From product to process, to genre theory and beyond: Toward an 'apprenticeship' model of teaching writing   **Evelyn Jackson, 2008**

Introduction:

Writing is probably the most complex of all the language activities (speaking, listening and reading) to learn and to 'do'. The ability to write develops over time and with maturity; and even when fluency of expression has been achieved, the process of writing is still often painfully slow, even for professional writers. Many people learn to read, but not all readers become effective writers. For beginning writers especially, what makes this task so complex is that writing requires what Negro and Chanquoy (2005) refer to as, '… the simultaneous implementation of multiple operations, from the mental elaboration of the message to its graphic transcription' (p.105). But writing is even more complicated than this. A writer must set up a shared reality with their imagined reader, a possible world the reader recognises and finds convincing. To be effective, to 'hook' their reader in and persuade them to keep on reading, writers have to think like the reader and anticipate how they might interpret the text. How does the novice writer learn to do all of these things?

Needless to say, the teaching of writing is a highly complex activity and up until quite recently (the mid 1970s or so), there was little research available to help guide teacher practice. This literature review looks at the teaching of writing through the lens of the major trends and influences, from the formalist methods of composition writing to the more eclectic recursive process and genre-based approaches of today. What characterises much writing teaching currently in schools is that individual teachers tend to construct it in very different ways. The question is do these eclectic approaches

adequately prepare students for the kind of academic writing demanded in tertiary education, or the kinds of writing needed in the workplace, or any number of purposes throughout their lives.

The first section of this review researches the theories and historical influences on contemporary teacher practice by looking at the history of the teaching of writing in Australia from the 1950s and 60's to the present time. The second section uses the literature on an 'apprenticeship' model, and draws on experience in the National Accelerated Literacy Program (see for example Gray, 2007), to broaden the field and take theory further.

1. The teaching of writing

1.1 The 1950s: Basic skills, composition and the rhetorical categories

During the 1950s (when I was at school), there was a common assumption that if children basically learnt 'how' to write, in terms of the more mechanical aspects of writing (handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar), they would then be able to apply that knowledge to many forms of writing and to different subject areas. In the early years of schooling, spelling and handwriting were emphasised as basic skills. Spelling was taught from lists of words which were practised and memorised for a weekly spelling test; and handwriting was practised as a daily ritual.

Grammar and punctuation were formally taught, often as a set of drilled exercises about such things as parts of speech, parts of sentences, grammatical terms and characteristics of well-crafted sentences and paragraphs (Pressley & Juzwik, 2006:350); and copying from the blackboard was a common activity to provide children with writing practice. This 'formalist' approach to teaching writing based on grammatical instruction was common in textbooks of the time, such as John Warriner's *Handbook of English*

(1948, in Pressley & Juzwik, 2006:350). As children developed greater control of the 'mechanics' of writing, they were encouraged to write compositions of various kinds on topics set by the teacher which they then marked for neatness and accuracy.

The idea that a complex activity like writing could be broken down into a sequence of basic skills, and taught through rote learning and practice, was consistent with 'behaviourism' (Watson, 1913) from the field of psychology. Behaviourism was based on early research on the study of reflexes (classical conditioning) by Ivan Pavlov in the late 19th century, and further developed by American applied psychologists, J.B. Watson (who founded the 'school of behaviourism') and B.F. Skinner (operant conditioning and behaviour modification) in the first half of the 20th century. Behaviourists claimed that learning occurs through a process of imitation, and positive and negative reinforcement. While behaviourism offered some insights into the role of active imitation in learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and the significance of providing accurate and positive feedback to learners, it was soon seen as insufficient to explain the complex cognitive processes involved in learning. Since then, theories about the development of writing have been influenced by 'learning theory' from the field of cognitive psychology; and also by theories of language acquisition and grammar from the study of linguistics. These relationships will be explored alongside theories of writing development in this review.

Composition writing in English lessons in the 1950s in (British, Australian and American) schools was based on particular forms drawn from the traditional categories of rhetoric: *narration, description, exposition* and *argument* (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975). These models prescribed how a text should be structured in order to realise the intention of the author to have a particular effect on their 'audience'. These four categories were used as a classificatory system for writing in most English

textbooks up to the 1950s. An influential text from this time, *Fundamentals of Good Writing*, stated:

> *We can see with only a moment of reflection that these four types of intention [to inform the reader, to change him, to convey to him the quality of experience, to tell him about an event] correspond to the four basic kinds of discourse: EXPOSITION, ARGUMENT, DESCRIPTION and NARRATION.* (Brooks & Warren, 1952:30)

The study of rhetoric has continued as a discipline since classical antiquity and still influences our thinking about the purpose and form of texts to this day. These four categories evolved from a period when rhetoric broadened its field of inquiry from persuasive oratory to all forms of written discourse; and have remained remarkably resilient over time (Britton et al., 1975:4). In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) Campbell wrote, 'All the ends of speaking are reducible to four' which he identified as: 'to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, to influence the will' (In Britton et al., 1975:4). Nearly 100 years later, Bain described the 'five leading kinds of composition' as Description, Narration, Exposition, Oratory and Poetry (1866); and more contemporarily, Grierson (1945) asserted that the four familiar categories were based on '… the fundamental division of experience' (p.136).

Given this long history and tradition, it is no wonder that these categories have so heavily influenced our thinking about written composition; and what research there was in the 1950s and 60s tended to accept them without question (Britton et al., 1975:4).

1.2 The 1960s: Personal / impersonal and creative writing

In the 1960s, a broad distinction began to be made between *personal* and *impersonal* writing; and at the same time, there was a movement towards a focus on 'creative writing' (Britton et al., 1975:8). Writing was seen as being for either *private* or personal

use intended for the writer alone; or *public* in the sense that it is written to be read by others (Gray, 1985a:5). Because of the demands of the various school subjects for more abstract and generalised writing, school writing was seen as impersonal or objective; and there was an implicit belief that developmental progress in writing was associated with a movement away from personal to impersonal modes of expression (Britton et al., 1975:8). As impersonal or abstract writing is based on knowledge of a particular field and subject, and the ability to relate to it, it seems likely that this does develop with age and experience. But expressive or poetic writing also progresses with maturity. This theory was insufficient to explain the developmental process and the shift towards creative writing can be seen partly as a reaction to the limitations of the impersonal writing model (Britton et al., 1975:8).

The movement towards creative writing in the mid-1960s was based on the idea that 'motivation' might encourage more 'creative' writing – that if students were presented with an attractive stimulus, imaginative and profound writing would emerge. According to James Britton (Britton et al., 1975:31), while some good writing did emerge, results were patchy at best; although one favourable outcome of the approach was that teachers were encouraged to look at writing on its own merits rather than being measured against some ideal. All good writing is creative to some extent, yet it is not totally 'free' in the sense of complete freedom of expression – the writer is constrained by the necessity to make their meaning clear to the reader. But for some more extreme proponents of the creative writing approach it became impossible to evaluate writing - if creativity is the measure and everything is 'creative', then everything must therefore be 'good' (Britton et al., 1975:31). By this standard it also became impossible to observe progress in writing as well.

1.3 The 1970s: The notion of 'whole' language and the 'processes' of writing

The 1970s saw a major shift from the more traditional 'teacher-centred' models of teaching reading and writing, to more 'child-centred' progressivist approaches to literacy teaching. Towards the end of the 1960s, the reaction to the more formalist approaches to teaching writing was also reflected in a reaction against the 'basic skills' approach to teaching reading.

Proponents of a more 'holistic' or 'whole' language approach to reading argued that children should focus on meaning when attempting to read; and that too much emphasis on direct phonics instruction could actually impede reading development. The philosophy of 'holism' was a response to behaviourism which came to be seen as a reductionist approach to understanding how humans learn. The idea of holism was based on the belief that 'the whole is more than the sum of its parts' (originally summarised by Aristotle in his '*Metaphysics*') or rather that *the whole is different to the sum of its parts* as it came to be expressed in Gestalt psychology, originally credited to Max Wertheimer (1923). This was a theory of mind that took a holistic approach to learning theory, arguing that analysing individual behaviours could never explain the complexity of how the human mind worked.

1.3.1 The Whole Language approach to teaching literacy

This idea formed the basis of the Whole Language approach to teaching literacy which was largely pioneered by Kenneth Goodman (Goodman, 1967, 1973) and later, Frank Smith (Smith, 1972, 1973). Whole Language grew out of Noam Chomsky's (1957) linguistic theory that humans have a natural, innate capacity for language. In 1967,

Goodman published a paper entitled 'Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game' in which he refuted the 'commonsense' notion that reading is a 'precise process' of identification of letters, words, and parts of words (p.126).

Goodman argued that reading is a 'selective' process involving an interaction between thought and language - a psycholinguistic guessing game in which efficient reading results from the skill of selecting the fewest, most productive cues for guessing the right words: 'The ability to anticipate that which has not been seen, of course, is vital in reading, just as the ability to anticipate what has not yet been heard is vital in listening' (p.127). Goodman proposed that reading involves attention to both semantic and syntactic cues, as well as graphic input. The reader anticipates and predicts from this information, sampling just enough from the print to confirm their guess and to cue more semantic and syntactic information (p.132). In his view, reading development occurs through, '…more accurate first guessing based on better sampling techniques, greater control over language structure, broadened experiences and increased conceptual development' (p.132)

Goodman's argument resonated with teachers as a way of thinking about how children learn to read - whether reading is a bottom-up process based on phonics; or as he suggested, a top-down one based on meaning; and about literacy in general. This led to the idea that reading and writing should be considered as wholes, learned by experience and exposure through immersion in good literature, rather than by analysis and didactic instruction.

1.3.2 The processes of writing

During this period, there was also a desire to study the actual processes of writing and the developmental progress of learners, rather than examining the finished products of

professional writers as a means of informing writing practice and teaching. An American study by Janet Emig (1971) looked at the writing processes of eight 17-18 year olds in a Chicago high school in which the researcher invited students to compose aloud in an attempt to externalise their composing processes. She interpreted two categories of writing from this research – *reflexive* (inward-looking) and *extensive* (outward-looking) - similar to the *personal* and *impersonal* writing modes of the 1960s.

1.3.2.1 Writing as a 'three-stage' process

Around the same time as Emig's study, James Britton and colleagues completed an extensive study into the developmental processes of writing in a Schools Council Project in Britain (1966-71) on the writing development of 11 to 18 year olds (Britton et al., 1975). Britton et al used 2122 pieces of extended writing by 500 11-18 year olds in 65 secondary schools on tasks set by teachers in various subjects, as the basis for their theoretical model; and then based their study of development on a four year follow-up in five of those schools (p.7).

While acknowledging the historical influence and significance of the rhetorical categories, Britton et al argued that these categories could not provide an adequate conceptual framework for their purpose. They found the categories to be 'profoundly prescriptive' (Britton et al., 1975:4)*,* concerned with how people *should* write, rather than with how they *actually* do. While supposedly based on particular intentions, they were seen in terms of the 'effect' they had on an audience; yet for Britton, narrative could not be seen as an 'intention' in the same sense as persuasion or exposition - there can be widely varying intentions in narrative (Britton et al., 1975:5). In this sense the categories were not equal; or 'pure' in the sense of existing as a kind of 'ideal' or as equivalent to fundamental mental states as was originally

contended. The intention to explain and persuade is common in both narrative and description; and pure description is very hard to find in adult writing, except perhaps in poetry. Because many pieces of writing tend to use one mode to fulfil the functions of another, Britton et al felt they were difficult to use as 'a sorting system for throwing light on the process of development' (Britton et al., 1975:6).

Earlier studies of composition and general writing development, such as those by Loban (1963), Harris (1962) and Hunt (1965), and the study of twelfth graders' writing by Emig (1971), did not provide the 'multi-dimensional' model they were seeking (Britton et al., 1975:6). Their previous research had indicated that the vast majority of school writing was produced in response to tasks set by teachers; and no matter what kind of texts these were, the writing could be differentiated by the quality of involvement of the student. They termed this *involved* or *perfunctory* writing (p.7), depending on how students conceived the problem, i.e. the degree to which they accepted the writing task and made it their own in the process of writing, or whether they only perfunctorily fulfilled their notion of what was demanded. This notion of the degree of involvement in writing became one of the dimensions they studied.

In developing their approach to this study, Britton et al drew on the growing awareness of the relationship between language and learning that had been developing since the 50s from psychology such as studies of concept-formation and cognitive growth; the study of grammar in linguistics and work done on the relationship between speech and writing (p.6). While linguistics at this time was concerned with 'the utterance' at the sentence level, Britton et al wanted to investigate whole written texts; and to take account of both the psychological processes involved and the social situation in which they occurred. They were informed by Halliday's (1971) work on the function of language in a social

perspective; and the work of Piaget and Vygotsky on inner speech (1962) and the relationship between thought, speaking and writing, contributed to their understanding (Britton et al., 1975:11).

The model they came up with described three stages of mature writing, two preliminary stages and the writing itself: conception, incubation and production (p.22-44). Conception is how the writer explains to themselves what they must do to complete the writing task and the resources they summon to do it. In the school situation this stage can be greatly affected by how the task is set up by the teacher and the degree of involvement the writer feels. Incubation is the thinking and planning stage, and production the actual writing stage, although they saw all three processes as probably running concurrently (p.27).

In categorising the scripts collected, they chose to look at both process and function in order to develop a dynamic, multi-dimensional theoretical model – 'at the end of the first year we listed degree of involvement, expectation, audience, function and individual resources of language as the situational features we intended to study' (p.15). However, the researchers were only able to develop two of these dimensions systematically, function and audience (in terms of the pupil/teacher relationship), as they found the language resources individuals bring to the writing task was beyond the scope of their enquiry (p.17).

Britton et al found that informative writing was largely developed in the school environment of the teacher-as-examiner; while expressive or poetic writing was most closely associated with the teacher-learner dialogue (p.190). It is within this latter category that it might be assumed that learning was most likely to occur and they did indeed find that this was a dependent relationship for the learner. For this reason

they were 'disappointed' to find so little writing in the expressive mode in their sample - only 6% in the first year, reducing to 4% in the seventh (p.196-7), as they felt that this mode was most likely to yield the most developmental progress. Their findings appeared to provide some support for their original hypothesis that developmental progress is associated with a process of dissociation or 'progressive differentiation' towards recognition of the more complex functions of written language (p.190). But they felt that this stage of their study did not prove or disprove their prediction that the development of writing abilities is demonstrated by a growing range of kinds of writing shaped by thinking processes.

