Vygotskian Principles in a Genre-based Approach to Teaching Writing

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This article describes the genre-based approach to teaching writing currently used in the third-year English Writing classes at NUCB. The fundamental principles based on the learning theories of Lev Vygotsky are briefly outlined, before the notion of a Curriculum Cycle deriving from them is introduced. Consequently, a lesson unit based on this notion and taught in the classes is described. Particular attention is paid to the roles played by model texts as well as contextual and textual exploration involving both teachers and students in the co-construction of knowledge and skills. The place of a functional view of language – in particular, grammar – in the course of instruction will also be discussed. Although the focus is on the teaching of writing, it will be contended that such an approach and its principles are applicable to the effective learning of other language skills.

Genre-based ELT

Genre-based approaches, where teaching and learning focuses on the understanding and production of selected genres of texts (both spoken and written), have become increasingly influential in the field of English language teaching (ELT) (Derewianka, 2003), and identified as one of the major trends in the new millennium (Rodgers, 2001). Such approaches are, of course, not "new", as Derewianka (ibid.) points out. For example, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), both of which have now been around for a while, are early examples of genre-based approaches, arising from pioneering work in genre analysis by Swales (1981, 1990) and others. However, the notion of teaching and learning around text genres has now expanded to generalized "mainstream" ELT in a number of situations, such as in literacy programmes in New South Wales, Australia, and in the national English Language Syllabus for primary and secondary schools in Singapore.

The approaches take on many forms and guises, with varied theoretical bases in linguistics, such as Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) in North America, and Generic Structure Potential (GSP) theory in Australia. Whatever the particular realizations, their major influences are from work in linguistics, in fields such as genre analysis and discourse analysis. Hence, some key features are common to all of them. Derewianka (ibid) describes some of these.

To begin with, genre-based approaches are concerned with the social purposes of language, and not just form: the genres in focus are generally defined according to social purposes of communication. The classification and labeling of genres may vary, depending, among other things, on the theoretical influences behind each approach. For example, in some instances, writing genres are defined in terms of familiar broad categories such as 'Narratives', 'Description', 'Persuasion and Argumentation' and so on. Another approach, elaborated on later, makes a distinction between six or so text prototypes called *text types*, and more specific genres that employ each or combinations of these text types. Whatever the differences, it is clear that the categorization is based on what the discourse seeks to achieve or to *do* socially, for example,

to tell a story ('Narratives' in many typologies) or to argue an opinion ('Argument' in some typologies, 'Exposition' in others). There is recognition that "all texts conform to certain conventions, and that if a student is to be successful in joining a particular English-language discourse community, the student will need to be able to produce texts which fulfill the expectations of its readers in regards to grammar, organization, and context" (Kim & Kim 2005, citing Muncie 2002).

As a consequence of their concern with achieving social purposes, genre-based approaches also begin with the whole text as the unit in focus rather than sentence, that is, language at the level of discourse, since it is only through whole or complete texts that an act of communication achieves its purposes. Here, a "text" refers to "a piece of language in use", which is a "harmonious collection of meanings appropriate to its context" and hence has "unity of purpose" (Butt et al. 2001, p.3). Butt et al. are referring, of course, to *successful* texts, but what is important to note is that the notion refers to stretches of language that may be considered complete in themselves as acts of social exchange. Length and mode of communication are immaterial: each text may be long or short, written or spoken. Thus, a brief exchange of greetings as two acquaintances pass each other is as much a text as is a 600-page novel.

The focus on whole texts implies recognition that there is a higher level of order and patterning in language than just the sentence – grammar at the level of discourse organization and meta-patterning of grammatical features. Genre-based approaches emphasize that this higher order must be attended to for effective language use. This is not to say that sentence-level grammar, for instance, is not seen as important: rather, its importance is seen in terms of the part it plays in the overall patterning of the whole text (e.g. what sorts of sentence patterns tend to pre-dominate in a particular genre). Indeed, close attention is paid to sentence- and word-level grammar in many current approaches, and without such grammar being treated separately from the business of communication, unlike in older grammar-focused approaches or in many forms of communicative language teaching. Thus, genre-based approaches can be seen as being at once both whole-to-part and part-to-whole.

