised, it is useful to demonstrate the similarities between the processes of reading and writing. Considering the processes in this way demonstrates the many implications for the teaching of reading and writing.

Another important insight that came to light in the 1980s was that the child begins this process long before he/she comes to school. Environmental print is read, copied, played with by children as young as two and three. Preschools began to see that they too could involve the child in important reading/writing activities — reading to children, encouraging them to write and so on. These important insights were gained from a range of home literacy studies that saw researchers go into young children’s homes, and observe what goes on there in the name of reading and writing. The aim of this research was to understand how children begin their literacy learning before formal schooling.

This research had its beginnings in the work of Clark (1976) who undertook a retrospective study of young fluent readers at school and concluded that their home experiences were a major influence on their success. The study was retrospective, and so researchers sought to go into homes before children started school. Key researchers, among many others, included Butler (1979) who carried out a case study of her special
## Figure 2. Reading/writing connections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Readers Do BEFORE Reading</th>
<th>What Writers Do BEFORE Writing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The proficient reader brings to the reading task:</td>
<td>The proficient writer brings to the writing task:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• about the topic (prior knowledge)</td>
<td>• about the task (prior knowledge)</td>
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<td>• about the language used (syntactic knowledge)</td>
<td>• about the language to be used (syntactic knowledge)</td>
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<td>• about the sound-symbol system (graphemic knowledge)</td>
<td>• about the sound-symbol system (graphemic knowledge)</td>
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<td>The proficient reader brings certain expectations to the reading task by:</td>
<td>The proficient writer brings certain expectations based on:</td>
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<td>• previous spelling experiences</td>
<td>• previous writing experiences</td>
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<td>• personal interests</td>
<td>• personal interest in the task</td>
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<td>• the purpose for the reading</td>
<td>• the purpose of the writing</td>
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<td>• the audience for the reading</td>
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<th>What Readers do DURING Reading</th>
<th>What Writers do DURING Writing</th>
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<td>The proficient reader is engaged in:</td>
<td>The proficient writer is engaged in:</td>
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<td>DRAFT-READING</td>
<td>DRAFT-WRITING</td>
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<td>• skimming and scanning</td>
<td>• writing note and ideas</td>
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<td>• searching for sense</td>
<td>• searching for a &quot;way in&quot;</td>
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<td>• predicting outcomes</td>
<td>• selecting outcomes</td>
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<td>• re-defining and composing meaning</td>
<td>• re-reading</td>
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<td>RE-READING</td>
<td>RE-WRITING</td>
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<td>• re-reading parts as purpose is derived, clarified or changed</td>
<td>• re-writing text as purpose changes or becomes different, clearer</td>
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<td>• taking into account where appropriate an audience</td>
<td>• considering readers and the intended message</td>
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<td>• discussing text, making notes</td>
<td>• discussing and rewriting text</td>
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<td>• reading aloud to &quot;hear&quot; message</td>
<td>• re-reading to &quot;hear&quot; the message</td>
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<th>USING WRITER'S CUES</th>
<th>PREPARE FOR READING</th>
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<tr>
<td>• using punctuation to assist meaning</td>
<td>• reviewing plan for correct punctuation</td>
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<td>• using spelling conventions to assist meaning</td>
<td>• brainstorming for conventional spelling</td>
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<td>• reading aloud to assist meaning</td>
<td>• developing an appropriate presentation</td>
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<th>What Readers Do AFTER Reading</th>
<th>What Writers Do AFTER Writing</th>
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<td>The proficient reader:</td>
<td>The proficient writer:</td>
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<td>• reflects upon it</td>
<td>• gets response from readers</td>
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<td>• feels success</td>
<td>• gives to readers</td>
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<td>• wants to read again</td>
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TASK

If you were a teacher teaching in a framework of writing as process, how might you answer the following questions?

- What is writing?
- What are the skills of writing that need to be taught?
- How is writing best learned?

Writing as genres

As the 1980s were drawing to a close, there were many issues being debated in the public and academic arenas. These included a cry that students were not being taught spelling; that ‘invented spelling’ was leading to a nation of illiterates; that student writing was becoming too personal; and that there was a need for students to be taught ‘the genres of power’ explicitly. These issues became the challenge of the 1990s.

While the 1980s had seen an important emphasis on the process of writing, concern was expressed that this emphasis was often at the expense of product – the quality, effectiveness and appropriateness of what children wrote. This led to a closer examination of what children are expected to write at school, across the curriculum. This examination not only concerned itself with content, but with the types of texts – or text genres – that children were required to write at school.

This examination was undertaken by genre theorists working in the paradigm of functional linguistics based on the work of Michael Halliday (Christie, 1987, 1991; Christie & Rothery, 1989; Collerson, 1988; Derewianka, 1990; Macken, Martin, Kress, Kalantzis, Rothery & Cope, 1989).