Britton et al concluded that the pressures in school to write at what they termed the 'analogic level of the informative' (p.197) for the teacher-as-examiner were so great that expressive writing was inhibited, yet only minimal development in abstract writing was achieved. They saw this narrowing of the range and the small amount of speculative writing as a reflection of the curriculum and its objectives which did not appear to foster independent thinking. At least not in the sense that Jerome Bruner (1975) had described in a recent paper as achieving what he termed 'analytic competence' – a stage beyond linguistic or communicative competence - in which the writer problem-solves propositional structures not related to direct experience with objects and events, but with 'ensembles of propositions' resembling Piaget's formal operations stage (in Britton et al., 1975:202).

While the three-stage model only marginally contributed to a broader understanding of the developmental process of writing, this study demonstrated that writing in schools was mainly used as an assessment tool, and there was precious little teaching about how to learn to write for the novice. Its significance was in the groundwork it laid for future research on the cognitive processes involved in writing.

1.3.3 Writing as a mode of learning

After Britton's study was published, Janet Emig (1977) published a discussion paper in which she contended, like Bruner, that writing is a unique mode of learning that corresponds to particularly powerful learning strategies (p.122). Emig pointed out that distinguished psychologists such as Vygotsky, Luria and Bruner had already noted the profound part that language, as a symbolic system and a technological device (p.124), plays in learning; and that the development of higher cognitive functions such as analysis and synthesis develop most fully when they are supported by both verbal and written language (p.122).

Of the four language activities, speaking and listening have been seen by linguists as first-order processes - acquired naturally, without formal instruction; and reading and writing as second-order processes that must be learned through systematic instruction. Each of these activities has its own unique characteristics and potential for learning: talking involves originating or composing, but not graphic recording; listening and reading both involve creating or re-creating, but not originating or graphic transcription; but writing involves all three processes of originating, composing and graphic transcription (p.123). Bruner had already specified three ways of learning – enactive (by doing), iconic (through depiction in an image) and symbolic (by restatement in words) – through the hand, the eye and the brain (1966:10-11). Emig argues that writing is unique as it uses all three modes of learning and corresponds to several powerful learning strategies.

Like effective learning, effective writing is connective – it establishes clear, unambiguous conceptual relationships (p.126) and is 'a powerful instrument of thought' (Luria in Emig, p.127) - what Vygotsky (1962) referred to as 'deliberate

structuring of the web of meaning' (p.100). Writing also connects the three major tenses of our experience (past, present and future) to make meaning through a process of analysis and synthesis (Emig, 1977:127). Writing is personal, engaged and committed, and is self-paced - as successful learning is (p.126). It is also abstract in its decontextualised nature; and creates a product that provides immediate self-feedback in the form of revision – literally a way of re-seeing. For Emig it is also 'epigenetic with the complex evolutionary development of thought steadily and graphically visible and available throughout as a record of the journey, from jottings and notes to full discursive formulations' (p127) - a powerful mode of learning that makes thought processes visible to the learner.

1.3.4 The notion of 'rehearsal' as a pre-writing strategy

In the late 1970s, fellow researchers at the University of New Hampshire, Donald Murray (1978) and Donald Graves (1978) also looked at the process of writing and the relationship between thought and language. They observed the writing processes of both professional and novice writers respectively, and found three main stages of writing: prewriting, drafting and revision. In his article, *Write before Writing (*1978*),* Murray emphasised a pre-writing stage he referred to as *rehearsal*, similar to Vygotsky's notion of inner speech and Britton's conception and incubation stages, as being essential for writing. He claimed that teachers rarely provided students with sufficient time for pre-writing activities such as rehearsal; and concluded that they should, if they wanted their students to improve in writing (p.375). For Murray, 'resistance' to writing was an essential part of the writing process; and that 'rehearsal' consisted not only of the pressure *not* to right, but of four countervailing pressures *to* write: increasing information about the subject, an increasing concern for the subject, an awareness of audience and the approaching deadline (p.376). He

pointed out that from the moment an idea for writing occurs to a writer, or an assignment has been accepted, many professional writers emphasise the need to 'wait' for their ideas to begin to take form before beginning to write.

According to Murray, the first time he heard the term *rehearsal* used in this sense was by Donald Graves at the University of New Hampshire, speaking about his observations of what young children do when preparing to write. 'He watched them draw what they would write and heard them, as we all have, speaking aloud what they might say on the page before they wrote.' (p.376). Adults do this too – he noted that if you walked through an editorial office you would see lips moving and professionals muttering to themselves as they wrote. But for Murray, the rehearsal process was more complex than this – it generally proceeds from imagining to note-taking to initial drafts and false starts, until the writer sees a signal which tells them how to control the subject (p.377). This signal or pattern is the problem to be solved through the writing (p.380). For Murray the processes in writing needed further observation and research, but the implications for teaching were three-fold: that teachers may need to change their thinking about students who delay writing; they should allow more time for prewriting; and they need to work with students to help them understand the process of rehearsal (p.380-381). Murray's work heavily influenced Donald Graves in his approach to teaching writing as a process which was introduced into Australian schools in the early 1980s.

1.4 The 1980s: The writing 'process' and the notion of discourse

During the 1980s, there was a dramatic shift in thinking about how writing should be taught. Donald Graves, supported by researchers such as Janet Emig and Donald Murray, led a process writing/conferencing approach to facilitating children's writing

development in schools. At the same time, other voices emerged from the research focusing on the 'cognitive' processes involved in writing for both the novice and the mature writer based on advances in cognitive psychology. Two approaches emerged during this period which still effect the teaching of writing today: a cognitive 'process' approach and a sociocultural model (Pressley & Juzwik, 2006:350).

1.4.1 The 'Process Writing' approach

At the beginning of the1980s there was a 'revolution' in the teaching of writing in Australian, English and American schools. The model that was introduced in Australia was the 'Process Writing' approach pioneered by Donald Graves (1978) based on his research and that of his associate, Donald Murray. Process Writing was based on the belief that children want to write and are capable of learning to control written language through the actual 'process' of writing. This process involved pre-writing activities (brain-storming topics, planning, drawing and rehearsal), drafting and revision. For Graves, revision was not only a crucial tool for a writer, but it provided the best guide to a child's writing development (1981:23).

The teacher's role was to facilitate children's writing by providing the time and the 'environment' in which to write. Graves felt that choosing their own topics reduced children's anxiety about *what* to write because they would write about what they know; and it provided a strong link between 'voice' and subject (1983:21). As Murray (1978) had suggested, teachers were encouraged to write with their students to model the process and to experience firsthand the difficulties of writing (p.43); and to 'publish' children's writing (as booklets or by displaying it in the classroom) in recognition of the public nature of writing and to support their writing development (p.54). Teachers should surround them with literature to support their writing (p.65) and support their individual

writing development through regular individual discussions known as the 'writing conference' (p.23) and to document their progress. During writing children were encouraged to use 'invented' spelling to enable them to control their own messages (1981:19). Direct teaching of spelling and grammar was discouraged in the belief that these would be best learnt in the context of their own writing at point-of-need during the writing conference.

Process Writing was based on Graves' research and the work of his friend and teacher, Donald Murray (see the dedication to Murray in Graves, 1983). Graves and his co-researchers, Susan Sowers and Lucy Calkins, spent two years observing the writing development of 16 children from Year 1 to Year 2, and then from Year 3 to Year 4, in a rural school in New Hampshire, USA (1981:18). The children were observed in their classrooms; and the writing samples gathered related to what the teacher asked them to write, or what the children chose to write. This research was aimed at finding out what was involved in the growth of children's control in writing. They looked at their transition from oral to written discourse and the part revision played in their development (pp.17-28).

Graves found that no matter how young or inexperienced they are, 'children want to write' (1981:17) – that from the first day of school they believe they *can* write, and that teachers should not hold them back. He argued that children learn to write through the act of writing, that not only should they be free to write but importantly, they should be able to choose *what* to write about. Graves proposed that children are capable of directing their own learning and that if teachers would only be willing to trust them, children would surprise them (1983:3). He pointed out that much of what children were being asked to write in schools inhibited their ability to express themselves through writing; and that children rarely had control of their own writing. He saw writing as a craft,

a process that children can only learn through the act of writing; and that teachers must practice the craft alongside their students. This reflected his belief that in order to understand the 'process' of writing fully, to comprehend its problem-solving nature, and to appreciate just how difficult writing is, teachers must write themselves. For Graves then, teaching is a craft as well: 'The teaching of writing demands the control of two crafts, teaching and writing. There are not many teachers of oil painting, piano, ceramics or drama who are not also practitioners in their field. They can't teach without showing what they mean.' (1983:6)

In reflecting on what sort of 'process' writing is, he described it as a shaping process – 'a long, painstaking, patient process demanded to learn how to shape material to a level where it is satisfying to the person doing the crafting' (p.6). For Graves, what is demanded in both craft processes (writing and teaching) is constant revision: a '…constant re-seeing of what is being revealed by the information in hand' (p.6). The teacher's role is to stand back and seek the best way to help the child realise their intentions and to encourage them to take control of their writing. This is achieved through the writing conference which aims to foster the child's desire to inform; and to help children to value what they know (p.8). Graves believed that as teachers grew in their ability to recognise the writer's 'voice' coming through the writing, they could detect when it broke down, i.e. the point at which the child loses control of the writing (1981:12). Their craft is to help the child to 'discover' their inner voice and to maintain control of the writing (1983:6).

The Process Writing approach had a huge impact on Australian teachers and the teaching of writing in schools. Graves attended the Primary English Teaching Association (PETA) International Conference at Sydney University in Australia in August,

1980, and his approach resonated with many teachers and educators. In his book, *"Children want to write…": Donald Graves in Australia*, R. D. Walshe (1981) captured the excitement of this conference and the 'missionary zeal' of the man exhorting teachers to 'Let Children Show us How to Help Them Write' - the title of one of Graves' reports from his research Laboratory (p.6) . Graves' visit to Australia also set off an explosion of research into writing and classroom practices in process writing classrooms by teacher/academics such as Jan Turbill (1982), Andrea Butler (Butler & Turbill, 1984) and Brian Cambourne (Cambourne, 1984, 1988; Cambourne & Turbill, 1987). By the late 1980s, the whole language/process writing approach was the dominant approach to teaching literacy in Australian classrooms.

1.4.2 Reading like a writer

While there was much synchronicity between whole language and process writing, one of the proponents of the whole language approach, Frank Smith, disagreed with Graves' notion that children learn to write by writing. Smith published a book on writing in 1982 called *Writing and the Writer* in which he argued (like Graves) that very little of what writers know can be taught, because it is too complex and largely unconscious – it must be discovered. While admitting to being tempted by the idea that we learn to write by writing as Graves claimed, Smith disagreed because we do so little of it (p.162). He argued that we learn to write by reading, by *exposure* to writing; but since not all readers become good writers, it must be reading done in a very particular way. He proposed three dynamically interrelated conditions of learning to write: demonstration, engagement and sensitivity (p.170).

Halliday (1973) had pointed out that children learn language and its uses simultaneously, but Smith went further by claiming they learn it *through* its uses. We

learn the conventions of language when we have a use for them and when we see the use others put them to – through some kind of demonstration. But for learning to occur, there must be a certain level of involvement (p.171). For Smith, engagement occurs when our attention is seized by something, as if we have little 'learning hooks' (p.172) waiting to engage in learning. The nature of these hooks and whether they are extended in readiness for learning or not depends on the third condition of learning - sensitivity - we learn when we expect to learn (p.174) and have an openness to learning, 'a reaching toward the learning opportunity' (p.175).

Smith believed that children are born with this sensitivity for learning, that 'They believe they can learn anything until experience teaches them otherwise' (p.175). Adults expect infants to learn to walk and talk and they do – the expectation of success is taken for granted. But when obstacles do arise in learning, he noted how expectations of failure on the part of children seem so often to emanate from adults and how prophetic these expectations can be. For Smith, sensitivity does not have to be taught, it needs to be protected and nurtured. He claimed children are sensitive to style and register in speech, and can therefore mimic the way parents and teachers speak to them, and the way stories are read to them, in their own writing (p.176).

Smith claimed that reading and writing have an 'asymmetrical' relationship – writing needs reading, that reading is the fundamental source of information for learning about writing; but reading doesn't need writing (p.177). However, it is critical to write to practice how to shape and consolidate what has been learnt about writing from reading, and for feedback about what has been learnt (p.178). As well as self-checking, adults can provide feedback too, just as they do when children are learning to talk, by responding to a child's writing. But for Smith, the key to writing is the incentive to write. Children must

see themselves as writers - *'to read like a writer'* (p.179). He claimed that the basis of learning to write is *inventiveness*, in composing and in the mechanics of transcription.

Learning to concurrently control handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar may hold composing back initially for the novice, but Smith believed these can largely be learned from reading, as a form of demonstration. While he conceded that handwriting may be more easily learnt separately to composing, he claimed (like Graves) that teachers don't need to wait for children to learn to write fluently before allowing them to write something more ambitious. But for Smith, learning to form letters only makes sense to a child when they have an understanding of sentences and words from reading (p.184). He claimed spelling and punctuation can be learned directly from reading, but in the process of learning to spell, invented spelling must be tolerated in the interest of composing (p.187).

Smith also claimed that because grammar is implicit and rooted in meaning, it cannot be taught. Instead, children can become sensitive to conventions by experimenting with them in the process of writing - exercises in the finer points of grammar would only make sense to children already writing (p.192). As every convention of writing is tied to an intention that lies behind it, for Smith, grammar is inseparable from composition. Composition is discovering what can be done with written language, '…to learn the conventions by which creativity can become manifest in composition' (p.192).