Finally, in terms of pedagogy, many genre-based approaches emphasize both product and process, and not just either one. In the last few decades, much of writing in ELT has been dominated by process-oriented approaches, i. e. approaches that focus on what writers *do* in moving from thought formulation and content planning (commonly called 'pre-writing') to the final product (e.g. through drafting, re-drafting, editing and so on). In so doing, they pay rightful attention to students' developmental processes as they learn to write. However, apart from the criticism that they often treat the writing process as a singular universal pattern, these approaches also in themselves do not provide a basis for explicit curricular goals as to what *types* of writing students should be able to produce. Thus, process-based approaches often run the danger of lop-sided attention to certain types of writing, while ignoring other socially important kinds of writing. Genre-based approaches address this by providing a basis for identifying the types of written products that can be selected for the curriculum. At the same time, they are capable of incorporating process-based pedagogy, and many do.

THIRD-YEAR ENGLISH WRITING COURSES AT THE NAGOYA UNIVERSITY OF COMMERCE AND BUSINESS

The third-year English Writing courses at the Nagoya University of Commerce and Business (NUCB), titled *English Writing V* and *English Writing VI* for the first and second semester respectively, exemplify a genre-based framework in its curricular design and pedagogy. Developed by the author over the academic year April 2005 to March 2006 in the absence of a previously stable curriculum, it is now a fully formed program, with explicit goals specified in terms of genre outcomes and fully written teaching and learning materials following a specific and consistent pedagogical pattern.

The specification of genres to be taught is based on the classification used by many systemic functional linguists, especially in applications to classroom teaching of English (e.g. Butt et al 2001, Derewianka 1990). The classification involves a distinction between *text types* and *genres*. Text types refers to text prototypes defined according to their primary social purposes, and six main text types may be identified:

- NARRATIVES tell a story, usually to entertain
- RECOUNTS (Personal, Factual) tell what happened
- INFORMATION REPORTS provide factual information
- INSTRUCTIONS tell the listener or reader what to do
- EXPLANATIONS explain how or why something happens
- EXPOSITORY TEXTS present or argue viewpoints

Genres, on the other hand, refer to more specific classes of texts, such as newspaper reports or recipes. Texts of each genre may be purely of one text type (for example, a bus schedule is purely an Information Report, while most recipes are purely of the text type 'Instructions') or they may be a blend (for example, sermons often include stretches of narratives or recounts, as well as explanations, while usually expository in intent). Genres may also be written or spoken.

The rationale for adopting a genre-based framework is that it facilitates clear links to the students' purposes for writing beyond the writing classroom. Thus, the primary factors in curricular selection are ensuring a balance of text types, to enable them to perform a broad range of social purposes for writing in English in future, and selection of specific genres based on the students' most immediate academic needs. With respect to the latter, the programme seeks to support the writing of their graduation essay, an extended research-based thesis that is the only major piece of writing in English required of the students. Since the research essay is a genre that potentially incorporates sections in its various sections all the main text types apart from 'Narratives', the curriculum covers all the text types except 'Narratives', which is also excluded because few students are likely to ever need to tell stories in English. Thus, the six units covered (three in each semester) comprise the following:

English Writing V (1st Semester):
- Information Reports (Survey & Interview Reports)
- Factual Recounts (Company Histories)
- Instructions ('How to' Essays)

English Writing VI (2nd Semester):
- Explanations (How or Why Something Happens)
- Information Reports (Classification & Categorization)
- Exposition (Arguing for a Position)

It might be noted that the specific genres realizing each text type are, where possible, those that approximate potential sections of the graduation essay. For example, one genre of 'Information Reports' selected, Surveys and Interview Reports, can evidently be adapted for the 'Findings' section, while the specific genre of 'Recounts', Company Histories, might be used by students doing research on a business in the 'Background' section of their essays. These possible applications to their graduation essays are made explicit to the students in the introduction to each unit.

The teaching and learning material for each unit are fully written up in a form akin to textbook units, printed, and distributed to the students. They are also made available online through the university's Blackboard Learning System. Each unit follows a similar pattern and learning cycle, and is completed over three to four 90- or 100- minute lessons. The principles on which this cycle is based, as well as a description of what a unit of learning includes, is described in the sections that follow.

To supplement the work done in the genre-based units, students are also required to submit a one-page

response or comment on newspaper articles of their choice once a fortnight. This is to provide sustained opportunities for free writing by the students.

VYGOTSKIAN PRINCIPLES & PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATION

While, as has been mentioned, genre-oriented pedagogy today is often both product- and process-oriented, it may and has sometimes become overly product-focused in a prescriptive way: it may thus "undervalue skills needed to produce a text, and see the learners as largely passive" (Badger & White 2000). The NUCB third-year courses seek to avoid this, basing their pedagogy on the socio-cultural learning theories of Vygotsky (1978).