The genre approach was based on premises that we previously identified in Chapter 1 when examining the nature of writing in terms of this book’s framework. To recap, these premises that underpinned the genre approach were:

- Writing, as is language generally, is a social activity.
- Genres are socially meaningful, coherent, purposeful texts that can be spoken, written, visual or multi-modal.
- Genres follow certain ritualised patterns that allow all participants ‘in the know’ to understand them, and therefore realise different genres’ respective purposes.
- Different text genres serve different social purposes and are organised in specific, ritualised ways to achieve that purpose.
- Different genres are used and valued differently vary across different cultural settings.
In developing a genre-based approach to writing at school, genre theorists’ concern was the need for all children to understand and effectively appropriate these genres in order to succeed at school. While some children seemed to have this knowledge or ‘pick it up’ somehow at school, clearly not all children did so and were consequently at risk of failure and marginalisation at school. Research (e.g., Walton, 1993) was showing that children from minority backgrounds – such as indigenous children – were especially put at a disadvantage by writing approaches that failed to explicitly demonstrate and explain the kinds of texts children were asked to write, in terms of purpose, organisation and language features of these texts.

From this concern arose an approach to writing that emphasised cyclical, systematic and explicit instruction.

This genre approach was based on a social interactionist view of learning, and incorporated the notion of assisting children to perform in shared situations with the teacher what they’ll then come to master and do on their own (after Vygotsky, 1978). Thus scaffolding was built into this approach, with the delineation of three phases:

- Modelled construction, which saw teachers read to children, explain and demonstrate the purposes of different kinds of texts and how these purposes were served by how the text was organised and the language features that it contains. For example, a narrative, designed to entertain, meets this purpose through orienting the reader to the setting, and sustains reader engagement by describing a series of events and complications, which ultimately lead to some kind of resolution. Language tends to include action verbs, descriptive words (adjectives), dialogue, and past tense (Derewianka, 1990). Modelled construction also provided a venue for teachers to model the physical writing of text genres, thereby relating process to product.

- Joint construction or negotiation, which saw teacher and children share the writing of a new text in the genre that previously had been modelled. Prior to a joint construction, children were given time and resources to prepare for the joint construction of a new text by researching, brainstorming, flowcharting, note-taking, and/or role-playing the theme or topic. During the joint construction, the teacher would act as scribe on a large sheet of paper or an overhead transparency for all to see. Children took the lead with contributing the content that they had prepared. The teacher’s complementary role was to invite and shape this content according to the text structures and language features of the genre at hand. Writing processes of editing and revision could come into play during this shared writing.

- Independent writing, which saw children independently write texts according to the genre that had been previously modelled and jointly constructed. Children took charge of both content and structure, while the teacher monitored and observed writers at work.
This approach provided what was described as systematic and explicit instruction in writing. In addition, specific genres were identified for instruction; these genres included narratives, recounts, procedural texts, information reports, arguments, and discussions — indeed the kinds of genres that we still see in syllabus documents today (e.g., NSW English K-6 Syllabus, NSW Board of Studies, 1998).

Underpinning concern about children’s control of writing particular genres at school were not only issues of school success but also of power. Writing came to be viewed as more than a means for personal satisfaction and personal growth: writing was viewed as access to power. To exercise that power, it was argued that we must have control over a range of text types or ‘genres’. All students, it was further argued, need access to this knowledge so that they can access this power. Such access, it was proposed, could be gained through competence in the use of a wide range of written genres.

Particular genres that began to be included in classroom writing programs are still found in classrooms and syllabus documents today. Some of these genres are overviewed later in this book, in Figure 12 in Chapter 4.

**TASK**

If you were a teacher teaching in the framework of writing as genres, how might you answer the following questions?

- What is writing?
- What are the skills of writing that need to be taught?
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**What We Have Learned About Writing**

Before moving on to examine the current model of writing, it is important for us to now take stock of what we have learned about writing and how to teach writing from the past four decades. Below is a list of key beliefs that are current in most writing curricula in schools today. It is interesting to note that many of these beliefs existed in the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s and survived. As we look back in hindsight, we can see that our knowledge about writing and the most effective teaching of writing has emerged over the decades as we have learned more. It is also interesting to note that the changes that have occurred are also reflected by changes in society’s needs in literacy. Today’s world is a vastly different one from the 1960s. One would expect that our understanding of
such an important language act such as writing is also vastly different. When one views the key beliefs set out below, it is clear that ‘writing is a very complex, difficult and time-consuming process’ (Elbow, 1981, p.3). Yet writing also ‘serves the function of helping us to organise and understand our lives and our worlds’ (Cambourne, 1988, p.184).