Children have a natural interest in stories and can create imaginative worlds, but they do have trouble ordering and connecting sentences and paragraphs when writing stories (p.193) and deciding how much detail to include (p.194). Expository writing is far more difficult for them than narrative, possibly because it is less familiar to them and their

experience is limited. If thoughts and conventions must develop together then for Smith they do so through being read to, using effective models of writing that show not only how something is best written, but for showing the possibilities of what might be written (p.195). Children must go beyond what they can write themselves, but to do so '…they must overcome the twin handicaps of the physical demands of the task and their own inexperience in clothing ideas in words' (p.195).

For this reason Smith agreed with Murray (1978) that adult and child should write together to ensure they both understand the challenge of the blank page; and that while children learn to write by reading and writing, it can also be fostered by discussions about writing (p.196). Just as many teachers seem unaware that professional writers write and rewrite their work, children rarely see the need for editing and revision without being explicitly shown the potentialities of rewriting. He cited Graves (1979) as his key source on the topic of revision; and agreed with Graves that the teacher's role is to provide a writing environment – stimulating demonstrations and support for their writing – not by providing set topics, but an underlying intention for writing (p.201). Smith's conclusion was that children are capable of learning to write and there is little that can be taught in terms of explicit rules and exercises. They learn to write by writing, by reading and by perceiving themselves as writers (p.199).

While numbers of children do appear to learn to read and write without explicit instruction as Graves and Smith claimed, those who do are usually from highly literate and privileged backgrounds which predispose them to pick up much about written English in incidental ways (Christie, 1992:145). For many other children however, a great deal of teacher guidance and explicit teaching is needed if they are to gain control of the features of written English for the purposes of reading and writing, as Gray (see

for example Gray, 1985b, 1987, 1990) has argued, particularly in relation to Australian Indigenous students for whom achievement in literacy has consistently lagged well behind that of their mainstream peers.

Still, the impact of Graves' work has been highly significant in its conceptualisation of the writing process which has largely become very much part of the mainstream culture of English teaching in Australian schools. And several of Smith's ideas such as the need for children to *read like writers*, to understand an underlying intention for writing, and to perceive themselves as writers, are all useful concepts that still resonate today.

1.4.3 Constructivism

This dramatic shift in the way reading and writing were taught from teacher-centred skills-based instruction to a more child-centred progressivist approach, and from a focus on product to process, reflected the influence of constructivism, a theory of learning that derived from developmental and cognitive psychology (Piaget, 1972 and Bruner, 1966). Within this theoretical framework, learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based on their prior knowledge. Constructivists believed that the individual learner must actively 'build' their own knowledge and skills; and that information exists within these built 'constructs' rather than in the external environment.

In his book, *Toward a Theory of Instruction* (1966), Bruner argued that the learner selects and transforms information through reliance on cognitive structures such as schema, or mental models, to provide meaning and organisation to experience, allowing the individual to go 'beyond the information given' (p.2). Information to be learned should be translated into a format appropriate to the learner's current state of understanding;

and instruction aim to lead students to problem-solving activity and encourage them to 'discover' principles for themselves (p.57). For Bruner, 'the heart of the educational process consisted of providing aids and dialogues for translating experience into more powerful systems of notation and ordering' (p.21) and is the reason why a theory of development must be linked to both a theory of knowledge and a theory of instruction.

Bruner stated that a theory of instruction should be prescriptive and have four major features. It should specify: experiences which most effectively implant a predisposition toward learning, the ways in which a body of knowledge can be structured so that it can be most readily grasped by the learner, the most effective sequences in which to present material, and the nature and pacing of rewards and punishments which should include a conscious shift from extrinsic rewards (such as teacher praise) to intrinsic rewards (p.40-42). Good methods for structuring knowledge should result in simplifying, generating new propositions, and increasing the manipulation of information.

Influenced by cognitive psychology and constructivism, researchers began to investigate the 'cognitive' processes and strategies expert writers use compared with novice writers and found that these cognitive tasks and strategies could not only be taught, but when they were, writing improved (Pressley & Juzwik, 2006:351).

1.4.4 Cognitive processes in writing

A landmark study by Linda Flower and John Hayes (1980a) described the cognitive processes involved in writing. Flower and Hayes were not the first to see writing as a series of stages (see Britton et al, 1975; and Rohman, 1965, in Pressley & Juzwik, 2006:351) but they were the first to realise the recursive nature of writing. That is, writing

is not a straightforward linear process, but one of constantly moving between the planning, organising, drafting and revising processes; and expert writers monitor these activities constantly. They contended that writers must be recursive because there is much to monitor in writing and all of this activity must occur within a writer's short-term memory (Flower & Hayes, 1980a). The most salient feature of short-term memory is its limited capacity (Miller, 1956) and the recursive nature of these processes compensates for this. 'By moving back and forth between planning, organising, drafting, and revising, a manageable amount of information can be held in mind during each moment of writing'(Pressley & Juzwik, 2006).

During the 1980s, Flower & Hayes published a series of papers that refined their initial work on the nature of the cognitive processes in writing. In *The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem* (1980b) they questioned the metaphor of 'discovery' for describing the writer's creative process. They argued that this rather glamorous myth obscured the fact that writers don't *find* meaning, they *make* it (1980b:21). If writing involves waiting to discover some hidden store of insight and ideas in the writer's mind, or from some external source, then what is happening when a writer can find nothing to say? And how is it possible to teach writing? For them, 'The myth of discovery, as many of us see it in students, leads the poor writer to give up too soon, and the fluent writer to be satisfied with too little' (p. 22). Their approach was to look at writing as a problem-solving, cognitive activity, beginning with the act of finding or defining the problem to be solved – the idea of 'problem-finding' – or how writers represent the problem to themselves (p.22).

In this study, Flower & Hayes used thinking-aloud protocols with expert and novice writers – the experts were teachers of writing and rhetoric, and the novices college students having problems with coherence and organisation in their writing. They were

given the problem to 'write about your job for the readers of Seventeen Magazine, 13-14 year old girls' (p.23) and asked to compose out loud into a tape recorder. From these protocols they created a picture of the rhetorical problem writers were grappling with – the rhetorical situation and the writer's own goals. The first is the given of the writing situation: the set task and the audience; and the second are the goals the writer sets for him/herself. The main goals they observed were: affecting the *reader*, creating a *persona* or voice, building a *meaning*, and producing the formal *text*; which they noted, happily turned out to closely parallel the four terms of the communication triangle from communication theory: reader, writer, world, word (p.25). While these protocols represented what writers actually do when writing, they acknowledged that writers also call upon tacit knowledge of stored problem representations or schema, such as how to write a formal letter.

The protocols showed that while both expert and novice writers initially spent little time analysing the rhetorical problem before starting to generate ideas, both returned to it. The difference was that novice writers simply re-read the assignment, while the experts spent time re-examining the problem in light of their audience and how they wanted to affect them, including what 'voice' to project (p.27). How they built meaning differed from merely trying to express already-formed ideas from memory to consciously trying to form new concepts and restructure old knowledge from their long-term memory (p.28). The fourth goal of actually writing the text depended on their knowledge of written conventions and genres. Overall they found that good writers responded to all aspects of the rhetorical problem, but in particular, the problem of audience. They built a rich network of goals for affecting the reader and represented the problem in more depth and breadth. People only solve the problem they give themselves to solve, and they concluded that, 'good writers are simply solving a different problem than poor writers'

(p.30). They believed the significance of this study is what it revealed about the nature of 'creativity' that could have implications for both research and teaching – if creativity can be seen as a talent for 'problem-finding', then it is a cognitive 'thinking' skill that is eminently teachable (p.31).

In *A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing* (1981) Flower & Hayes outlined their cognitive process theory more fully. It rested on four key points: that the process of writing is a set of distinctive thinking processes that writers orchestrate or organise during the act of composing; these processes are hierarchical with many embedded sub-processes; composing is a goal-directed 'thinking' process guided by the writer's own growing network of goals; and writers create their own goals by generating both high-level goals and sub-goals to support them. These goals reflect the writer's developing sense of purpose and can at times, change a major goal or establish new ones (1981:366). But how a writer goes about this process depends on how they represent the rhetorical problem to themselves – as previously noted, novice and expert writers tend to do this in very different ways. From their think aloud protocol studies conducted over a five year period, they found that the act of writing involves three major elements: the task environment, the writer's long-term memory and the writing processes; and the latter involved three main processes: planning, translating and reviewing (p.369).

Their notion of planning was not just detailing how to get from A to B, but forming what they called, 'an internal representation of the knowledge to be used in the writing' (p.372). Planning involves retrieving and generating ideas from long-term memory, organising those ideas and setting goals. Translating is '…essentially putting ideas into visible language' (p.373). They chose the term 'translating' rather than *transcribing* or *writing* in an attempt to capture the complexity of the writer's task - to translate a particular meaning through their choice of key words - what Vygotsky called, words

"saturated with sense" (p.373). They noted that for inexperienced writers, and children struggling with their knowledge of spelling and grammar, this process can overwhelm their short-term memory capacity and their global ability to attend to planning and goals. Reviewing is a conscious process that can be systematic and planned, or spontaneous, in which the writer evaluates and revises what they have written; and this process can occur at any time during the act of writing.

The writer's task then, is to monitor these processes as they write by making decisions about how long to spend on any one process and when they will move from one to the next. This choice is determined both by the writer's goals and by their own writing habits, but it is this monitoring role that children find hard to orchestrate if they do not have control over the translating processes (p.374). These processes can be seen as a kind of writer's 'tool-kit' which the writer can use without feeling constrained to use them in any order or stage (p.376). For Flower & Hayes, a process model that is hierarchical with many embedded sub-processes and a monitor, or switching mechanism, for controlling these processes, was a powerful one because of the flexibility it afforded.

1.4.5 Writing as 'knowledge-telling' or 'knowledge transforming'

Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia also focused their research on the cognitive process model and the cognitive difficulties faced by writers in the writing process. In 1987 they published a book called *The Psychology of Written Composition* in which they proposed that development in writing moves from a knowledge-telling to a knowledge-transforming composing process. They contrasted the everyday naturally acquired ability to 'tell' about something in writing by simply linking ideas together, with the more studied ability to achieve more deliberate control, to shape a piece of writing to achieve intended

effects and to transform one's own knowledge in the process (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987:6). They pointed out that while children are often proficient users of oral language when they begin school, it usually takes some years before they can produce written language with anything like the proficiency they have in speech. Longitudinal studies by Loban (1976) had suggested that the catch-up point typically occurs around the age of twelve. The most obvious problem in generating written language for learners is the written code itself. But a less obvious one is how to generate the content of discourse, literally what they want to say. This is generally not a problem for children in oral discourse because conversational partners provide instant feedback and support. But in writing, making choices for an audience that is not immediately present is much more difficult – children tend to have problems thinking what to say, staying on topic and knowing how to organise their writing into a coherent whole (1987:7).

Bereiter and Scardamalia argued that when professional writers rework their thoughts they not only transform what they want to say in their writing and how they want to say it, but they also transform their knowledge. They consider whether the text they have written says what they want it to say and whether they themselves believe what the text says. In the work writers do to achieve both external and internal goals, and to feel fully satisfied with the integrity of their writing: 'Thus it is that writing can play a role in the development of their knowledge' (p.11).

For Bereiter and Scardamalia the two models overlap: knowledge-telling remains a function of the knowledge-transforming model, as not all writing is problematic; but the distinctive characteristics of the knowledge-transforming model lie in formulating and solving problems in ways that, '…allow a two-way interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing text' (p.12). Their research on the development of planning abilities using think aloud protocols found that between the

ages of 10 and 12 there is a doubling in the quantity of planning; that only 14 year olds responded to models of conceptual planning; and that adults showed a higher incidence of conceptual planning with or without models. These findings supported the proposition that what happens in writing development is the increasing differentiation of planning from text production - from thinking more directly of what to write - to conceptualising the issues at a metacognitive level (p.210).

If writing is a way of processing and developing knowledge, then developing a knowledge-transforming model of composing represents a major intellectual achievement for students (p.362). The problem for teachers is how to shift them from knowledge telling to knowledge transforming (p.359). For this to happen, the goals of instruction must change from making writing a 'meaningful experience' for students dependent on the teacher to provide a 'meaningful context' for writing (Graves, 1978) to promoting intentional cognition as well as intentional writing (Bereiter & Scardamalia p.360-361).

Bereiter and Scardamalia concluded that the educational implications are that students need to be made aware of the full extent of composing processes; that the thinking processes of writing must be modelled by the teacher; that acquiring higher levels of competence is a clear goal; that students need to pursue challenging goals (not what is easiest); and that simplified routines and procedural support be provided by the teacher, but that understandings of the nature and function of the process be shared by students (p.363). This notion that the act of writing can be a knowledge transforming process is congruent with Emig's (1977) contention that writing is a powerful mode of learning, and Vygotsky and Bruner's notion that language (both spoken and written) is a tool which mediates learning.

1.4.6 The sociocultural approach

The sociocultural approach was to some extent a response to perceived deficits in the cognitive process model, but it also grew out of developments in psychology and linguistics which focused on the social contexts of learning (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) and the dialogical nature of written text (Bakhtin, 1981). Sociocultural researchers challenged the notion that writing is a top-down process from individual thought to text, the notion of 'language after the ideational fact' (Nystrand, 1986) and the 'relatively decontextualised individual writer' (in Pressley & Juzwik, 2006:356) composing in isolation. Instead they wished to explore the cultural and dialogic contexts in which writing functions as a complex social transaction.

In his article, *Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal,* Lester Faigley (1986) argued that the problem with conceptions of writing as a process is that they vary so widely from theorist to theorist. The two main distinctions were: the 'expressive view' (Graves, 1978 and Murray, 1978) including proponents of 'authentic voice' such as Peter Elbow (1973) and writing as 'therapy' such as James Moffett (1982), and those who analysed composing processes such as Flower & Hayes, Barry Kroll and Andrea Lunsford (Faigley, 1986:528).

Faigley critiqued the Romantic 'expressive' definition of 'good' writing – that it has integrity, spontaneity, and originality – as precluding the notion of writing as an intentional, coherent and rhetorical act, and impossible to assess (p.530). Rather, it was a progressive and psychological one, often resulting in fragmentary and unfinished writing, a problem with the notion of 'organic spontaneity' which Elbow resolved through revision – which he viewed as, 'the shaping of unformed material' (p.531). In this view

writing is a means of self-expression including the development of individual genius – a romantic view that hardly fits the reality of most composing experiences.