Much of ELT in the last few decades has been based on largely cognitivist theories of Second Language Acquisition (or SLA as the field is commonly known) that view learning as pre-dominantly psychological in nature, dependant largely on what happens in the mind. For Vygotsky, however, learning is both social and psychological in nature. Mediation through the use of plays the key role at every point, with *sign systems* being the primary tools, and language being the key sign system, and hence, key tool for mediation. Vygotksy proposes the notion of Zones of Proximal Development (ZPDs), zones between what he calls 'actual' development (what the learner can do independently) and 'potential' development (what the learner can do in the future, with the help of others now). Every act of learning occurs within a ZPD, building on what the learner already knows and can do, and is first *inter-psychological* (social) before it is *intra-psychological* (psychological). Learning begins by being *object*-regulated, and then is *others*-regulated, before it is *self*-regulated. As the stages of *object*-regulation, others-regulation, and *self*-regulation are crucial to understanding the pedagogical design of the NUCB third year courses, they are further elaborated below.

By *object*-regulation, Vygotsky was referring to the role played by concrete manifestations of culture in the environment – objects and artifacts, rituals, routines and daily practices, documents and valued texts, and so on – that function as sign systems that mediate learning. The learner's starting point is thus social, in the first place, because he or she begins by taking cues from the environment. Thus, the value of some rituals, for instance, is that they enact in physical terms values of central importance to the culture, for example, filial piety through the ritual of offering tea to one's elders, and thus form a visible means of transmitting those values to succeeding generations. Children's playground activities, in the Vygotskian perspective, are also of value not because they provide the children opportunities to manipulate, explore and discover the environment, as in Piaget's view of human development, but because the role-playing that often dominates such activities is a form of object-regulation of the child's understanding of his or her immediate society.

One's potential development, however, cannot be manifested if learning stops at object-regulation. The key to such a mai nifestation is the role played by significant others in mediating learning – the stage of *others*-regulation. Such significant others may include, for instance, parents, elders and teachers, as well as more expert peers, who through talk and other means provide explicit or conscious as well as implicit or unconscious guidance to the learner. Returning to the examples of rituals and playground activities, this guidance may take the form, for instance, of explanations of the meanings of rituals, or of a child with wider experience telling another his or her version of how, for instance, a real doctor would act. It is at the stage of others-regulation that language becomes important, not only facilitating the transactions between 'expert' and learner, but also enabling key concepts to be captured and retained.

For the potential development manifested by what the learner is able to do with the help of others to be translated eventually into actual development, *self*-regulation is vital. This is the stage in which the learner processes and manipulates by himself or herself the knowledge and understanding gained, and/or begins to

be capable of working independently. As opposed to the Piagetian view of the phenomenon of self-talk by young children as indicative of ego-centricity, whose reduction as the child becomes increasingly aware of others is what is responsible for its eventual disappearance, self-talk is seen by Vygotsky as a manifestation of self-regulation. Its disappearance as children grow up is simply a matter of it becoming internalized and silent: this internal self-talk, again made possible only because of language, continues to be a vital part of learning through self-regulation.

Vygotsky's ideas on learning have been operationalized in genre-based ELT through the notion of the Curriculum Cycle, proposed by systemic-functional linguists such as Derewianka (1990) and Butt, et al. (2001) and influential in school settings in New South Wales and other parts of Australia, as well as in Singapore. This is a simple model for developing complete lesson units or cycles around text types or genres to be taught, and has as its ultimate aims helping learners *do* things with language independently through mastery of text types and genres.

Each lesson unit or cycle has as its central focus a chosen text type or genre, and consists of a fixed sequence of stages. Descriptions of the cycle (e.g. in Derewianka, 1990 & Butt et al, 2001) vary in minor ways, but four phases essential for developing control of a genre may be identified, namely:

1. Context Exploration
2. Text Exploration based on Model Texts
3. Joint Construction of a Text
4. Individual Application
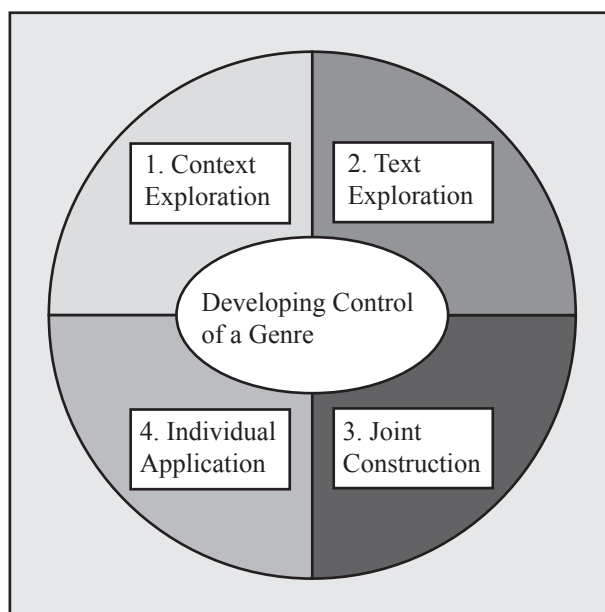
This is captured in Figure 1:

