

Review

Rose, David & Martin, Jim R. (2012). *Learning to Write, Reading to Learn: Genre, Knowledge and Pedagogy in the Sydney School*. Sheffield (UK) and Bristol (USA): Equinox Publishing Ltd.

Reviewed by

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The book *Learning to Write. Reading to Learn. Genre, Knowledge and Pedagogy in the Sydney School* provides a rich and profound overview of the groundbreaking work concerning the teaching of writing and reading in Australia often named The Australian Genre Pedagogy. The book is a gold mine for newcomers of this pedagogy as well as those already engaged and informed. This work has now a history of over thirty years. Rose and Martin take the reader of this book on a journey that starts out in late 1970s and the formation of the first projects concerning the teaching of writing: *Writing project* and *Language as Social Power project*. It continues with the development over the years of the *Write it Right project*. The last decade the teaching of reading is included by the project *Reading to Learn*. But as the authors state in their concluding remarks in the book “our overarching purpose is neither history, description nor procedure; it is justice” (p 331). And justice is a theme that imbues the whole book. It concerns students’ right to be given opportunities to reach the same goal in school independent of their different social and language backgrounds. The educational framework of the genre pedagogy is to a large degree based on Bernstein’s theoretical perspective in educational sociology.

There are two interacting motives for requesting justice that Rose and Martin come back to over and over again. The first concerns the different language background students come to school with. The main focus is on students who, most of the time, have adequate resources of spoken language but little or no experiences of different ways of meaning-making in written language. But genre pedagogy is actually much more general than this focus might seem to imply and concerns the education of all students. The other and interacting motive is the dominating pedagogy in Australian schools in the form of progressivism, nowadays known as constructivism or social-constructivism. Its orientation to the interest of middle-class families and not marginalized groups in the society is central to the critique raised by Rose and Martin.

As a consequence of this asymmetric interest in different groups of students, the strategy of tracking or putting students in “ability groups” is frequently used. According to Hattie’s large-scale meta-analyses tracking “has minimal effect on learning outcomes” (p 13). Especially in the early grades the progressive pedagogy is structured as an invisible pedagogy in Bernstein’s terminology. Learning is described to emerge from within and “language is osmotically absorbed from the child’s environment, in a process that has been dubbed ‘natural language learning’” (p 28). The criteria for assessment are not visible to the student. As a result there is an absorption concerning learning, and a reluctance or even taboo to discuss teaching. Halliday’s expression for this type of pedagogy is “benevolent inertia” (p 30). “Whole language” and “writing process” are mentioned now and then as examples of constructivist approaches. From, for example, a Scandinavian perspective writing process is not a good example of this type of pedagogy because, in these countries, this approach is usually based on either a socio-interactional perspective or a socio-cultural perspective, and not constructivism.

In contrast to a progressive pedagogy like constructivism, central to the Australian genre pedagogy is “the principle that effective teaching involves providing learners with explicit knowledge about the language in which the curriculum is written and negotiated in the classroom” (p 2). The language framework is founded on Michael Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics. Modeling and repeating is considered to be the base for all forms of language development, whether spoken or written. It is thus a visible pedagogy in Bernstein’s terminology, where the focus is on teaching AND learning. The teaching consists of explicit transmissions of knowledge, skills and, values, and the criteria of assessment are visible. Of central importance is that all students are given the opportunities and expected to accomplish the same level of task. Therefore teachers need strategies to support them equally. And such strategies are described in depth in this book.

In the first chapter the genre pedagogy, and its history and *raison d’être*, is introduced. A brief outline is also given of the model of language in social context that underpins the genre pedagogy, and of a metalanguage that goes along with this model and can be used by teachers and students. A key point to genre pedagogy is that meaning does not reside within words, it arises from semantic contrast, or through its negative value in Saussurian terms. By exploring alternative and contrasting ways of meaning-making in a pedagogical activity, the meanings and the values they are based on are highlighted and made visible for discussion. Another key

point of the genre pedagogy discussed in this chapter is the structure of the so-called learning activity. However, would a more adequate term be teaching/learning activity in accordance with the equal emphasis on teaching AND learning and the term ‘teaching/learning cycle’ (p 64-66)? The structure of the learning activity proposed is an interesting extension of the traditional IRE-pattern, i.e. Initiative–Response–Evaluation. The initiative is extended to become a focus and the response to become a task. Furthermore, there are two other steps included. Firstly a preparation phase is added, since the difference between how well acquainted and prepared students are with a certain topic is shown to be critical to their success with learning about such a topic. Secondly, just an evaluation as a follow-up is not enough. Language learning situations in the early years, as they are known from many studies, also include an elaboration. Therefore the learning activity embraces five general elements: Preparation–Focus–Task–Evaluation–Elaboration.