The Flower & Hayes model introduced a cognitive theory of 'processing' to many writing teachers and spawned many strands of research into composing processes. Their claims - that composing processes 'intermingle', are directed by goals, and that experts compose differently to novice writers - have all become commonplace in the process movement (p.533). Less well understood was the debt this model owed to a new area of cognitive science, cybernetics and computer sciences, concerned with how humans solve problems - information processing systems (Newell & Simon, 1972) - the idea that thinking and language can be represented by computers. The Flower & Hayes model even looked like a computer flow chart with a '*feedback loop* in which the regulating mechanism receives information from the thing regulated and makes adjustments' (Faigley, 1986:533). While they made strong theoretical claims that assumed relatively simple cognitive operations could produce enormously complex actions (p.534), it did promote a 'science consciousness' among writing teachers and suited a popular notion that writing occurs after ideas are fully formed.

Faigley proposed a third perspective which was just beginning to emerge: that writing is social in character, not a solitary activity (p.534). In America, this third perspective came from researchers like Patricia Bizzell, Kenneth Bruffee, Marilyn Cooper and Shirley Brice Heath; and radical Marxist educationalists such as Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux. The latter's radical critique of education in America saw the splitting of composition from the study of literature as a sign of what they saw as the technicization of society, a movement towards an 'atheoretical' and 'skills-oriented' education (Faigley, 1986:537) which they thought must be resisted because it was an attack on critical thought and

would result in the eventual 'demoralisation of teachers and their alienation from work' (Giroux, 1983:52).

While Faigley thought this view a bit extreme, he felt that unlike other radical theorists, their claims were not pessimistically determinist and did not deny human agency – they saw the possibility that teachers and students can think critically in a historically aware pedagogy (p.528). For Giroux: 'Writing…, like other acts of literacy, is not universal but social in nature and cannot be removed from culture' (Giroux, 1983 in Faigley, 1986:534). Faigley claimed that in Giroux's view, the fault with the cognitive model was that: it collapsed cultural issues under the label of 'audience', it neglected the content of writing and downplayed the inherent conflicts in acts of writing (p.534).

The sociocultural model was based on the work of Lev Vygotsky, his student Luria, and contemporary, Mikhail Bakhtin, which was taken up by Jerome Bruner after he met Luria at a conference in Montreal in 1954 (Bruner, 1986:70). While many cognitive researchers have tended to lump Vygotsky with Piaget, his understanding of language was very different to Piaget's. Vygotsky studied language development in a historical and cultural context in which a child acquires not only the words of language, but the intentions they carry and the situations implied by them (Faigley, 1986:535). In his book, *Mind in Society* (1978), Vygotsky contended that, 'Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them' (p.88). In studies of mother/child interactions, Vygotsky and later, Bruner (1983), found that infants acquire language by sharing joint attention and action with care-givers, and the intention to communicate through interaction in social contexts. These social contexts are highly framed or formatted contexts in which children can convert communicative intention to communicative convention in speech (Bruner, 1983:58). Vygotsky (1978) proposed that '…speech and action are part of *one and the*

same complex psychological function directed at solving the problem in hand*'* (p.25); and that, 'Children solve practical tasks with the help of their speech, as well as their eyes and hands. This unity of perception, speech and action, which ultimately produces internalisation of the visual field, constitutes the central subject matter for any analysis of the origin of uniquely human forms of behaviour' (p.26). In other words, 'Language is a way of sorting out one's thoughts about things' (Bruner, 1986:72), a tool that permits us to get to higher ground mentally and for mediating learning (p.73).

A significant ethnographic study by Shirley Brice Heath (1983) confirmed Vygotsky and Bruner's theory of the social context of language acquisition and showed how the particular communicative style acquired could affect a child's chances of success in school. In her study of three closely located communities in the Piedmont Carolinas (Trackton, Roadville and the surrounding mainstream community), Heath's research showed how the children in each community were scaffolded in their language learning into the communicative and narrative styles within quite disparate discourses - a socialisation process that included their attitudes to, and preparation for, schooling. While the children achieved equivalent communicative proficiency within their home discourses prior to going to school, of the three communities only the mainstream children did well in school: 'The language socialisation habits of the three groups differ greatly, and only those of the mainstreamers seem to fit the expectations of the school and other mainstream institutions' (Heath, 1983:159).

A British longitudinal study by Gordon Wells (1986), the Bristol Study, followed children's language development from pre-school to 10 years of age. Wells also found that up to the age of five there were no statistically significant differences between middle and lower class children in their language development (1986:142). However this

changed when they went to school. For Wells this was not so much to do with class difference as with linguistic difference, the nature of which was knowledge of the significance of literacy (1986:146).The most striking finding of his study was the very strong relationship between knowledge of literacy at five, and at all other assessments of school achievements up to the age of ten - the initial test was strongly predictive of children's future academic success and correlated to differences in family backgrounds (1986:147).

In Britain, Bernstein (1971) and Halliday (1973) had already drawn attention to this relationship between sociocultural contexts and associated patterns of behaviour, including language use and participation in school (Christie, 1986:221). In Australia, Harris (1980) and Walker (1981) concluded that the 'cognitive styles' frequently adopted by Australian Aboriginal children were not congruent with the ways of working and patterns of discourse adopted by their white teachers (in Christie, 1986:222). Gray (1985a) had also described how children from various sociocultural environments come to school with differing degrees of skill in meeting the language demands which will be made on them in the classroom (p.2)

In their research on language learning in different cultural settings, husband and wife team, Ron and Suzanne Scollon (1981) compared the linguistic socialisation of their two year old daughter, Rachel, with that of the local Fort Chipewyan children in Alberta, Canada (p.58). In the course of their research, they came to see that what had seemed to them to be the very 'ordinary manner' by which they raised their daughter was actually quite 'remarkable' when compared with her Fort Chipewyan peers; and that this difference was her 'incipient literacy' (p.61). In her oral performance of stories she had 'written' they found that through her deliberate prosody of her 'stories' Rachel showed a

strong orientation to both 'the decontextualisation and high information levels required for literacy' (90); whereas the local Fort Chipewyan children had been socialised in a different way (p.91). Rachel's ability to 'fictionalise' herself in relation to the roles of author, audience and self in oral story-telling was the kind of literate orientation that is required for the sort of 'essayist literacy' that Olsen (1977) had already argued is both the medium and goal of Western schooling (Scollon & Scollon 1981:61). The Scollons claimed that while Rachel couldn't yet read, she had already developed most of the understandings she would need to become literate – a great advantage over her Fort Chipewyan peers who had not been socialised into this kind of orientation to literacy.

1.4.6.1 The functional model: genre theory

Rachel Scollon's prosody in an oral 'reading' of her biographical stories demonstrated an intuitive understanding of the differences in how grammar functions between the spoken and written modes. Michael Halliday (1973) had already pointed out that children learn language and its uses simultaneously in social contexts. Halliday and his followers (known as the London School of Linguistics) challenged the notion of investigating language in isolation, claiming that our understanding of meaning in text is dependent on the 'context of situation' (Couture, 1986a:1), a concept originally proposed by Malinowski (1923, 1949) and later expanded by Firth (1935) to refer to 'the entire cultural environment encompassing a communication event' (in Couture, 1986a:1). Halliday went further to claim that 'language itself is as central to meaning as the social activity it represents' (p.1), that language is what he termed a *social semiotic* (Halliday, 1978): 'As we learn how to mean we learn to predict each [language and context] from the other' (Halliday, 1978:3). In other words language not only makes meaning, it creates meaning in interaction with others. Couture claimed that this notion of language as *social semiotic* has dramatic consequences for scholarly investigations into written

discourse (1986a:1). These must include an adequate language theory that goes beyond lexical and syntactic components of formal linguistic systems to include semiotics; a theory that provides evidence of texts that work in real-world communication contexts; and a 'functional' theory of language that unites speakers, listeners and situations to show how language users generate and interpret texts in various social situations and seeks the sources of 'socio-semantic congruence' (p.2).

In 1976, Michael Halliday moved to Australia to open the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney, and Frances Christie and Joan Rothery were among his first students in the new MA program (Christie & Martin, 2000:1). In 1977, Jim Martin arrived to complete his doctoral thesis under Halliday's supervision and stayed on as a tutor from 1978. Over the next few years, Martin and Rothery (1980, 1981) commenced a study of writing in the primary school which resulted in early descriptions of written genres; and both Christie and Rothery worked on the development of genre theory and register theory in their doctoral theses under Martin's supervision. Over time, this group became known as the Sydney School of Linguistics. Halliday later published his seminal work on systemic linguistics, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985).

In a book edited by Barbara Couture, *Functional approaches to Writing* (1986b), Christie published a paper entitled, 'Writing in Schools: generic structures as ways of meaning' (1986), in which she examined the relationship between language and learning, and the linguistic structures though which meanings in writing are made. Christie noted that even though the evidence of the relationship between patterns of discourse and ways of learning in schools was strong (as previously noted) many teachers still work in a manner which effectively denied this relationship (p.222). Thus when children fail to develop the understandings and capacities that education is intended to provide, their

failure is often rationalised as due to 'little motivation', 'poor cognitive abilities', that they 'lack concentration' or have 'limited intelligence' (p.222). Such judgements are not very productive as they tend to preclude any corrective action and imply that schools can do little for them. But as Christie pointed out, children learn the skills that schools value and the language used to teach them. Therefore, teachers must design programs which provide all children with access to the various discourses required to succeed in school. The fact that teachers typically don't see it in these terms is understandable since they share the attitudes of the wider community: seeing students' mental abilities as separate to the patterns of language through which these are expressed. For Christie, teachers need to become more sensitive to the 'significance of school language and the discourse patterns which students must learn to interpret and produce in order to succeed in school' (p.222).

In looking at the general aims of schooling in Western education, including the Australian curriculum documents of the time, Christie found that (despite some cultural differences between English-speaking countries) there were many commonalities between language arts programs in primary schools and English studies in secondary schools in the skills, abilities and attitudes they aimed to develop. She characterised these as: 'confidence and independence in expression of personal opinion as well as the abilities to communicate ideas clearly, to listen critically to others, to exercise discriminating judgements about literature and other media, and to write in a variety of ways, including creating original literary pieces' (p.223).

These skills of reasoning, arguing, valuing and investigating were frequently talked about as if they were separate entities to the behavioural forms or patterns in which they are expressed (p.223). She felt this was because the relationship between language

and learning is in a sense, largely 'invisible' (p.224). So, in choosing what to teach, teachers tended to focus on 'content', 'knowledge' or 'ideas', all conceived as existing independently of language use (p.224). But for Christie, these really refer to complex sets of understandings, and ways of investigating these, which are realised in distinctive patterns of discourse: 'When teachers and students speak or write in school, they are constructing meanings about human experience and endeavour that educational systems ascribe to the CONTENT AREAS' (p.224).

Through his studies of first language learning, Halliday (1975) had already suggested that learning to speak is a process of learning how to 'mean'. That is, children learn their mother tongue through a process of negotiating and building relationships, understandings, attitudes and points of view; and these constitute the various kinds of content expressed in language (Christie, 1986:224). Whether these are spoken or written, the nature of a text will vary according to the kind of content involved. For Christie, the implications for education are significant:

- *Students in the process of learning content must manipulate different ways of constructing and organising meaning in texts.*
- *Teachers must recognise the linguistic demands associated with the content areas of schooling, so that they may guide students more usefully in their learning* (p.224).

In other words, learning in different subject areas involves learning to distinguish different generic structures associated with each field.

For Christie, methods of teaching writing up until then had not been very helpful to students. Language arts courses emphasising self-expression and creativity failed to acknowledge how people become creative: by manipulating and experimenting with

significant linguistic structures and genres. On the other hand, writing in other subjects such as science and social studies, tended to focus on teaching content while largely ignoring language, subscribing to a belief in the independence of form and content: yet, meaning or content is actually realised in language (p.225). As she pointed out, 'Students who struggle to make sense of content in writing are actually struggling to develop the language necessary to achieve an appropriate mastery of it' (p.225). In analysing various types of student writing (a narrative, a scientific essay and a literary character-study) Christie attempted to demonstrate how a functional analysis of generic structure is useful for identifying what a child knows about writing and for guiding their future writing development. While acknowledging it is often difficult to identify precisely which linguistic features of a text account for certain effects on a reader and their appreciation of it, it is possible to identify features that establish genre (p.228). If teachers understand the nature of these structures themselves, they are in a position to teach students how they work.

For Christie then, in learning to write, children are engaged in learning to construct meanings (p.239). They must learn that, like oral texts, written texts use different linguistic structures to convey different experiences, information and ideas; and that access to various fields of school knowledge relies on learning these socially constructed and valued ways of meaning: 'These ways of meaning find expression most powerfully in the patterns of discourse that successful school participation demands' (p.239). Christie argued that failure in schooling is effectively '…an inability to handle the language structures necessary to make such mastery possible' (p.239).

In the same volume as the Christie article, Martin and Rothery (1986) discussed 'What a functional approach to writing can show teachers about 'good writing''. They supported

Christie's view of treating writing as a social semiotic, a way to mean; and the significance of genre structure for teaching children to write, as well as a 'functional' approach to analysing their writing as a means of supporting their writing development. They had already identified genre structures in children's writing in the *Writing Project Report* (1980, 1981) and had in particular, defined the schematic structure of the narrative genre (orientation/ complication/ resolution/ coda), the genre so favoured and valued by teachers in the early primary years. They believed this focus reflects cultural ideas of what makes a good writer: 'someone who is creative and imaginative and can tell a good story' (p.254). Therefore, if 'good' writing is creative and original, and narrative writing encourages creativity and originality, then the logic goes: good writing is narrative writing.