Figure 1: The Curriculum Cycle

Every cycle begins with *context exploration*, 'context' referring to the possible contexts of situation in which the chosen text-type or genre may be used. This phase resembles the pre-listening/reading/speaking/writing phase that has come to be typical in communicative language teaching, and the activities that may

be carried out do indeed resemble typical pre-activities in skills-based teaching. However, where traditional genre-based activities have aims ranging from mere warming up to activation of mental schemata, one primary aim of the genre-based Curriculum Cycle is to help students become aware of and understand the social purpose of the chosen genre, as well as other contextual factors influencing the production of the texts that they will examine as models, and the texts that they may be required to produce in speech or writing. Following Halliday (1994), these contextual factors may be neatly captured as consisting of the *field* or subject matter of the discourse, the *tenor* of the relationship between the speakers/writers and listeners/readers involved, and the *mode* of the discourse (i.e. whether it is spoken or written, what specific form it takes, e.g, letter or e-mail). Based on Vygotskian principles, another important aim of the context exploration phase, from the teacher's point of view, is to establish the learners' 'actual development' or starting point.

The next stage, *text exploration*, is the first of two perhaps distinctive key phases in the Curriculum Cycle that demonstrates how a genre-based approach founded on Vygotskian principles is set apart from other forms of communicative language teaching. The aims of this phase are to familiarize the learners with the target text-type or genre, and to draw attention to organizational and linguistic features commonly found in texts belonging to it. *Model texts* play a crucial role in this phase, providing, in Vygotsky's terms, the necessary object-regulation. Using such model texts, pedagogical activities to make explicit the features of the text-type are carried out. These may include a gamut of established 'communicative' activities, such as the re-assembling of 'jigsaw' texts or information gap exercises, but the tasks are deliberately constructed in such a way as to highlight the salient lexical and grammatical features. Thus, the tasks aim to be at least implicitly 'analytical' in nature, and not just to facilitate interaction as an end in itself. Of course, more explicitly analytical work (such as asking students to 'hunt' for and highlight all instances of a specific grammatical form), as well as direct teaching by the instructors, is also possible, in order to make the features obvious to the learners. How the formal features work to help the text-type or genre achieve its purposes is also discussed or explored, the teacher playing a key role in *others-regulation* throughout this phase.

Others-regulation continues and takes centre-stage in the next stage, *joint construction*. Here, referring to the model text or texts, and making use of the knowledge and awareness gained from the exploration of the text, the students work with the teacher to construct their own texts (spoken or written) in the text-type or genre (or, in the case of listening and reading, to construct an *understanding* of the new text). This can take forms varying from teacher-fronted whole-class co-construction of a single text on the board, to small-group or pair construction with the teacher helping each group or pair by turn, to the teacher working with each individual student through conferencing. In the case of writing, as with process approaches, the texts may go through a few rounds of drafting, editing, and re-drafting. The model texts continue to provide object-regulation, while others-regulation comes from not only the teacher but also from other students, as more expert peers guide others, or as students refer each other to features in the models, and to points raised in the text exploration stage.

What is to be noted in both the text exploration and joint construction phases is that while there is much oral interaction taking place, its nature and intention is different from that of most forms of communicative language teaching. Where the interactive activities in the latter are often designed to simulate real life interaction, directed at providing opportunities for talking *in* the language, the talk here is *about* using language, and is focused on a collaborative effort to learn to accomplish a purpose in the language.

The last stage in the Cycle, *individual application*, as the name suggests, requires learners to work individually and independently, for example, in the case of writing, to produce individual essays. Ideally, this is carried out only after the students have successfully produced a jointly constructed text or

understanding of a text. This phase then provides the opportunity for *self-regulation*, the crucial final stage in Vygotsky's model of learning. What each learner produces can, of course, be further re-cycled through further others-regulation (e.g. peer editing, teacher feedback), until the learner attains a desired level of attainment.

