

PUT IT IN WRITING

Context, text and language

Joanne Rossbridge with Kathy Rushton
Preface by Beverly Derewianka



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Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA)
Laura St, Newtown, NSW 2042, Australia
PO Box 3106, Marrickville Metro, NSW 2204
Ph: (02) 8020 3900
Fax: (02) 8020 3933
Email: info@petaa.edu.au
Website: www.petaa.edu.au

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Preface

Put it in writing provides a very practical and engaging guide to teaching students to successfully meet the writing demands of the Australian Curriculum.

Joanne Rossbridge and Kathy Rushton build on a long tradition of teaching writing from a functional perspective. Some thirty years ago, Australia saw the beginnings of a fresh way of looking at language and literacy, inspired by the work of Professor Michael Halliday. Research had shown that primary students were writing a very limited range of texts – primarily recounts of personal experience (eg, Martin 1985; Rothery 1996; Christie & Martin 1997). Researchers set about examining the various purposes for which students needed to use language across the different areas of the curriculum, identifying a number of key genres such as procedures, narratives, explanations, information reports, recounts and arguments. Drawing on such research, in 1990 PETAA (then PETA) published what came to be known as ‘the pink book’, *Exploring how texts work*, making the findings available to classroom practitioners.

In the years between then and now, genre theory has continued to evolve and *Put it in writing* reflects these developments. From the basic half dozen genres canvassed in *Exploring how texts work*, further investigation has distinguished a much more detailed array of genre families. Recounts, for example, might include recounting what happened in a science experiment, or recounting an episode from history, or recounting the events in a person’s life, or recounting a sequence from an imaginary or literary perspective.

While early versions of genre theory described how different genres unfold in characteristic broad stages, *Put it in writing* picks up on more recent developments, recognising that within each stage we can identify minor phases. Within the orientation stage of a narrative, for example, we might find phases introducing the characters, or establishing the setting and mood, or describing an initiating event, or giving a flashback. While the stages are relatively obligatory to the success of the genre, the phases provide an element of flexibility: there is a choice as to whether to include them or not and in which order – or even to insert unexpected phases or phases that respond to a particular task. *Put it in writing*, for

example, describes how *Don't let the pigeon drive the bus!* includes phases of interaction between the pigeon and the reader, phases of reaction by the pigeon, and phases of internal reflection.

By considering the phases in a text, we are better able to identify the language choices typical of the phase and therefore to determine a potential focus for teaching. An interaction phase in a narrative, for example, will generally involve dialogue: choice of saying verb (usually in past tense), use of direct speech (including appropriate punctuation), speech functions such as questions, statements and commands, an indication of how something is said (eg, *in a nasty snarl*), and so on.

Put it in writing also reflects recent advances in genre theory regarding multimodal texts, as outlined in Jon Callow's recent PETAA publication, *The shape of texts to come*. Genre theory provides a set of tools for analysing images (still and moving) and the relationship between images and written text. In relation to *Silver Buttons*, for example, Rossbridge and Rushton introduce students to notions such as shot distance and how visual features function in relation to verbal text.

Another recent development in genre theory is an examination of how language is used interpersonally to express attitudes: sharing feelings and opinions, evaluating the qualities of things, and judging human behaviour. These resources are explored in historical recounts from *Australians all* in terms of how individuals and groups of people are named and the cultural and historical significance.

Put it in writing is a welcome and timely contribution to the teaching of writing, embodying the principles associated with a functional approach: a view of language as a system of choices; a model of language in context; and a commitment to equity so that all students are supported to achieve learning outcomes through explicit teaching.

Beverly Derewianka
Professorial Fellow
University of Wollongong

Put it in writing: Context, text and language

The development of this book was inspired by the ground breaking work of Beverly Derewianka who wrote *Exploring how texts work* (1990) which gave primary teachers the tools for working with genres in their classrooms. The influence of her work, with its focus on the purpose, structure and language features of a range of texts, has meant that many teachers now have the language to talk explicitly about texts in their classrooms. The aim of *Put it in writing* is to build upon that work and provide models, guides and processes to help teachers and their students give serious and careful thought to the texts they are reading and writing. In expanding upon the contribution of *Exploring how texts work*, this book investigates a range of genres across curriculum areas. It incorporates the notion of stages with the flexibility of phases for looking at text structure when engaging with multimodal and visual texts. In addition, it further draws on a functional approach to language including more recent developments based on appraisal theory. In doing so, knowledge and processes for implementing the Australian Curriculum are supported.