Furthermore Cambourne (1988, p.184) proposes,

‘Readers can read without necessarily being writers or knowing a great deal about writing and how it’s done. But writers must be readers, and this creates a kind of language and thinking behaviour which is quite unique.’

**Beliefs about the learning and teaching of writing**

- Writing is both a process and a product.
- We learn to write by writing.
- Spelling and handwriting are tools for writing.
- Writing is a powerful learning tool.
- Reading and writing are both acts of composing.
- Readers learn about writing from reading and writers learn about reading from writing.
- Evaluation of written language is a constant part of the teaching cycle.
- Learners need constant demonstrations (models) of both process and product of that which they are to learn.
- When writers perceive themselves as writers they read like a writer; they engage in how texts work.
- Different subject areas, purposes and audiences require different types or genres of language.
- Language is functional, social and contextual; it is the principal vehicle for making sense of our world.
- Spelling is a functional, social and contextual activity.
- Spelling serves writers but is learned primarily through reading.
- Spellers need to be effective readers and proofreaders.
- Children need to learn to write different kinds of texts for different purposes; they need to know a variety of genres in order to be successful in their future lives.
- Writing in schools should be more than ‘story writing’; it should focus on particular genres such as recounts, procedural writing, narratives, report writing, exposition, descriptions and more.
- Children learn language, learn through language, and learn about language as they use language.
• Teachers and students need a language to talk about language.
• Teachers need to make explicit how different genres work and how they are constructed.
• Teachers need to make explicit their own beliefs about learning, about what writing is and why they teach it as they do.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of significant moments that saw shifts in how writing has been theorised and taught at school. Key approaches have been teaching writing as production or encoding skills; teaching writing as a creative and personal approach; writing as a process; and teaching writing as genre-based approach. This last approach brings us to the framework of this book – teaching writing as a set of social practices, that the next chapter now details and which the rest of this book explores in relation to theory and classroom practices.

Key Concepts

• writing as production or encoding
• writing as creativity
• writing as process
• writing as genre

Tutorial Activities

A. In this chapter we have explored shifts in how writing has been theorised and taught over the past forty years or so. We now are going to return to each of these approaches. Your tutorial group might take each of the four approaches and spend 15 minutes or so discussing them. Alternatively four groups might take one each and explore the questions listing their thoughts and ideas on chart paper for a general discussion at the end of the tutorial. Your focus for discussion is:

If you were a teacher teaching in this particular framework of writing how might you answer the following questions?

• What is writing?
• What are the skills of writing that need to be taught?
• How is writing best learned?

B. Following is a series of teachers’ recollections of teaching within a particular series of frameworks. One group is to focus on one set of recollections and critically discuss in terms of whether or not you agree with the teacher’s views that are expressed.
1. A teacher’s memory of teaching writing as production or encoding

My memories of teaching during this age were very clear especially with one particular Grade 2 I taught. These children were considered the ‘dregs’ and thus I was given less students than the other four Grade 2 teachers with the expectation that I would bring them ‘up to scratch’. I hated Wednesdays because this was when composition (as it was called then) was scheduled from 11.15-12.30pm. The weekly composition topics were chosen by the ‘Headmistress’. This was important because if all second graders wrote on the same topic the headmistress believed she was able to fairly ‘grade’ the compositions – and grade them each week she did. All 150 of them! The five best were chosen to read their stories in assembly each Monday morning. Needless to say, it was a rare occurrence when any of my students were given this privilege.

One particular topic I recall was ‘Swinging on the Garden Gate’. To this day I have no idea what one could write about this topic. But we gave it our best shot. We went out to the school gate and all had a go swinging on it to give us inspiration. We brainstormed the words we might need. I reminded them about neat handwriting and correct spelling and away they went. I moved around, bent over them, (no wonder I have a bad lower back these days), writing spelling words for them and asking – ‘well what could happen next?’ ‘What else could you write?’ ‘You know Mrs S likes to see at least a page of writing’ I would add. What a nightmare. Lunchtime came and they went out for lunch. I was exhausted. All went out except for Justin, who to my surprise said he hadn’t finished! He read me his composition about how he loved to visit his grandfather’s dairy farm because whenever he went with Granddad around the farm, his job was to jump out and open and shut the big gate. And he did this by asking a big jump and swinging on the gate. It was a great piece – the first time that Justin had ever written more than a few lines. I realised that day that while the rest of us struggled, Justin excelled because he could make this topic his own. I learned something about writing this day. And yes, it was one of the rare times one of my students was selected to read in assembly.

2. A teacher’s memory of teaching writing as creativity

I remember the teaching of ‘creative writing’ as being fun. Creative writing was scheduled once a week and the children sometimes wrote in their books and sometimes they wrote on coloured pieces of paper. While I chose the topic for writing each week, I tried to ‘set the scene’ before I asked the children to write. That is, I tried to develop children’s background knowledge so they had something to write about. This involved activities such as reading to the children, playing
music, going on walks, observing various classroom experiences such as science experiments, and many others. I would then ask the children to talk about what they heard or saw. We would brainstorm the "interesting" words they used or needed and I would write these on the chalkboard.