LESSON UNIT EXAMPLE

Each lesson unit in the NUCB third-year courses is constructed based on the Curriculum Cycle model. As an example, the first unit in the first semester, 'Survey and Interview Reports', is described.

The entire lesson unit is completed over the course of three to four 90-minute lessons, the pace depending on the students' progress, and was designed to serve secondary purposes of allowing the instructors insights into the students' attitudes to and extent of writing in English, and getting the students to reflect on their own attitudes and learning strategies.

The Context Exploration stage that begins the unit opens with the students working in small groups to simulate a survey. Using a prepared questionnaire on 'Attitudes to Writing' (see Figure 2 below) provided to them, the students interview each other, collate the results in their groups (calculating the percentages for each response), and then report what they think are the most significant figures, through appointed group representatives. Still working in their groups, the students then discuss and write down answers to the following questions: *Why did your teacher ask you to do this survey? Who would be interested in knowing the results? Why? Where are some places where the results can be reported? What are the most important points to include?* On the basis of their answers the instructor then explores with the class why surveys are carried out, draws attention to the fact that the results need usually to be reported in writing, and then discusses possible purposes and audiences that survey reports may be written for.

Survey: ATTITUDES TO WRITING

Name of Interviewer: _____

Name of Respondent: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Q 1: When do you write in English?

a.	*Only* when I am studying English (during lessons, or for homework)	
b.	When I am writing in my diary	
c.	When I am at my part-time job	
d.	When I communicate with foreigners (through letters, e-mail or Internet chat)	
e.	When I write my graduation thesis	
f.	At other times (please tell when):	

Figure 2: Extract from Survey Questionnaire Used by Students

Now prepared for the Text Exploration phase, the students are directed to read the model text 'Reading Materials in the SAC (Self-Access Centre)' found in Appendix A. Salient features of text organization, grammar and vocabulary are highlighted in the margins of the model text in this unit, but in later units, students are gradually guided to make similar notes on the model texts. This is to encourage students to learn to observe texts and learn on their own from their reading. Before the students proceed to examine the textual features more closely, the instructor ensures that they understand the content of the text, and the students then write answers to questions in the unit to reflect on the purpose and audience of the report, discussing this subsequently as a class.

Text exploration begins in earnest with the organization of the text. A jigsaw activity on another survey report similar to the model text is used to heighten the students' awareness of the possible parts of survey reports, and how they may be ordered. Once the students have re-assembled the new report, they are asked to compare it with the model text, and identify the organizational features common to both. These features include both the macro-structure of the texts and the organization of content at the level of the paragraph.

Exploration then moves downwards to the lexico-grammar: that is, both the vocabulary and grammar at the level of cohesive devices, the sentence, and the word. One of the features explored in this unit is the use of reported speech, which is often prominent in survey reports. The instructor gives examples of reported speech sentences, and teaches the basic syntax of reported speech sentences explicitly. Following an example by the instructor, the students are then directed to look for and highlight all instances of reported speech in the model text, marking out the 'reporting' clauses (e.g. "80% of the students said...") and the 'reported' clauses (e.g. "...that they could not understand most of the magazines and articles") clearly. This draws their attention to the common use of reported speech in the genre, as well as provides them further examples of the syntax of reported speech sentences. The students are also further asked to circle all the reporting verbs (i.e. the main verb in each 'reporting' clause expressing the act of projection) and classify them as either 'Saying' (e.g. "said", "explained") or 'Thinking/Feeling' (e.g. "felt", "thought") verbs.

After this is done, the instructor leads a discussion on the *functions* of the observed features – that is, how do they help the writer to achieve his or her purposes in the text? For example, why do writers of survey reports use reported speech? Why are some findings reported using 'Saying' verbs, and others using 'Thinking/Feeling' verbs? It is important to note that the discussion should explore *possibilities* rather than make dogmatic interpretations as to the writer's intentions. What it seeks is to show that the grammar used is a motivated choice to help achieve communicative purposes, rather than a matter of prescription for the genre. Reported speech, and the range of reporting verbs, are, in other words, a set of resources that writers of survey reports can use. To help the students master this possible resource, they are then give sentence writing practice, using concocted figures for some of the items on the 'Attitudes to Writing' questionnaire used in the context exploration phase. Figure 3 shows part of this exercise:

Exercise 6

Below are statements based on the questionnaire on writing that you have completed. The percentage or number of students who have agreed with each statement is given in brackets. Write a reported speech sentence for each statement. Use a different reporting verb for each sentence.