From their research, Martin & Rothery found that for the majority of children in the early years their preferred genres were the 'observation/comment' and 'recount' genres, with some individuals preferring report writing. Yet teachers consistently valued narrative writing above all other genres, even when this was not explicitly called for (p.248). They found that while teachers do stress differences in speech and writing, they rarely make it clear to children which genre they should use in a given writing situation (p.247). For Martin & Rothery, the biggest difference between speech and writing children have to learn is the way writing differs with respect to field (p.244). For every child their experience of spoken language has involved personal experience. Some of the topics teachers set do try to relate to students' personal experience - topics like 'pets' or excursions - or they try to provide content and experiences through class themes such as 'dinosaurs'. But this directly conflicts with their hopes for creative and original writing; and has the effect of rewarding children who have broader social and reading experiences to draw on in their writing (p.245).

For Martin & Rothery, the conflicting constraints between the desire for creativity and originality, and the way teachers get children to write, can cause functional problems for many young writers who often resolve this conflict by dropping other genres and creating a new narrative genre out of recounts, as a means of pleasing the teacher (p.248). They reported that of the hundreds of texts they examined in their research, the vast majority fell on this 'recount through narrative' continuum (p.254). But they believed that this phenomenon was a reflection of teachers' tastes, rather than children's abilities. Despite the evidence that young children seem to have no problem attempting report writing and often do so voluntarily, Martin & Rothery found that many teachers seemed to believe that expository writing is too abstract and difficult for them, based on the notion of formal operations and the supposed limitations on their cognitive development, even though research into language development had not shown any such effects (pp.253-4). They believed that teacher bias towards narrative reflected their low 'generic consciousness' and that '…many are simply unaware of this prejudice' (p.248).

In this paper, Martin & Rothery proposed a new approach to teaching writing: a model which would allow teachers to look at how students learn to write in much the same way as we view how children learn to speak, in terms of how language works to effect social interaction (p.242). They argued that the pedagogical method which would most assist a 'functional' approach to writing was a process approach. They agreed with Graves that the complexity of learning to write could be reduced for struggling writers trying to make meaning in their writing, if they are allowed to 'invent' their spelling, citing Graves' research which showed that children write more confidently and produce longer texts if they are allowed to keep the meaning flowing (p.242).

Teachers who emphasise the mechanics of writing more are often concerned that invented spelling and poor punctuation can become habits that are hard to break. But they argued that this isn't what happens when children first learn to talk. Young children often create sounds and ways of saying things that differ greatly from adult speech, yet adults rarely correct their grammar. Parents concentrate instead on their meaning, and over time, children adjust their patterns of speech to match those of adult native speakers in their culture. They argued that there is no reason for teachers to believe that early spelling and grammatical errors in writing will become any more 'ingrained' than 'baby talk' (p.242); and that teachers can learn a lesson from this, that, 'Young writers, like young speakers, need this kind of response if they are to develop skills naturally. If teachers respond to the meaning of what children write, their pupils should quickly see the purpose of developing spelling and punctuation skills' (p.242). They suggested that teachers use the writing conference to teach students about how texts work and that drafts should be treated as such, with children encouraged to rework their texts. While guiding students, each student's autonomy and attempts to 'mean' should be protected and overall, the process of writing made more like the process of speaking by breaking down the isolation of writing through interaction with their teacher and peers (p.261).

So, rather than teachers following 'intuitive' feelings of what constitutes 'good' writing, Martin & Rothery suggested that they can use knowledge of the functions of language to evaluate students' writing (p.260). They can help young writers to learn to distinguish the genres they are writing in and the kind of language used to realise different genres. The problem was that teachers' professional training up to this point had not included genre recognition and few thought about language in this way – they tended to think of language usage as they had been taught themselves. Martin & Rothery believed this approach to be inadequate, and suggested (like Christie) that an uninformed teacher

might assume that poor writers have cognitive or other learning problems, when they have simply not mastered a genre which is highly valued in education (p.260). If this critical factor could be overcome, they believed that teachers can play a key role in children's writing development by teaching them how language works. They can help organise students' writing processes, evaluate their writing and note progress in genre development, and actively TEACH writing by intervening constructively in the writing conference to help the child develop their meaning and to create a better piece of writing (p.262).

1.4.6.2 The notion of 'scaffolding'

As a leading cognitive psychologist who greatly influenced educational theory during this period, Jerome Bruner (1986) came to re-evaluate his earlier view of the lone child mastering the world on his own (constructivism) to research what actually happens in a tutoring situation when one possesses the knowledge and attempts to pass it on to the other (p.75). Bruner described his research with Gail Ross and David Wood at Harvard University based on Vygotsky's theory that all 'good' learning occurs ahead of development through social interaction, in a learning space he described as the now famous 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD1978:86) in which the more competent assist the young and less competent to reach 'higher ground'.

In the role of the tutor, Dr Ross became 'consciousness for two' in problem-solving situations with three and five year olds. Bruner described the process in the following way: in the beginning she controlled the focus of attention and demonstrated that the task was possible through a slow and dramatised presentation; she had 'the monopoly on foresight' (p.75); she kept the segments of the task at a size and complexity appropriate to the child's powers; and set things up in a way that the child could

recognise the solution even though they could neither do it alone or perform it later by just being 'told' about it. In other words, she made the most of the 'zone' between what someone can recognise and comprehend and what they can generate or produce on their own (p.76).

Bruner coined the metaphor of 'scaffolding' to describe this process of providing 'vicarious consciousness' for others which he made clear is not a 'simple act of will' but rather a 'negotiated transaction' (p.76). This theory of scaffolding has permeated teachers' consciousness in both child-centred (Piagetian), progressivist pedagogy such as process writing, and sociocultural (Vygotskian) approaches such as genre theory, although there have been many interpretations of this concept in practice.

1.5 The 1990s: The great literacy debates and the National Literacy Benchmarks

The impact of Graves' work was highly significant in the way teachers conceptualised writing as a 'process' and this approach has become very much part of mainstream writing teaching. Process writing effectively restructured classrooms to allow for a workshop environment which shifted the focus from teacher to students (Williams, 1998:79). While progressivist literacy approaches gained broad acceptance, they were never universal in all schools across Australia and whole language teachers used a range of strategies. Some waited for skills to emerge, while others took advantage of teaching opportunities as they arose by providing mini-lessons and further instructional activities (Pearson, 2004 in Snyder, 2008:52). An influential model for teachers to use in observing and recording children's writing development was the 'Writing Development Continuum' (1994) produced in Western Australia as part of the First Steps Program (in Green, Campbell, & Rivalland, 1999:147). This continuum identified six phases of writing

development which is still used in many schools for assessing writing up to the present day (pp.147-150).

In the late 80s and early 90s, some concerns about progressivist approaches to teaching writing began to emerge. In their book, *Coping with Chaos* (1987), Cambourne and Turbill attempted to answer critics who saw process writing classrooms as unstructured and chaotic. Using descriptions of classrooms they had previously studied in 1982 (p.5), they claimed that if the conditions for learning were present, these classrooms were not as chaotic as they appeared (p.66). The conditions they cited were: immersion in print, teacher demonstrations of how language and print work, responsibility on the part of the learner for making their own decisions about their writing, teacher expectations that children will learn, allowing approximations (encouraging children to have a go, e.g. invented spelling), providing time for practice, and responding to children's writing by providing feedback (pp.66-70).

Cambourne and Turbill claimed that these conditions for learning 'coerce' young learners to develop their own 'coping' strategies for learning to write; and that learning to write is as 'natural' as learning to speak (p.66). They concluded that teachers must be aware of these coping strategies and why children use them; they need to understand the nature of language and how reading, writing, talking and listening are interrelated; and they need to encourage cooperative, rather than competitive learning in scaffolded learning situations (p.70). In response to concerns about some students' disruptive behaviour, 'cooperative learning' became popular as a means of helping children to take responsibility for particular roles in small group work and peer conferences (see for example Cree & Donaldson, 1996).

But there was a cry that children were not being taught spelling - that 'invented' spelling was leading to a nation of illiterates (P. Harris, McKenzie, Fitzsimmons, & Turbill, 2003:29). There was widespread concern that writing was becoming too personal and there was a need for students to be taught the 'genres' of power, those highly valued in schooling, as Christie and Martin & Rothery had identified. Particular genre structures identified for instruction were: narratives, recounts, procedural texts, informing reports, arguments and discussions (P. Harris et al., 2003:31). This approach provided explicit instruction in writing using these structures through a process of modelled construction, joint construction and independent writing (p.30-31). The 'genre' approach began to gain credibility from the late 80s onwards and direct teaching of genre structures began to be incorporated into mainstream teaching of writing and into state and territory curricula (Macken et al., 1989).

A genre approach also began to be seen as the answer for teaching students who had previously been disadvantaged in the school system, such as Indigenous students and those with English as a second language. In the early 90s, Martin was funded by the New South Wales (NSW) Disadvantaged Schools Program and the NSW Education and Training Foundation to complete a major research project on genres, the 'Write it Right' Project, from 19991-94 (Christie & Martin, 1997:1). In this project, Martin led a team of linguists (including Rothery) in an attempt to examine the written genres of a range of key learning areas of secondary education (English, history, science, mathematics and geography) and to consider their relationship to written genres in particular work situations such as the media, the science industry and administration. Many, but not all, of the participants in this project later contributed chapters to a book edited by Christie and Martin, *Genre and Institutions: Social Processes in the Workplace and School*

(1997), in which the authors claimed that Halliday's functional grammar still remained a critical tool in genre analysis and research.

For a brief period in the 90s functional grammar was included in the NSW English curriculum, but was quickly removed, a symptom of the genre versus process writing debate which began to be heard in the so-called 'literacy wars' of the 90s (Snyder, 2008:29). Despite this, the approach has greatly influenced many teachers and the instructional genres listed above still appear in Syllabus documents today.

1.5.1 The 'Four Reader Role Model'

In an attempt to diffuse the 'great debate' in Australia, Allan Luke and Peter Freebody (Luke, 1992; Luke & Freebody, 1997) attempted to provide what they saw as an acceptable and inclusive framework for discussions of literacy education and for teaching literacy (in Freebody, 2007:35). This was their 'Four Roles of the Reader' model which outlined a model of reading as social practice including the following four roles: code- breaker, text-participant, text-user and text-analyst (p.34). With this model Luke & Freebody aimed to provide a framework for critical literacy that took into account the social context of writing, both culturally and in schools. They attempted to bring together a focus on the meaning and structure of written language (text participant) with explicit teaching of phonics and decoding (code-breaker), and included sociocultural understandings of various discourses and genres (text-user) and how texts position and influence readers (text-analyst). This model has largely become incorporated into mainstream literacy teaching practice in Australia today.

The concerns raised in this debate reflected the 'whole language versus phonics' debate in the United States revived by Jean Chall (1996) through the publication of a third

edition of her book, *Learning to Read: the great debate* (previously published in 1967 and 1983). She called for a return to explicit teaching of the alphabet and phonics as the best method of teaching children to read. This was supported by more recent research by Marilyn Adams (1990) which drew the same conclusion. In Australia there was widespread community concern with what was perceived to be falling standards in literacy and numeracy. Parents and community leaders were concerned about *minimum* standards in literacy and numeracy in schools, there was a desire for conformity across Australia and for access for parents and educators to national data about literacy and numeracy standards. This resulted in the development of the National Literacy Benchmarks.

1.5.2 The establishment of National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks

In March 1997, a new National Goal was agreed to by Education Ministers across Australia: *That every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level* with an ambitious sub-goal that *every child commencing school in 1998 would achieve a minimum standard within four years* (DEEWR, 2008). To support this goal, Education Ministers endorsed a *National Literacy and Numeracy Plan* which called for immediate actions such as comprehensive assessment of all students, identification of students at risk of not making adequate progress, early intervention for 'at risk' students and the development of national benchmarks for assessing students. Annual assessment of students against nationally developed benchmarks was recommended with national reporting of student achievement against the benchmarks and professional development provided for teachers to support the key elements of the National Plan (CC, 2008).

This resulted in the establishment of the National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks in 1999. Overseen by a taskforce of government and non-government nominees, the Curriculum Corporation (CC) developed the benchmarks: a set of descriptors which represented nationally agreed minimum standards for literacy (and numeracy) for students at Year 3, 5 and 7 levels. The level of the benchmark standards has undergone several drafts since 1999 based on broad community consultation (CC, 2008).

The development of national benchmarks represented a historic moment in public education in Australia. For the first time, national standards were recognised and statistics made available annually to the community about how well students have achieved the benchmarks. As a set of national standards, the literacy benchmarks embody a broad set of beliefs about what it means to be literate and numerate, and how to assess student outcomes at particular points in time. While the Benchmarks have provided a national standard and data sets of student outcomes, they relate to 'minimum' standards only and as such, have not satisfied the continued debate about perceptions of falling standards in literacy.

1.6 The 2000s: A 'balanced' approach

This decade has seen broad acceptance of the Luke & Freebody model as a framework for literacy teaching and calls for a more 'balanced' approach to teaching reading and writing which include explicit teaching of phonics and grammar (see for example Pressley, 2006). While grammar was not explicitly taught for over 20 years in Australian schools, it generally is now through the influence of the genre approach and Halliday's functional grammar, and the efforts of particular teacher/linguists such as Beverley Derewianka (1998).

According to Freebody (2007), research studies on writing in the late 90s and 2000s have made it clear that reading has been 'at the eye of the storm' in most national reviews and debates about literacy (p.52). The relationship between phonological awareness and writing was investigated with Spanish speaking kindergarten students by Vernon and Ferreiro (1999) who argued that writing development was a critical but neglected variable in considerations of grapheme-phoneme correspondence. They found that the way students dealt with oral segmentation tasks strongly correlated with their conceptualisation of the writing system and while phonological abilities can be trained in oral contexts, development of phonological awareness is closely linked to young children's writing development to an extent not formerly recognised in reading research (Freebody, 2007:52). For Freebody, this is proof that once again, researchers have recognised that the acquisition of the codes of written language need to incorporate the wider linguistic, cognitive and social contexts in which these codes are actually practiced. This was confirmed in a later study (Vernon, Calderon, & Castro, 2004) in which the authors concluded that the relationship between writing development and phonological awareness suggests that 'writing influences the way we think about language, as Olson (1994) has proposed' (p.116).