The next chapter, chapter two, deals with writing in infants and primary school. Here a picture is given of how genre pedagogy was founded within the projects *Writing* and *Language as Social Power*. Typical patterns of traditional writing in early grades in the late 1970s and early 1980s are described and discussed. It is concluded that observation/comments and recounts dominated writing activities, and that students were neither receiving any preparation for writing in different subject areas, nor any knowledge about the language of different genres. The early formation of genre pedagogy and the key genres for primary schools is presented. The development and refinement of the nowadays so well-known teaching/learning cycle is discussed. In the subsequent *Write it Right*-teaching/learning cycle the central goal was refined as “*Towards control of and critical orientation to genre and text*” (p 66). Here, detailed examples of interactions between teachers and students are in focus. It is shown how teachers and students are provided with a metalanguage concerning the name of each genre, the social purpose, and the stages constituting each genre, in order to work with the deconstruction, and joint and independent construction of, different genres.

The third chapter concerns genres in secondary school and the embedding or integrating of literacy in curriculum learning. The action research project *Write it Right* that began in the early 1990s was the frame for this work. The authors make the comment that the preferred name of the project was *the Right to Write*, but that was not accepted by those who funded the project. Firstly, the basic kinds of meaning that all knowledge is made of are dealt with from the perspective of both early language learning at home and later language learning in school

in different subject areas. The basic kinds of meaning described and richly exemplified are, firstly, the use of classification and composition in order to understand things, and secondly activity sequencing to understand processes, time, cause, and effect. How values in social science may be expressed is another topic of this chapter. The chapter ends with a detailed discussion of how information may be condensed and packed into grammatical metaphors in social science as well as science, i.e. how congruent wordings or realisations are transformed to incongruent ones by the process of nominalization. As shown by the authors, this is a critical resource in building uncommonsense knowledge and a distinctive feature of this kind of knowledge.

The third generation of genre pedagogy in the form of the project *Reading to Learn* is the topic of chapter four. Here teachers are given teaching strategies in order to support all students to engage confidently with curriculum texts in all subject areas. This is in opposition to those publishers and education departments that instead choose light versions of textbooks in order to facilitate learning for students who are struggling with the ordinary textbooks. According to Rose and Martin all students, including those not so prepared by e.g. their typical home discourses, should have the same opportunities and equal rights to more advanced ways of meaning-making in reading. Four levels of reading are pinpointed: decoding, and literal, inferential and interpretive reading. A reflective and /or critical stance, which usually is another level included in this type of treatment of reading, is on the other hand not so clearly stated and discussed (cf Hasan 1996; Langer 2011; Luke & Freebody 1999). Reading as well as writing is integrated with the curriculum in this pedagogy. The core of the chapter contains a thorough description of sets of teaching strategies in order to deal with stories as well as factual texts and arguments and their different language characteristics. These strategies include a preparation phase, and detailed reading. Furthermore, joint and individual rewriting of selected sentences or paragraphs is described. This rewriting supports students to practice writing new sentences or paragraphs by using language patterns of a familiar text and, in the long run, to use these resources in joint and individual construction of whole texts. Further, so-called intensive strategies concerning sentence making, spelling and sentence writing are included, which are considered to be particularly valuable in primary grades.

The fifth chapter, *Knowledge about language*, presents a metalanguage that teachers can use in their lesson planning and assessment of students' work and that teachers and students can

use in their classroom discussions. This metalanguage is based on systemic functional linguistics, but it is transformed into a pedagogically relevant, transparent and easy to capture framework. The last and sixth chapter sums up what genre pedagogy has reached so far. A note on teacher education is also given, and four aspects of professional learning are emphasized: knowledge about language and pedagogy, lesson planning, classroom implementation, and assessment of student's growth. The last aspect is expanded on by giving detailed criteria for writing assessment. The authors' envoi addresses students' right to write and read and "how genre pedagogy can raise the confidence of each student by enhancing their skills in reading and writing, and thus their capacity for learning in school" (p 332).

As has been stated earlier, this book gives a rich and profound insight into genre pedagogy and its different facets in a very accessible way. At the same time, it is a teaser for wanting more. One of these "wanting more things" concerns an extended discussion of the transfer from joint reading and writing to, in the first place, individual and later on independent reading and writing, and how to keep track of the transfers different students may go through. Another aspect to expand on is the embedding or integration of reading and writing in curriculum in order not to lose sight of the content of what is written and read. It concerns the perspectives chosen, the voices used, and the values and norms these perspectives and voices are based on (cf a perspective based on the work of Bakhtin and his colleagues (*The Bakhtin Reader* 1994)). These things are hinted at in the book on some occasions. However, from a curriculum perspective these are of tremendous importance and therefore a whole chapter on each of these issues would be desirable.

References

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