Example
Statement (from Q1): "(I <u>write</u> in English) when I <u>am writing</u> in my diary." (60%)
Reported speech: "60% of the students said that they <u>wrote</u> in English when they <u>were writing</u> in their diaries"

1.   "(I write in English) when I communicate with foreigners."   (70%)

2.   "(I write in English) only when I am studying English." (Only a few students)

3.   "(I write in English) to help others to do something." (40%)

Figure 3

Apart from reported speech and reporting verbs, quantifiers for reporting numbers (e.g. "Most of the students", "80% of the students") as well as vocabulary often found in most survey reports are also explicitly highlighted and taught. The instructor can, of course, employ a variety of different activities and tasks for this, and has discretion as to the range of lexico-grammatical features to cover, but always, the teaching of the grammar and vocabulary is related to their function and use in the genre. In addition, the meta-language or grammatical terminology is also always introduced and used, as this facilitates discussion both during this phase and during the collaborative work in the joint construction stage. The students can also be asked, as homework, to look at more examples of survey reports (either provided by the instructor or to be found by themselves), and take down more examples of the various lexico-grammatical features at work.

Equipped now with an awareness of the organizational possibilities and lexico-grammatical resources at their disposal, the students are now prepared to carry out *joint construction* of their own survey reports. This they do in pairs or small groups, using their findings from the mini-survey in the context exploration stage. Alternatively, each student may write his or her first draft individually, then work with a partner to improve this draft. To provide scaffolding, the students are given a planning template based on the model text (see Figure 4) to guide them in their writing. The students are also encouraged to constantly refer to the model text and their grammar work as they write, and the instructor plays an active role by circulating around the classroom and guiding the students in turn or when they are in need, reminding them constantly about the text organization, appropriate use of reported speech, how they can vary the reporting verbs, and

so on. Each piece of writing goes through more than one draft before it is submitted to the instructor, who then provides further feedback for a final draft to be submitted for grading.

Pre-writing Outline

	Title: _____
Introduction: Background – Why the survey was carried out Method of research Aim of survey: What did you want to find out? Main body – Findings: Q1: Generalization Findings Q2: Generalization Findings Q3: Generalization Findings CONCLUSION: Summary Recommendations: Closing statement:	

Figure 4

Following the Curriculum Cycle, the students should then be given an opportunity *for individual application*. This can be done through students carrying their individual mini-surveys on a topic of their choice, using their own questionnaires, then writing individual reports. However, due to time constraints, the individual application is not carried out within the writing course. Instead, the course assumes that this is carried out in the students' writing of their graduation essay, which may include a section involving a survey. As mentioned, the possible application to their graduation essays is made explicit by the instructor, who may, in addition, advise individual students how the learning in the unit may be used. Efforts are also made to inform tutorial or seminar instructors supervising the graduation essays of the work done in this unit in the writing class.

A FUNCTIONAL VIEW OF GRAMMAR

It can be seen from the description above that grammar instruction is an integral part of the teaching of the genre. The instruction not only is explicit, but also involves some degree of student analysis. However, it differs from more traditional forms of grammar instruction in some very fundamental ways.

To begin with, grammar is not taught in isolation from the communicative functions of the language. It is also neither taught as an end in itself, nor as the central focus of instruction, but as a means to an end – achieving the social purposes of the genre that is the overarching focus of teaching. The most traditional forms of grammar teaching focus on sentence analysis and the learning of prescriptive grammar rules, with the emphasis on producing 'correct' form at the level of the sentence, and little reference to the communicative functions of language. The structuralist approaches that developed in the late 1950's and early 1960's, and emphasized sentence pattern drills, with less or no recourse to explicit teaching of 'rules' while based on more descriptive linguistics, still continue this formal focus and emphasis on accuracy, although most later forms included attempts at fairly artificial 'communicative' practice around the chosen patterns. While of a broad church, the communicative approaches that followed, on the other hand, generally focused on the use of language, emphasizing communicative practice, with grammar either believed to be just learned implicitly in the course of receiving language 'input' or through interaction, or taught as a separate matter. This is reflected in the ongoing debates that still persist today in ELT and SLA (second language acquisition) literature about what the balance should be between 'focus on form' and 'focus on function'. The genre-based material in the NUCB course, on the other hand, views grammatical form as intrinsically linked to communicative function, and seeks to help students understand the links between particular aspects of English grammar and their functions. Moreover, the focus does not remain focused at sentence level, but moves beyond to how sentence-level patterns fit into natural whole texts in communication. In all these senses, the teaching of grammar is 'functional'.