Much research this decade has focused on the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which have permeated educational settings and brought with them high expectations of more sophisticated and efficient ways of learning. Freebody (p.53) cites two large meta-analyses of the research: the first investigated the efficacy of ICT in supporting beginning readers by Blok, Oostdam and Overmaat (2002); and the second by Kuiper, Volman and Terwel (2005) looked at the effects on learning of students' use of the web as an information resource. The former showed a small but reliable effect on students' beginning reading abilities but the research was small; while the latter analysis

concluded that students often have difficulty locating information, they rarely look at the reliability or authority of the information found, and they do not possess the skills to decipher or analyse the information they found (Freebody, 2007:53). Freebody argues that increased use of the internet and the amount of information available to students today is rapidly making questions about the need for 'critical literacy' irrelevant – he believes it is an essential part of what it means to be literate.

1.6.1 How assessment of student writing can inform writing teaching

In their literature review for a study of writing in the middle years, Judith Rivalland and Ben Wooller (2006) noted that the last two decades have seen an increasing interest in how assessment of student writing can be used to improve the learning of writing (p. 20). Formative assessment in particular has been seen as a means of providing feedback and improving student writing. Black & William (in Sadler, 1998) found that 'formative assessment is effective in virtually all settings: content areas, knowledge and skill types, and levels of education' (p.77); and that it provides 'a general theory of feedback and formative assessment in complex learning settings' (Morgan & Wyatt-Smith, 2000:129).

Rivalland & Wooller (2006) reported on a case study of the way teachers judge student writing by Wyatt-Smith and Castleton (2005). In their case study they wrote that while relatively little is known about how teachers make specific judgements of student achievement in writing in specific contexts, the nature of teacher judgement and accountability are now considered to be very important matters (p.132). They also made the point that while setting writing standards is an essentially public act of policy-making (e.g. the national writing benchmarks), teacher judgement is by nature an essentially private act. Their case study demonstrated that teachers actively incorporate other

knowledge such as children's past performance and observations of children's progress over time when assessing children's writing (in Rivalland & Wooller, 2006:21).

Rivalland and Wooller (2006) note that what we know little about is how teachers use assessments of students' writing to inform their teaching – 'to actively teach children the technical skills and knowledge needed to improve their writing in different contexts' (p.21) – the main focus of their study. They asked four teachers from Years 3, 5 and 7 classes in schools which had a partnership with their university to participate in a pilot project. After they had collected their data they asked the teachers to participate in a one-day professional development session in which they used the data collected to discuss issues that arose for them when teaching writing using Scott Paris's (2006) notion of *constrained* (spelling and grammatical conventions) and *unconstrained* skills (knowledge of genre, top-level structures, cohesion, vocabulary and the capacity to manipulate grammar skills to create meanings - in Rivalland & Wooller, 2006:21) to inform their discussion.

They concluded that the greatest struggle teachers have is in teaching constrained skills and the grammatical aspects of genre, top-level structures and shaping meaning for different texts; and that teachers need more training in these areas (p.24). Rivalland & Wooller concluded that if we are to successfully support weaker writers to achieve secondary level competence in writing, we need 'highly knowledgeable teachers who are able to deconstruct texts and have a good knowledge of how grammar constructs and shapes meanings, in order to show students how writers use their knowledge and technical skills' (p.27); and that they need support to teach the constrained skills (spelling, grammar and punctuation) at key learning points to enable them to get on with teaching the unconstrained skills of writing.

Another way to look at contemporary teacher practice in teaching and assessing writing is through the lens of the current National Benchmarks for writing (CC, 2008) and the writing samples provided. Firstly, these exemplify a broad belief that the assessment of writing should be based on students' actual writing, not on other tests such as cloze activities or grammar exercises, as was common in the past. Secondly, they demonstrate an underpinning belief that learning to write is a developmental process that becomes more differentiated with age and maturity (Piaget, Britton): the standard expected gradually becomes more complex from Year 3 to Year 7 and there is a progression from writing simple recounts and stories based on personal experience in Year 3, to composing more complex narratives and simple factual texts in Year 5, to being able to structure texts more purposefully using a variety of text-types by Year 7. Thirdly, that writing is a process: drafting techniques such as planning before writing and reviewing or editing afterwards, are also expected to develop with age and experience (Murray, Graves, Hayes & Flower, Cambourne & Turbill). At all levels there is an emphasis on the mechanics of grammar, punctuation and readability (handwriting and spelling), but students' ability to control these are expected to increase with age, as well as the ability to organise their writing as they gain more control at the higher level. And lastly, that writing for a particular audience and purpose is valued, and that students can achieve purposeful writing through an understanding of the purpose of a variety of text types or genres (Halliday, Christie, Martin & Rothery).

Teacher assessments of student writing samples also demonstrate the influence of systemic functional grammar (Halliday, 1985) and genre theory on writing teaching. These focus on how well students use register, achieve cohesion, and use appropriate lexical and language choices for the particular genre concerned. For example, one teacher commented that a weakness in a Year 7 student's argument was that his use of

register was more spoken-like than written, i.e. not appropriate for the genre (Donnelly, 2005). Teachers also looked for how well students expressed a point of view in their writing, particularly in opinion pieces or arguments, and for the development of their writer's 'voice'. This notion of 'voice' relates to the concept of 'audience' – the reader as the intended audience of the text - and the author as the 'voice' expressed through the writing.

1.6.2. Conclusion

Since the behaviourist methods of the 1950s and 60s, there have been several shifts in thinking about how children become literate and various approaches to teaching and assessing writing. In the late 1970s and early 80s, the whole language and process writing approaches to teaching reading and writing revolutionised literacy teaching in Australian schools. This change can be viewed as a major experiment which set the stage in the 90s for a debate that still resonates today about perceptions of falling literacy standards, traditional versus progressivist pedagogies, and the place of basic skills in the teaching of reading and writing. While process approaches to writing have largely been incorporated into mainstream literacy teaching, genre theory and functional grammar have also been highly influential and have largely been incorporated into state and territory curricula.

Despite the introduction of the literacy benchmarks in the 90s, the so-called 'great debate' has continued in Australia, reinvigorated by the release of the *Benchmarking Australian Primary School Curricula Report* (Donnelly, 2005), which recommended that '…*less emphasis be placed on critical literacy and greater emphasis on a cultural literacy and model of litera*ture' and *'…less emphasis be placed on the whole language approach and greater emphasis on phonics'*, and the recent publication of Alana

Snyder's book, 'The Literacy Wars' (2008). The introduction of a national literacy and numeracy test this year is a symptom of this unrest along with calls for a national curriculum.

In the preliminary report of the *National Report on Schooling in Australia in 2007* (MCEETYA, 2007, http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/anr2007/) the latest literacy outcomes for students across Australia in the 2007 state and territory-wide testing show that an average of 91% of all students in Years 3, 5 and 7 achieved the national benchmarks in reading and 93% achieved the writing benchmarks. At first glance this might be interpreted as a highly positive outcome, but almost 10% did not achieve them; and when the data is aggregated into non-Indigenous and Indigenous students, this reveals that Indigenous students lag well behind their mainstream peers. The data shows that only 74% of all Indigenous students achieved the benchmarks in reading and 76% the writing benchmarks; and in remote and very remote locations, only 57% of remote and 37% of very remote students achieved the benchmarks for reading, and 61% of remote and just under 40% of very remote students achieved them in writing. This means that one out of every two Indigenous students living in remote communities failed to reach the minimum literacy standards.

This represents an unacceptably high illiteracy rate, not only for Indigenous students, but for the Australian community and economy as a whole. It demonstrates that for many students, current methods of teaching literacy are not working, effectively marginalising them from completing their education and from the workforce. Given that Indigenous people want and desire a good education (see for example Nakata, 1999), and that poor literacy skills are known to be a major cause of poverty in Indigenous communities, this is not good enough in 21st century Australia.

2. A way forward: An apprenticeship model

Introduction

In this section, it is argued that a way forward in the teaching of writing can be found in the notion of Vygotsky's social learning theory; and that this is ideally suited to an apprenticeship model of learning. If literacy is the goal of schooling (Tharpe & Gallimore, 1991), and writing is a powerful mode of learning (Emig, 1977), then learning to write effectively can potentially transform students' cognitive development and in time, their lives. It is about empowerment.

In this view, a major contention is that the missing link from previous models of literacy teaching is the notion of discourse (see for example Gee, 1991; Gray, 2007) and how discourse understandings might be scaffolded in writing classrooms using effective texts as models. To support this idea, Bruner's argument (1991) that, as we construct our 'reality' through narrative, narrative is therefore a powerful genre for teaching novice readers and writers about how written language works, will be explored; and that narrative can act as a bridge for students struggling with literacy into more abstract, factual texts. Smith's notion that learning to write involves learning 'to read like a writer' (1982) is relevant to this model, but it is perhaps equally, if not more important, to learn *to write like a reader*.

It is also proposed that Bakhtin's notion of 'voice' and the 'dialogic' nature of texts, whether spoken or written, are central to explorations into how authors set up a dialogue with the reader and how students might learn to do this in their own writing to write for 'effect'. It also demonstrates the importance of 'dialogue' in the classroom for guiding student instruction in writing, i.e. how teachers can construct dialogues around written texts in order to scaffold student writing. Woven through this argument will be Wertsch's

notion of scaffolding as 'mediated action' (1988), and language and pedagogy as cultural 'tools' for negotiating learning; and how a teacher can create shared goals and intersubjectivity with their students to support them in their writing endeavours.

2.1 The process approach to 'apprenticeship' and why it hasn't worked

The metaphor of writing as a craft and children as 'apprenticed' learners is not new – both Graves and Smith have used these terms. However, the whole language/process writing approaches they support are based on Piaget's notion of learning by invention – that, given time and encouragement to write, children can 'discover' much about writing. From the mid to late 80s, they, and other proponents of these approaches, tried to incorporate elements of social learning theory, such as the notion of scaffolding and genre, into this developmental approach through the writing conference. Peer and teacher conferences have been seen as a way of making children aware that writing is a social process and used to 'scaffold' students' writing.

The trouble with this approach is that it was assumed that all teachers are expert writers with specific knowledge of grammar and the structure of written genres which as Martin (1986) pointed out, is not always true; and teachers have found it hard to find the time to conference effectively with all children in their class (Rivalland & Wooller, 2006:20). Proponents of this approach have also strongly held to the belief that children can lead the way in learning about written language in school. In this view, children are seen as expert language learners based on the notion that learning to write is as 'natural' as learning to speak. Because young children appear to learn spoken language relatively easily, some researchers have concluded that they must have an innate ability to learn language (Chomsky, 1957; Pinker, 1995). But Vygotsky and Bruner have both shown

that learning about written language is of quite a different order conceptually to learning to speak (I will return to this later).

Within this approach, there has also been an assumption that children come to school with prior knowledge of literacy. As Heath (1983) demonstrated, this is not the case. Those children who succeed in school tend to do so because their language backgrounds and early literacy experiences are congruent with that of the school. In other words, they are already prepared for the kinds of literate discourses they will encounter when they enter formal schooling. Despite attempts to incorporate elements of social learning theory (scaffolding and genre theory) into a process approach, this has been problematic because the learning theories that underpin these are essentially incompatible - the idea of the lone child acting on the world to construct their own learning versus the notion that all learning is social in nature - and these attempts have not contained a theory of 'discourse'.

2.2 Another view of an apprenticeship model

The apprenticeship model proposed here is one which closely follows Vygotsky's theory of learning in which children are apprenticed as members of the academic and literate discourses of schooling (Gray, 2007). This notion goes beyond teaching about the schematic structures of genre which many teachers have enthusiastically taken up from genre theory (Thwaite, 2006). While structure is an important element, the focus needs to be on the social functions of the genres and the language features as well, and on building students' resources for effective writing. Just as significant adults and children negotiate understandings of concepts, and the words to share them, through social interaction in 'naturally' occurring situations in the pre-school years (usually without any formal instruction, as Vygotsky, Bruner, Heath, Wells and others have shown), it is

through participation in the academic discourses of schooling that children learn the social purposes, intentionalities and practice of literacy in our society.

In her book, *The Cultural Nature of Human Development (*2003*)*, Rogoff describes this as 'guided participation' (p.284), a notion which is central to her proposal that learning is a process of changing participation in community activities, a process that involves taking on new roles and responsibilities. In her studies of parent/child interactions in a broad range of communities and cultures, Rogoff found that guided participation appears to be universal across cultures; and that narratives, routines and play are widespread cultural practices which have great significance for learning (p.285). Rogoff notes that: 'Communication and coordination during participation in shared endeavours are key aspects of how people develop. Participants adjust among themselves (with varying, complementary, or even conflicting roles) to stretch their common understanding to fit new perspectives' (p.285). From this perspective, 'development occurs in *participation* in shared sociocultural activities' and 'children play actively central roles… in learning and extending the ways of their communities' (p.285).

A crucial aspect of guided participation in an apprenticeship model of learning is *goal awareness* – how the learning context can be organised in such a way as to maximise an awareness of the goal or end-product (Gray, 2007:18). Rogoff provides an example of this in the 'curriculum' of apprenticeship for Vai (Liberian) tailors, as they learn their craft: 'Conventional learning steps are reversed as apprentices begin by learning the finishing stages of producing a garment, go on to learn to sew it, and only later to cut it out' (p.90). The order of these steps allows apprentice tailors to develop an awareness of the correct end-product at the highest end of the process first and to shape and monitor their performance down through the sequence towards cutting out a new

garment. As they progress through this sequence, the focus on the logic of how different pieces are attached helps them to understand the pattern for cutting the pieces: "Each step offers the unstated opportunity to consider how the previous step contributes to the present one" (Lave, 1988b, p.4 in Rogoff, p.291).

In discussing this same example, Gray (2007) suggests that, 'This awareness of the goal or end-product expectations increases the potential for the attempts of the students to be more closely aligned to the expectations and orientations (intentionalities) held by the teacher' (p.18). This process is potentially transformative. As they work through it, the tasks and activities allow the apprentice to let go of previously held ideas and to transform their thinking - this is the notion of transformational learning (p.18). As Gray points out, while the expectations and intentionalities of tailoring are highly visible in this example of a physical process, the intentionalities and orientations of literate discourse, and the often tacit understandings implicit in them, can be largely invisible to the novice reader and writer (p.18). The literacy teacher's job then, is to make these visible for students in the way they teach using 'reflective dialogue' (Siegel, 1999) around the intentionalities inherent in texts. This is the development of what Seigel termed 'mindsight' – the ability of a mind to reflect on itself and on other minds (in Gray, 2007:19) in the negotiation of meaning. Gray notes that reflective dialogue aligned around shared understandings and intentionalities is a crucial starting point in any setting that aims to be transformational (p.19).