This book offers models to support the teaching of writing and is organised around the strands of knowledge about texts and language and support for the learner. These aspects are interrelated (Figure 1), as having knowledge about text and language is not sufficient unless it can be transferred into pedagogical knowledge (Myhill, Jones & Watson, 2013). The ideas in this introduction provide the framework within which we have selected and analysed texts and provided practical teaching examples.

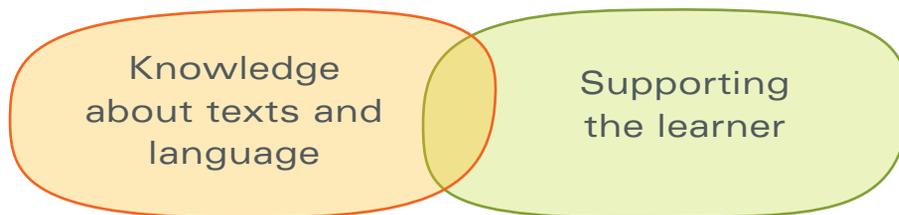


Figure 1
Interrelationship between knowledge about texts and supporting the learner

Knowledge about texts and language

The *Australian Curriculum: English* acknowledges the importance of knowledge about texts and language, with ‘Language: knowing about the English language’ (ACARA, 2012), being one of the three interrelated strands organising the content. Knowing about texts and language requires knowledge of how language works to make meaning. Providing students with such knowledge gives them both access to and makes explicit, the valued texts found in schooling. A functional approach to language including genre theory (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, Christie, 2005, Martin & Rose, 2012, Derewianka & Jones, 2012) underpins the development of knowledge about language and how it works.

Teacher knowledge is critical for supporting students to write texts using a variety of language modes. An understanding of a functional model of language and genre theory ensures teachers are equipped to explicitly support students with metalanguage that can enable students to talk about the language choices in texts composed across curriculum contexts. Talk and reflection based on language as a system of meanings has been seen to improve student writing (Williams, 2005; Myhill, Jones & Watson, 2013b). The *Australian Curriculum: English* (2015) supports this approach stating:

By developing a body of knowledge about these patterns and their connections, students learn to communicate effectively through coherent, well-structured sentences and texts. They gain a consistent way of understanding and talking about language, language-in-use and language-as-system, so they can reflect on their own speaking and writing and discuss these productively with others.

A functional model

In each section of this book models are provided to show how teacher knowledge about texts and language is developed through an analysis of texts using a functional approach. In adopting a functional model the emphasis is placed on choices for making meaning based on the context of a text. This knowledge is then used for planning how to use the modelled texts to support learners to compose texts. Modelled texts are analysed based on context and social purpose or genre, field, tenor and mode as well as stages and phases of texts.

Context

Meanings and choices in texts are determined by the social, cultural and historical factors underlying the situational and broader cultural context. In schooling this is important, as particular texts are valued in the educational context and in different subject areas. Spoken and written language as well as visual choices may differ depending on the context.

Social purpose/genre

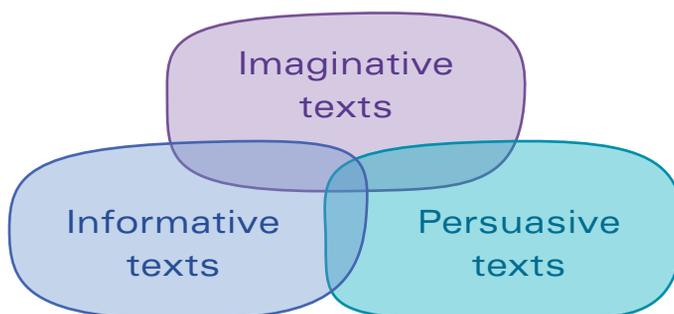
The cultural context of a text relates to the discourse in which it is situated. In this book it is educational discourse which is valued. Within this cultural context there are a variety of purposes for using language such as narrating a fairytale in English, recounting experiments in Science, or persuading an audience to a way of thinking about historical events in History. These are referred to as genres (or sometimes text types or types of texts). Much research has been conducted on the teaching of genres in schools (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). To identify the genre of a text the social purpose needs to be identified – to explain, to instruct, to describe, etc. The genre is a way of achieving the social purpose with the social purpose reflecting the overall goal of the text.