The approach to grammar is influenced by the systemic functional linguistics of Michael Halliday and his associates, whose model of grammar is most definitively described in Halliday (1994) and Halliday and Matthiesen (2004). Butt et al (2000), amongst others, have also produced more teacher-oriented descriptions of the grammar. Essentially, the theory sees language as a system of resources for making meaning in context. Thus, the grammar of a language, or what systemic functional linguists call the 'lexico-grammar', is seen not merely as a set of rules or patterns of syntax, but a set of agreed-on conventions intimately related to possible meanings, determined by *contexts of situation* embedded in *contexts of culture* in which language is used.

To know a language then, is to know the set of grammatical resources – e.g. the range of sentence patterns or word-level grammatical features – that one may choose from, in a particular situation, to achieve a particular purpose. Thus, what is most important to know and teach about grammatical patterns or features are their functions and use in discourse – their meaning potential, what each can achieve in

communication, in what contexts, both situational and cultural, and for what purposes; conversely, when and where each might be used. While accuracy of form remains a legitimate concern, the more critical focus then is to help learners develop knowledge of the range of specific grammatical resources that they may employ for particular tasks. This is illustrated in the focus on reported speech in the lesson unit described earlier: reported speech is often a resource used in such reports to attribute opinions to others (the respondents to the survey) in order to emphasize objectivity.

It should also be noted that the grammar instruction within the approach described does not seek to be comprehensive – what is taught is dependent on what is needed for the genres selected. Instructors are also encouraged in their feedback to students' writing to focus largely on the use of the feature highlighted in each lesson unit, and aim at helping students master these aspects, rather than try to attend to all aspects of the students' grammar in their writing. Assessment criteria in mid- and end-of-semester examinations also focus on these as well as the larger organizational aspects taught, and this is made known to the students.

The tasks and exercises for grammar learning draw on established methods and techniques, in recognition that they each have their place and worth. For instance, in some units, substitution tables to practice particular sentence patterns are used. This, of course, draws on a technique influenced by structuralist approaches, the difference being that the sentence patterns are now learned in the contexts of their natural use in particular genres, and the aim is for the students to put them into immediate use in producing writing in the selected genres. In addition, teachers also explain the functions of such patterns in achieving the purposes of the genres.

Finally, the instruction ideally aims at highlighting the grammatical features taught as likely and very useful, but not mandatory, resources for each genre. However, given that the students are relatively low-level English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) learners, there is insistence that they use the features taught in each unit in the production of their own texts. This is less out of dogmatic prescriptiveness than of pragmatic consideration that the learners would otherwise not be in possession of appropriate grammatical resources. Moreover, for those who do possess other grammatical resources for achieving the genre's purposes, the insistence extends the range of resources they are capable of using. Nevertheless, what is emphasized in the course of instruction is that learning the grammatical features will help them produce writing in the target genre, rather than that failure to use the features constitutes wrong writing in itself.

Although genre-based approaches are increasingly common in ELT, their influence appears to be largely in English as first language and English as a Second Language (ESL) situations, and their use in EFL situations, particularly in the East Asian region, appears to be highly limited. A survey of EFL teaching journals, such as the online Asian EFL Journal (http://www.asian-efl-journal.com) and The Journal of Asia TEFL (http://www.asiatefl.org/journal/main.html) and the Japan Association of Language Teaching's *The Language Teacher*, throws up only very occasional articles relating to or describing genre-based practices. The third-year writing programme at the NUCB therefore represents one initiative in extending genre-based language learning to EFL, especially in Japan. Through describing the programme and documenting the considerations involved, this article aims to provide an example of how and why genre-based teaching can and should be introduced in similar contexts.

Thus far, the experience has been positive, and affirms many of the claims of the merits of genre-based approaches found, for example, in Paltridge (2001: 7-10). In their assignments, most students are able to produce original and coherent texts close to the model texts for each unit, and exhibiting many of the organizational and grammatical features highlighted. The best students produce writing that is not only nearly error-free but also impressively effective in the genre after two drafts. At mid-semester and end-of-semester exams, while understandably more error-prone and with less control, the majority of the students are still able to produce under test conditions at least functionally effective writing in each genre simply

through employment of the features taught, even when some features taught are not produced with entire accuracy. This suggests that they have moved at least some way through Vygotsky's ZPD – the students now have the potential to produce good independent writing at some future point in the genres taught.