2.2.1 The goal of schooling: literacy, meaningful discourse and concepts

In questioning what the goal of schooling is, Tharpe & Gallimore (1991) argue in their book *Rousing minds to life* that not only is *literacy* the 'goal', but, whatever 'content' schools choose to teach, it is the teaching of *concepts* and *meaningful discourse* that are

the goals of education: '*Concepts* are the goal; meaningful discourse is the medium in which society creates minds and by which minds create society. For literacy, meaningful discourse is both destination and vehicle.' (p.93). Becoming literate then, depends on being enculturated into these literate discourses. Gray (2007) characterises this as 'discourse control' - the primary goal of schooling (6). And as Tharpe & Gallimore point out, Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD is the 'cornerstone' of this kind of teaching (p.94).

Vygotsky's theory of learning has shown that all learning is essentially social in nature, not learned in isolation by individuals acting on the world; and is always situated in both cultural and historical contexts. In Vygotsky's words, 'Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them' (Mind in Society, 1978:88). His theory of how a competent adult can 'lend consciousness' to a child who doesn't have it, by creating zones of proximal development for lifting them conceptually to higher mental ground (Bruner, 1986) is now well known. Bruner's research has shown how this can work in practice, how a tutor can truly be 'consciousness for two', with his metaphor of *scaffoldin*g. From this point of view, the relationship between learning and development becomes clear: 'learning is not development; however properly organised learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus, learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organised, specifically human, psychological functions ' (Vygotsky, 1978:90).

2.2.2 The difference between everyday and 'schooled' concepts

Vygotsky's learning theory encompasses both the social aspect of learning and of cognitive development. Vygotsky differentiates between 'scientific' or 'schooled'

concepts from everyday concepts, such as the difference between the concept of 'brother' and that of 'exploitation' (Thought and Language, 1962:82). While connected to everyday concepts, he makes the point that learning schooled concepts is analogous to learning a foreign language which requires conscious effort on the part of the learner. But these can only unfold out of everyday concepts that are fully developed and held consciously (p.109). For Vygotsky, the 'word' is the basic unit of meaning and words represent concepts as well as discourse. 'Word meaning, then, as both vocabulary and discourse competences, develops in the context of social use in joint activity' (Tharpe & Gallimore, 1991:94). This ability to attend to objects and situations plays a significant part in concept development, as does the development of memory, though this is not conscious at this stage.

Vygotsky argues that everyday concepts can only become conscious and under deliberate control when they form part of a system (Thought and Language, 1962:93). Thus, generalising a concept means the formation of what he refers to as a *superordinate* concept which includes the original concept as a particular case, such as the concepts of 'flower' and 'rose'. Vygotsky contends that the acquisition of schooled concepts is mediated from the start by some other concept; and that systemisation occurs when these are then transferred to everyday concepts, changing their psychological structure from the top down (p.93). In other words, metacognitive learning has the effect of transforming our previously held ideas about everyday understandings and concepts.

Tharpe & Gallimore (1991:108) contend that schools must provide an *interface* for the interaction between emerging schooled concepts and everyday concepts to ensure that the highest order of meaning is achieved. They propose that: 'Reading and writing

prepare the child for schooled concepts, thus preparing the child's mind for building an interconnected system of schooled word meanings and discourse meanings' (p.108). They argue that teaching reading is teaching comprehension; and use the metaphor of 'weaving' to describe the weaving of new and old information (p.109). They point out that the very word 'text' is derived from the Latin, *texere* (to weave), and that the word 'text' has come to mean the 'woven narrative, a fabric (*textile*) constructed by the relating of many elements' (p.109).

2.2.3 Written language illustrates the notion of schooled concepts

Written language is a good example of this level of abstraction and Vygotsky notes that this is the reason why writing comes so hard for many children that there can be a lag of as much as seven to eight years between their 'linguistic age' in speech and writing (Thought and Language, 1962:98). Vygotsky's investigations into children's writing development led him to the conclusion that learning to write does not follow the same developmental process as learning to speak: 'Written speech is a separate linguistic function, differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning' (p.98). Because it is so abstract, he refers to written text as a 'second degree of symbolisation' and claims that, 'Even its minimal development requires a high level of abstraction' (p.98).

There are several reasons for this. Written text is decontextualised, far removed from any immediate context; and the motives for writing are more abstract, intellectual and removed from the writer's immediate needs (p.99). The writer must create the situation and represent it to themselves, a task that demands a certain degree of detachment from it. Writing also requires deliberate analytical action and conscious effort on the part of the learner because of its relationship to thought or inner speech. For Vygotsky, oral

speech precedes the development of inner speech, while writing follows inner speech and presupposes its existence - the act of writing implies a translation from inner speech. Yet the grammar of thought is not the same as the grammar of written text. The syntax of thought is abbreviated; while the latter must be as elaborated as possible. As Vygotsky states, 'The change from maximally compact inner speech to maximally detailed written speech requires what might be called deliberate semantics - deliberate structuring of the web of meaning' (p.100); and is the reason for the discrepancy in children's oral and early written performance.

2.2.4 The role of imitation and instruction: the application of the ZPD

Within Vygotsky's learning theory, the role of active imitation and instruction are crucial. In his model, instruction usually precedes development and children must acquire particular habits and skills before they learn to apply them consciously and deliberately (p.101). For Vygotsky, 'What the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow' (p.104) and therefore, the only 'good' learning is that which occurs ahead of development. Instruction therefore, must be pitched at as high a level as possible - it must 'look to the child's future, not the past' (p.104).

James Wertsch (1988) has taken Vygotsky's social learning theory and Bruner's metaphor of scaffolding further by arguing that all human action is mediated by cultural 'tools' and (as both Vygotsky and Bruner pointed out) that language is a 'tool' for mediating learning. In his discussion of the properties of mediated action, Wertsch argues there is an irreducible tension between the 'agent' and the tool as they interact, in terms of the skill of the person using the tool and the efficacy of it (pp.24-25). All cultural tools have affordances and constraints (p.38); and new cultural tools can have a transforming effect on human action (p.42). As I have argued, learning to use a cultural

tool such as written language involves this kind of transformation in terms of the further development of thought and metacognition.

By this definition, pedagogy is also a cultural tool. Wertsch argues that when a tool is no longer adequate for the intended task, then a new one will emerge; and the mediated action can undergo a fundamental transformation (p.45). This means that change will occur when sufficient 'agents' (or teachers) recognise that their old cultural tool (their approach or methodology) is not working sufficiently well with all students and a new approach will emerge.

One program that has emerged which uses this kind of sociocultural approach to literacy pedagogy is the National Accelerated Literacy Program (Cowey, 2003; Gray, 2007). While the focus of this program has been to improve the literacy development of Indigenous students in particular in remote communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland, with considerable success (Gray & Cowey, 2001; Rose, Gray, & Cowey, 1998, 1999), it has also proven successful with mainstream students with a broad range of literacy levels. While there is not room here to discuss the teaching strategies used in this program in detail, the theoretical principles I will outline in the next section underpin this approach. Further information about the NALP can be found by going to the following website: www.nalp.edu.au .

2.2.5 Applying discourse theory to writing teaching

As Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987) pointed out, writing can be a knowledge-transforming process. But it is not just through the 'act' of writing that learners can transform their knowledge, this can occur before writing by developing an understanding of literate discourse and how effective texts work. As Vygotsky argued, instruction precedes

learning. Rather than expecting students to write first and only reflect on their writing in hindsight through peer or teacher conferences, students need to be shown how to write effectively for a particular social purpose. If we apply the notion of 'goal awareness' to the situation of learning to write, the idea of working from a whole text to its constituent parts in-depth to develop an understanding of how effective texts work to construct meaning, is what has been missing from writing teaching. Although the need to expose students to model texts and a variety of genres (or text types) has been recognised, leading to activities such as *immersion in print* and *shared book,* and the modeling of genre structures, the notion of teaching about the social purposes of literacy and analysing focus texts in detail (beyond their genre structure) has not been common practice.

Gray (2007) argues there are two fundamental elements that are crucial for teaching about discourse: knowledge of the vocabulary and grammatical resources required for the effective operation of the discourse and the *ways of thinking* for operating successfully within literate discourses (p.7). Students must be made aware of the impact and purpose of effective written texts; and within this framework, how the generic structure, the grammatical and lexical choices and literary techniques (such as simile, metaphor, contrast, foreshadowing etc) work together to achieve particular effects on the reader.

If children are to learn to write effectively for particular purposes, they must not only be brought to understand how written language works, but be closely aligned with the mindset and orientation taken by a literate person such as their teacher. As Smith (1982) pointed out, reading is a meaning-making activity. To understand how to write themselves, the learner must appreciate the text as a whole in all its complexity, to be

aware of the highest possibility; and to learn how the parts – the way the text is organised (structure), the language features, the grammar, the words – work together to create an effective text, one that has an impact on the reader.

2.2.6 The goal of teaching: shared intentionality and intersubjectivity

In their research into how humans learn, psychologist Michael Tomasello and his colleagues at Leipzig University (Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005) have confirmed Vygotsky's notion that the ability to share attention, and the desire and intention to communicate meaning, is how all humans learn. They claim that this ability accounts for the development of language and culture, and is what sets humans apart from other species, such as apes (p.675). Tomasello et al contend that humans are the world's best mind-readers; and that this ability to share intentionality is the origin of human cognition and the development of culture. Such 'shared intentionality' involves collaborating with others to achieve a shared goal with complimentary roles – that each participant must understand the goal, their own role and the role of others (p.681).

In his review of this paper, Bruner (p.694) points out that the paradox of 'shared intentionality' is that human culture or discourse has become so localised. To operate within an unfamiliar discourse requires each of us to learn the 'rules' of that social setting, the ways of thinking and behaving. This idea has been encapsulated in the notion of 'secret English' (quoted in Gray, 2007:7 from Bain, 1979:113 and Lee, 2004:iii) to denote the kinds of tacit understandings in classroom discourse that remain a mystery for many Indigenous students. This highlights the point that when we are a member of a discourse, that discourse is largely invisible to us. To teach about discourse then, teachers must bring their tacitly held knowledge into consciousness.

The notion of shared intentionality is useful for understanding how an apprenticeship model of teaching writing might work. The goal of all teaching is for teacher and students to be in the same mindset, to share the same goals and to collaborate in a plan of action to achieve those goals. To describe how teacher and students might differ in their interpretation of particular learning situations, Wertsch (1984) uses the term 'situation definition' (p.8) - the way each participant represents objects and events to themselves. Even though teacher and students share the same spatiotemporal context, they often have very different understandings of the writing task and what is expected.

Wertsch argues that the process of giving up an existing situation definition in favour of a qualitatively new one (a situation *redefinition*) is characteristic of the changes a child undergoes in the ZPD (p.11). By negotiating an alignment of understanding, 'intersubjectivity' (p.12) can be achieved through a process of 'semiotic mediation' (p.16) – the use of language as a tool for negotiating meaning and the development of a metalanguage for talking about language.

2.2.7 The power of narrative for teaching about writing

While children must learn to cope with a range of genres, there is a strong argument that narrative is a powerful genre for focused literacy teaching about how effective writing works. Narrative is universal across all cultures and, as Rogoff (2003) showed, is an important cultural tool for mediating learning. In his book, *Acts of Meaning,* Bruner (1990) states that meaning is central to human psychology and intentional states (p.33); and 'narrative' is the organising principle of human experience and memory by which people interact with their social world (p.35).

Bruner contends that in all cultures there is a kind of 'folk' psychology that exists as a system of beliefs and desires that 'enter into the narratives of human plights' (p.39). That is, we hold to a set of beliefs that the world is organised in certain ways, that we want certain things and should not want irreconcilable things, and that some things matter more than others. We also 'know' that people hold these beliefs, and recognise that when people's beliefs and desires become sufficiently coherent and organised, these then become 'commitments' and 'ways of life' (p.39). But it is only when constituent beliefs are violated that narratives are constructed in the form of myths, stories, legends, excuses, etc.

In a later paper, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality' (1991), Bruner proposes that narrative is a conventional form that is transmitted culturally and is constrained by each individual's mastery of it (p.4). As such, narratives are a version of reality governed by 'narrative necessity', rather than empirical evidence or logic. Yet it is out of the logic of stories that we construct our scientific or schooled understandings. Bruner's aim in this paper is to consider how narrative operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality, rather than how narrative text is constructed. But he makes the point that one mirrors the other – the old adage that 'life imitates art and vice versa' (p.21) – that there is an interplay between our stories and our lives as we experience them.

Bruner discusses ten characteristics of narrative which will only be briefly outlined here. Narratives take place over time; they deal with particular events and intentional states (belief, desires, values etc) and can be interpreted as a selected series of events that constitute a 'story'. Stories are about something unusual that breaches the 'canonical' or normal state of things, they in some way reference reality (though not directly) and offer 'verisimilitude' rather than verifiability. Narratives can be classified as genres such as farce, quest, tragedy, romance etc; and because they involve a breach of conventional

expectation, they are necessarily normative in supposing how one ought to act. Narratives are also negotiable in the sense that we assign a context and suspend disbelief in their telling, and we are happy to accept different versions without too much difficulty. And finally, narratives are cumulative in that new stories build on old ones - this is how we accrue a shared social history and culture (pp.6-20).

Bruner concludes that human beings are alike and that, 'It is this sense of belonging to a canonical past that permits us to form our own narratives of deviation while maintaining complicity with the canon' (p.20). This understanding of how narrative constructs our reality makes narrative texts a powerful genre for learning about literate discourse. Because they impact on the reader emotionally, writing teachers can use narrative texts as a focus for engaging students in written language and for building their resources for writing. Bruner recognises that this understanding of narrative brings with it the idea that they operate as cultural toolkits for interpreting the social world and learning how to operate in it. Narrative texts can also be used to build students' toolkits for writing. Professional author, Stephen King (2000), uses this metaphor of the writer's 'toolbox' in his partly autobiographical book, *On Writing*, in which he shares some of his 'method' for writing. It is a useful metaphor to use with students to build an image of the tools they will accrue with which to mediate their own writing.