My expectations were that the children were learning new vocabulary and therefore would use these words (spelled correctly) in their writing. I believed I was developing the children's creativity and this is why I no longer "marked" their work with a "red pen". However I couldn't leave the "errors" – I still had to "fix" them but I did so with pencil. Selected children were invited each week to read their "exciting" pieces to their classmates.

Another important feature during this time was to try and integrate our creative writing topic with the classroom theme. Sometimes we went a bit overboard. For instance, I remember a time when the theme was on "Ghosts and Goblinis". I read my Grade 1 children lots of stories, for instance, Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are" and we painted ghostly stories in art. To prepare for our creative writing time, I pulled down all the blinds and hung pieces of cotton from the ceiling (to give the effect of cobwebs). I put on some 'ghostly music' and as the students came into class after morning break, they had to walk around the classroom listening to the music, feel the 'cobwebs' and imagine 'ghosts' around them. After some 5 minutes we all sat down and began the 'creative writing lesson', still with the blinds drawn!

I was quite disappointed with their writing, I recall, because while I believed I was encouraging them to write, write, write, all they wanted to do was talk, talk, talk.

3. A teacher's memory of teaching writing as process

I stood at the front of my Year 1 classroom and surveyed my class of 26 students. It was week 6 of Term 1 and every child was actively involved in writing yet none of them was seated in neat rows at their desks quietly writing. What a change for my teaching. When I first introduced the notion of 'process writing' I was rather nervous about giving so much responsibility to the children. I began by telling the children that we would be writing every day after 'reading time'. I gave them each a blank exercise book and told them they could write about anything they wanted to write about. The biggest change for all of us was for them to try and spell the words they wanted without me having to write every word for them. To help I introduced a 'have-a-go' card on which they could attempt to write the word they wanted. They were then required to check their attempt with a friend or me, but they had to have a go first.

I also used a blank news books to demonstrate how I would 'sound out' the spelling of a word or use the words around the room, and to also demonstrate that it was OK to leave these often unconventional attempts (we called them 'temporary spellings') until later. Every morning I demonstrated how to write
like this when I wrote the ‘news of the day’. After a few weeks, I began to ask particular children to come to the easel and write the word. The children soon accepted that they were ‘allowed’ to spell a word the way they thought it went rather than having to be correct in their first drafts.

The first few weeks were hectic and messy. It soon became apparent that some children might take the whole 20 minutes for their writing and still not finish whereas others finished in 5 minutes. So I began to introduce reading activities into the mts for those who finished early. I also encouraged those who finished quickly to share with a friend and together think about what else might be added.

So after 6 weeks the traditional ‘creative writing’ lesson disappeared. I now had a 60 minute reading/writing session where individuals and groups worked away. In a given week I heard every child read and saw every child write. I was constantly amazed at the choice of topics and the growth in spelling as well as their reading and writing. It was true I thought as I watched them——every child can write (and read).

4. A teacher’s memory of teaching writing as genres

I remember the challenge of teaching genres to young children, and the common view was that it would too hard for young children. But what I found is that it gave children tools they didn’t have previously. It was like unlocking the door, or lifting the veil of mystery that had clouded school writing. This was especially important for the children I taught, as they came from many different cultural backgrounds and NESC homes. If I asked them to write a story, they might have ideas about what to put in, but little grasp of how to structure a satisfying story.

I remember the challenge that writing procedural texts presented. It was somehow more abstract than stories or recounts, and yet procedural texts like kit manuals and recipes are fairly common in the community. The way I approached it was this. We had been reading ‘Where the wild things are’ by Maurice Sendak. As a follow-up we planned a wild rumpus. We compiled guest lists, made invitations, planned menus, and made decorations and costumes. We made wild raspberry jelly. First the children followed a recipe that I had modelled. I guided them through the process. The jelly was good! After we made and ate the jelly, the children then composed a recount of how they made the jelly. This was very much grounded in their concrete experience. From this, I posed the question, ‘If we wanted to tell someone else how to make this delicious jelly, how might we best do that?’ We talked about recipes, and children brought in examples from their homes. In modelled sessions, we explored their purpose, how they were organised, and their special language features. I guided the children through composing the procedural text for raspberry jelly. This provided a good basis for children exploring procedural texts in their own independent writing sessions.
I found recounts of our classroom activities often provided a useful springboard to transforming the recount into another kind of genre, provided we carefully talked about why we were doing that. Each time we did this, children could see the point – the shift in purpose gave rise to the need to change our approach to the piece of writing.

Further Readings