Students have also reported that the third-year programme has given them more confidence and security in their own abilities to produce independent writing than their previous writing courses have. In particular, they point to the use of model texts and the teaching of particular grammatical features as very helpful in knowing how to go about writing texts of similar genres. Some have reported that specific learning units have helped them in writing their graduation essays, showing their ability to transfer the learning to other contexts. The instructors, on the other hand, appreciated the consistency of the pedagogical cycle, which at the same time allowed for a variety of tasks and activities. They also expressed much satisfaction at the visible progress of the students towards producing relatively competent writing in the genres taught.

While genre-based teaching is most readily applicable to writing instruction, and has most extensively been used for it, it may be and has been applied to the teaching of the other language skills of listening, speaking and reading, following a similar pattern to that described in this article. Paltridge (2001) discusses and demonstrates the ways in which this may done. In terms of teaching conversation, for example (ibid., pp.33-40), he suggests that it may be based on work done by Eggins and Slade (1997), which demonstrates that casual conversation in English does follow schematic structures and generic patterns of openings and closings, turn taking, topic management and such, realized through particular grammatical features in the same way as written genres. Through using the Curriculum Cycle model, students may be helped in a similar way to manage particular genres of spoken conversation.

There are, of course, potential difficulties and limitations associated with genre-based approaches. Some of these are highlighted in various chapters in Paltridge (2001), and illustrated in Lin (2003), in relation to the implementation of the genre-based English Language syllabus in schools in Singapore. Among these is the potential for instructors to extend rigid prescriptivism to the level of the text, insisting for example, that all instances of writing in a particular genre must conform to one specific structure and set of grammatical features. This can tend to stifle individual expression and possible linguistic innovation. However, it has not been the intention of this article to explore genre-based teaching in full; hence, these issues will not be explored, although readers are reminded that like all approaches to ELT, genre-based approaches are not a panacea or final revelation, and the article does not pretend that they are. Rather, it is hoped that through its description of a writing programme and the considerations involved in its construction, the article has pointed a way towards how effective language instruction may be designed through application of what is believed to be sound theory.

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APPENDIX A

II. LET'S LOOK AT A MODEL:

a. A possible article in a student magazine

Text Organization	Text	Grammar & Vocabulary
Introduction: Background – Why the survey was carried out Method of research Aim of survey: 2 Questions	**Reading Materials in the SAC** Many students often complain that there is not enough interesting reading material in English at our university's Self Access Centre (SAC). In order to understand why they say this, and to help to improve the situation, my seminar group and I conducted a survey at the end of last semester. Using a simple questionnaire, we interviewed 30 second-year English major students. We wanted to find out what they were not happy about, and what they would like to have in the SAC.	Vocabulary for surveys & interviews: "conducted", "survey", "questionnaire", "interviewed"
Main body – Findings: Q1 – 1st answer: 'Biggest' finding first	The biggest problem seems to be that the magazines and printed articles found in the SAC are too difficult. 80% of the students said that they could not understand most of the magazines and articles. Only one student reported that he had no difficulty reading any of the magazines and articles.	Topic sentences: Start with the topic ("The biggest problem…", "Another problem …", "Concerning what they would like to read…")
Q1 – 2nd answer: Next biggest finding	Another problem is that the storybooks are not suitable for our students. More than two thirds of the students felt that the books were too childish, and 50% reported that there were too many British 'classics' in simplified forms.	Reporting findings: ❑ Reported speech: note sentence structure (e.g. "X said that …") & reporting verbs ("said", "reported", "felt", "asked" etc.)
Q2 – 1st answer: 'Biggest' answer first	Concerning what they would like to read, most of the students asked for more magazines and articles about economics and business. Some of them explained that there were very few of such magazines and articles, and since they were business students, they would like to read about these topics.	❑ Quantifiers to indicate no. of respondents ("80% of the students", "Only one student" etc)
Q2 – 2nd answer: Next biggest answer	About three quarters of the boys said they would like to have more detective or action novels, while most of the girls requested more romance novels. Nearly all the students agreed that there should be more storybooks set in Asian situations.	
CONCLUSION: ❑ Summarize what findings suggest – make recommendations ❑ Closing statement	In short, our survey suggests, firstly, that the SAC should replace the present magazines and articles with simpler ones. Secondly, the SAC needs to provide more magazines and articles about economics and business. Finally, there should be more detective and romance novels, as well as Asian novels in English, instead of only simplified British 'classics'. [If all this is done, students will find the SAC even more useful than now.]	Use "firstly", "secondly" etc to list Use modals ("should", "needs to")