Harper & Wignell (Draft, 2007) make the point that for novice readers and writers, one of the greatest hurdles is learning to deal with highly complex and abstract language in texts in which the meaning is obscured (p.5). Halliday (1985) notes that one of these complexities is the principle of 'grammatical metaphor' (p. xviii) which is a dominant feature of adult language; and it is not usually until the age of nine or ten that children can handle it. This is a phenomenon whereby meanings can be cross-coded and represented by categories other than those that have evolved to represent them, such

as the nominalisation of verbs or adjectives, e.g. turning 'attract' into 'attraction', and 'lovely' into 'loveliness'. Grammatical metaphor can be found in narrative, but is more generally a feature of 'scientific' or factual texts. Harper & Wignell note that a major aim of schooling is to transform children's narrative modes of expression into more expository and argumentative ones (Draft, 2007:13). Narrative texts can therefore be a pivotal genre for teaching reading and writing. They not only act as an emotional 'hook' for engaging children in literate discourse and for 'facilitating their ability to construct, analyse and express complex relationships between ideas and language' (p.11), they can act as a bridge to more abstract texts for developing readers and writers (p.15).

2.2.8 How Bakhtin's notion of the dialogicality of text can inform writing teaching

When making crucial decisions about *what* to teach and *how* to mediate children's reading and writing development, the question arises as to what kind of 'literacy' teachers want their students to develop. It has been argued that to become literate, we must learn to deal with the literate discourses of our culture and to master the linguistic resources of that culture. In doing so, we not only learn to produce these discourses through writing, we also learn to talk in a 'literate' way (Harper & Wignell, Draft, 2007: 5).

Nevertheless, it is generally through writing that we develop an understanding of how literate language works. Heath (1986:291) and Tharpe & Gallimore (1991:110) argue that children in schools have too often been silenced in literacy classrooms in the past. If we are to prepare students to become fully-fledged members of literate discourse, then we must give them the opportunity to engage in high level analysis and discussion of study texts. Heath (1986) argues that, '…literature – written forms of language currently most revered – depends ultimately on transference to oral language as readers energise the inevitable dead state of its written form and assign it significance' (p.282). It is only

by coming to understand how and why such texts work, how they 'speak' to us, that children will learn how to create texts that achieve an emotional impact to influence a reader themselves.

Bakhtin's notion of 'voice' and the 'dialogic' in text, whether spoken or written, are highly relevant to an understanding of how texts work and to teaching: how to create dialogues around a study text to scaffold children's writing development. For Bakhtin (1981) the dialogic describes the interactive nature of language itself, the notion of intertextuality. Dialogism is an inherent quality of language (Schuster, 1985:4), that is, every communication involves at least two voices and is a dialogue. For Schuster this quality represents a basic model of epistemology, for how we come to 'know', which Vygotsky (a contemporary of Bakhtin) expressed as, 'A word is a microcosm of human consciousness' (1962:153). While someone must own words (there is a 'speaker'), words come to us from other speakers saturated with meaning and context. We literally take words from other people's mouths. As Bakhtin asserts:

> 'The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "ones own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.' (*Dialogic, 1981:* 293-4)

Bakhtin alters Aristotle's rhetorical triangle of speaker-listener-subject to one in which he replaces the subject with a concept he calls the 'hero' (Schuster, 1985:2). A speaker does not communicate to a listener about a subject, they engage in an act of communication which includes the 'hero' as a genuine rhetorical force. As Schuster puts

it, 'The hero interacts with the speaker to shape the language and determine the form. At times, the hero becomes the dominant influence in verbal and written utterance.' (1985:3). In Bakhtin's terms, the hero may be ideas, characters, locations, objects, etc. Schuster cites some examples - New York is the hero in the Woody Allan film, *Manhattan*, and freedom becomes the hero in a speech by Martin Luther King (p.3). The hero can often be a strong determiner within discourse, changing the communicative triangle to speaker-hero-listener. While both speaker and listener interact in a dialogue, so too does the hero; and it contains its own accumulation of values and terms as well (p.2).

As Schuster points out, Bakhtin's theory changes our perceptions about language and how it is used, 'making us more sensitive to tone and the expressive implications created by all verbal phrasing' (p.2). Bakhtin shows us how to become more sophisticated in our reading of prose and consequently, trains us to be better teachers of writing. For Bakhtin the notion of 'style' as a developmental process occurs not only within the individual writer but within language itself (Schuster, 1985:1-2). Style is not something that can 'dress' language up, it cannot be added later as a mere 'accessory': it is an essential part of how language is constructed.

This has important implications for teaching. Simply exhorting students to use more adjectives, or to 'write more', isn't necessarily going to result in more effective pieces of writing. Teaching them about grammar in isolation won't either. Just as the Vai apprentice tailors began with the whole garment and worked backwards to understand the construction method, writing students must experience the full expressive, or 'stylistic' possibilities, of a piece of literature (the goal) and work backwards to understand how its construction achieves this effect. Once the structure and language

choices have been unpacked and internalised, they will be ready to 'cut the cloth' - to construct written pieces that express something about a 'hero' that will not only make a reader care, but will create a dialogue with them.

So how do we 'unpack' a focus text with students in a way that will engage them and at the same time teach them about the 'stylistic' or expressive possibilities of written text? In an apprenticeship model, 'method' is crucial and grounded in theory. Again, Bakhtin leads the way. In a recently translated, unfinished paper, 'Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar' (2004), he demonstrates his 'method' of teaching grammar in order to improve his students' writing through a discussion of 'stylistics'. In spirit, this is very similar to the strategy known as *Transformations* in the NALP pedagogy already mentioned (see Cowey, 2003 and Gray, 2007:24) through which grammatical forms that can be expressed in alternate ways are physically transformed to test their effect.

In 1945, Bakhtin (2004) was teaching a Year 8 working-class, secondary boys' class and was searching for a dialogic pedagogy for teaching grammar in a way that would bring it alive for the students. He used three sentences from the canon of Russian literature by Pushkin and Gogol which all had the same structure - they were parataxic sentences - two clauses joined with no conjunction. These are the sentences he used:

> *Sad am I: no friend beside me (Pushkin).*
>
> *He'd start to laugh – they'd all guffaw (Gogol).*
>
> *He awoke: five stations had already fled past in the opposite direction (Gogol).*
> (Bakhtin, 2004:16)

Bakhtin describes these sentences as 'dramatically dynamic' with the last being even more dramatic than the others. After discussing the effect of each sentence, they transformed them by putting the conjunctions in, coming up with sentences like:

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I am sad because I have no friend (p.17).

When he starts to laugh, then they'd all guffaw (p.19).

In discussing the effect of these after reading them aloud, they agreed the conjunctions set up a logical relationship which was now foregrounded. This meant that not only did the meaning change, but the imagery and expressive quality was gone - it is difficult to get an image from a logical relationship – and so was much of the rhythm of the language.

When they read the third sentence aloud, they realised that the pause caused by the dash between the two clauses indicates a tense expectation of surprise, while the second clause brings the reader into the scene with the traveller – a metaphoric expression akin to personification through which we see and feel what the traveller does, as he rubs his eyes in astonishment (Bakhtin, 2004:20). They then came up with an alternative construction by putting the conjunction in again, such as:

When he woke up, then he discovered that five stations had already fled

past in the opposite direction (p.21).

The students agreed that the logical relationship the conjunctions set up wasn't appropriate for the subordinate clause – five stations hadn't really fled past, it was the traveller's perception that they had. They came up with: *He had already passed five stations* which though grammatically correct, they felt was 'dry and pallid' in comparison (p.22). Not only had much been lost in terms of meaning, but again these were nowhere near as dramatic or rhythmic. Bakhtin reports that these discussions were very lively with much disagreement, but that they were well worth doing. He found his students understood and really enjoyed these stylistic discussions – they were never boring - and their writing improved greatly as a result (p.23).

We may not use the word 'stylistics' today, but the method still holds true. In order to teach about a text, the teacher must know and understand it well themselves. To demonstrate briefly, the following passage from *Blueback* by Australian author, Tim Winton (1997), will be used to explore the kind of demonstration and reflective dialogue that could be engendered in an upper primary or early secondary class about the impact this passage has on the reader.

> *Abel had graduated from high school and was home on holidays when all the pilchards died. There was no storm, no warning, no oil spill, no explanation. One morning he stumped down to the jetty to see the whole beach blackened with dead fish. The air roared with flies. Gulls hovered uncertainly over the stinking mess. Abel walked along the beach trying to understand it (p.103-104).*

In this passage, Winton has juxtaposed a happy event for the main character in the first two clauses with a major ecological disaster in the third: *when all the pilchards died.* In Bakhtin's terms, *Abel* and the disaster are both the hero in this passage. The impact of the emotional jar we feel by the juxtaposition of the first two clauses with the last is achieved by its understatement. To teach this point, the clauses could be rearranged on a sentence-maker board by putting the last clause first, as in: *When all the pilchards died Abel had graduated from high school and was home on holidays.* The effect of this change could then be discussed to explore the difference in meaning and impact, and why Winton chose to put it the other way around.

Similarly with the parallel construction: *There was no storm, no warning, no oil spill, no explanation.* There are no words wasted here and the repetition of *no* lends impact and emphasis. These echo the kind of explanation we, as readers, are looking for after the shock of the previous clause and are what we imagine is going through Abel's mind. To explore how this construction achieves this effect, the order of these could be changed,

and turned over one at a time to see what each one adds to the meaning and effect. The purpose of this 'method' is to not only demonstrate the expressive qualities of effective texts, but to explore the dialogic possibilities of written language and for demonstrating how students might use writing techniques such as parallelism in their own writing.

These kinds of choices and effects, including the impact and meaning of nominal groups such as *the whole beach blackened with dead fish* and *the stinking mess,* verb choices like *stumped* and *hovered,* words that tell *how* such as *uncertainly* and the effect of metonymy as in *The air roared with flies,* could be discussed with students through reflective dialogue to build what Edwards & Mercer refer to as common knowledge (1989) within the group about literate discourse, and how authors use language to have an emotional impact on the reader, as well as building students' writing resources – their own writing toolkit - for using written language effectively themselves.

Although brief, the aim with this example is to demonstrate how a dialogic pedagogy might work in a sociocultural model of teaching. This is an apprenticeship model that positions the teacher in a central role for guiding explorations of texts in such a way that children become apprenticed members of literate discourse, the discourse of schooling.

2.3 Conclusion

In the first section of this literature review the various approaches and research that have influenced the shifts in thinking about how to teach writing in Australian schools from the 1950s through to the present day were explored. The 1950s to 60s saw a shift from drilling basic skills in handwriting, spelling and grammar, and composition writing based on the rhetorical categories, to a call for more *creative* writing. James Britton's

research in the 1970s saw the beginnings of an interest in thinking about writing as a *process* rather than just a *product.*

The *whole language* and *process writing* approaches of the late 70s to 80s created a revolution in literacy teaching across Australia which was given added momentum when Donald Graves attended a conference in Sydney in 1980. The notion of writing as a *process* has been accepted and is still incorporated into mainstream teaching of writing up to the present day. Social learning theory began to gain ground in the mid-80s through *genre theory* which became incorporated into writing teaching and is still part of state and territory curricula.

The 90s brought the 'great debate' about the best methods of teaching reading and writing, with calls for a return to 'basic skills' and the introduction of the National Literacy Benchmarks. For the first time in Australia there was a national set of minimum standards in reading and writing and data on student outcomes made publicly available. The 2000s have seen more of the same with attempts to meld process and genre approaches, and very little research on writing teaching, apart from an interest in how feedback and assessment might influence learning to write, and the effect of computers and ICT on students' writing. There have been further calls for 'back to basics' teaching and the 'literacy wars' have continued to be waged.

In the second section a new direction was proposed using an apprenticeship model of teaching writing based on a more closely aligned interpretation of Vygotsky's social learning theory and Bruner's metaphor of scaffolding. Rogoff's notion of *guided participation* was used to explore Vygotsky's theory further; and the Vai apprenticeship model of starting with the goal (the garment) and working backwards to learn its

construction as a model of apprenticeship for teaching writing. Wertsch's notion of mediated action and cultural tools was discussed to elaborate on how a teacher might scaffold writing; and Gray's notion of 'goal awareness' and the concept of 'shared intentionality' from Tomasello to explore how and what to teach in order to teach literate discourse.

If literacy is the goal of schooling (Tharpe & Gallimore) and the teaching of concepts is the aim of education, then Vygotsky's notion of the difference between *everyday* and *schooled* concepts is highly relevant; and following Vygotsky's thinking, that writing is a powerful mode of learning schooled concepts. Bruner's notion that we construct our reality though narrative and therefore that narrative is a powerful genre for teaching reading and writing was discussed, and that it is a pivotal genre for bridging narrative modes of thinking and expression with more abstract 'scientific' modes.

Finally I argue that Bakhtin's notion of the dialogicality of text, both spoken and written, can inform us about how written texts work to create a dialogue with the reader and impact on them; and how his theory of culturally created language can be used to develop a dialogic pedagogy using an apprenticeship model. This model, based on Vygotsky's social learning theory, positions the teacher back in a central role as a language expert, rather than a peripheral one in the Piagetian sense; and because the focus is literate discourse, it is inclusive of all students, whatever their language or cultural background.

To conclude this view of writing teaching as an apprenticeship to literate discourse and the literary canon, I give the last word to Bruner. As he pointed out more than twenty years ago in his book, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986), language is the medium of

education and it is never neutral (p.121). Language imposes a perspective through which we view the world and a stance toward that view; and this kind of 'hermeneutics' has great implications for teaching. For Bruner, culture is a *forum* for negotiating and renegotiating meanings. Institutions are forums as well: forums for the co-creation of culture (p.123). As he states:

> 'It follows from this view of culture as a forum that induction into the culture through education, if it is to prepare the young for life as lived, should also partake of the spirit of a forum, of negotiation, of the recreating of meaning' (p.123).

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