A genre has a typical text structure that unfolds across the text to achieve its social purpose. Focusing only on the stages or text structure of a text is problematic as it is too simplistic and potentially formulaic. Often the genre of a text may seem problematic as sometimes texts may have multiple purposes depending on their contexts. These are sometimes referred to as hybrid texts or ‘macrogenres’.

The *Australian Curriculum: English* places texts into three broad categories: imaginative, informative and persuasive. The three sections in this book have been organised around these broad purposes for using language (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Categories of texts



In working with these categories teachers can draw on the significant work of the genre movement to consider the context and articulate the purposes and features of particular texts. A text may be categorised as informative, however its purpose needs to be discussed explicitly and in context as, for example, informative texts can achieve a range of purposes. These can range from instructing and recounting to describing and explaining. Due to the complex function of some texts, they may fit into more than one of these categories and may have multiple purposes.

The register of a text is the relationship between the text and its context. The main factors in the context are the field (subject matter), tenor (roles and relationships) and mode (channel of communication). This is reflected in the *Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA, 2012):

English uses standard grammatical terminology within a contextual framework, in which language choices are seen to vary according to the **topics at hand**, the nature and proximity of **the relationships between the language users**, and the **modalities or channels of communication** available.

The three key substrands in the Language strand in the *Australian Curriculum: English* have been developed on an understanding of register. They are: *Expressing and developing ideas*; *Language for interaction*; *Text structure and organisation* reflecting concepts of field, tenor, and mode.

When working with texts, it is strongly recommended that teachers are familiar with the relationship between context (genre and register) and the choices made in creating a text. The social purpose and genre of a text determine the overall structure, while combinations of the register variables of field, tenor and mode influence the language choices in a particular situation. These understandings are key to developing students' resources for making choices when writing. For this reason the field, tenor and mode of each modelled text has also been analysed within the models across the book.

Field (What is the subject matter?)

The field is the topic of the text and involves *Expressing and developing ideas*. Within this book the field of a text will be determined by the curriculum or subject context. Language used for representing subject matter may range from dealing with everyday, concrete, non-specialised subject matter to more technical or abstract subject matter, as students move between subject areas and levels of schooling. For example, in English we are more likely to see texts about personal experience while in Science a text may be technical such as when writing about natural phenomena.

Tenor (Who is involved and what is the relationship?)

The tenor of a text is related to the roles and relationships when *Interacting with others*. Tenor can be influenced by factors such as age, gender, social status, expertise etc. Choices will also be reflected by the nature of contact between participants such as the familiarity, frequency and feelings of those involved. In school contexts, students are often required to write as experts for an audience they never have nor will ever meet, particularly as writing becomes more academic in nature. When working with students we can consider engagement with the audience through the adoption of points of view, the expression of opinions, sharing of feelings and the judgement of behaviour.

Mode (What is the channel of communication?)

The mode of a text refers to the organisational features for creating cohesive texts through *Text structure and organisation* and reflects discourse which may range from spoken to written-like language. The mode may range from spoken-like, spontaneous texts to more dense, written-like, planned and carefully crafted texts often valued at school. The mode of a text may also be visual or a combination of visual and verbal text. Due to the contextual influences on texts, particularly with regard to technology in recent times, choices made in representing meanings in various modes should be considered (Callow, 2013). Texts have become more multimodal in nature than the genres or text types first identified as critical to schooling success (Martin & Rose, 2008). For this reason it is all the more important to look at the choices made in texts within context.

Text structure and phases

By developing talk and knowledge about texts at the level of context, genre and register, choices at the text structure level can be considered in more critical and purposeful ways. For example, the typical stages of a narrative are often described as orientation, complication and resolution. However, when looking at less traditional contexts and forms we may see variation in such stages. Within the stages of a text, phases can be identified and described in greater detail in terms of the role they are performing within the stages. 'Stages are the relatively broad stretches of text that are characteristic of most texts belonging to a particular genre. The phases are much more flexible and vary from text to text, depending on the particular topic or audience' (Derewianka & Jones, 2012, p. 116).

Again, if taking the narrative example, phases such as description of a setting and introduction of characters may occur at the beginning of a narrative. Alternatively events and a character's reaction could be phases that a writer draws upon in order to achieve that stage of the text.

Using modelled texts to develop metalanguage

When interacting with texts in context it becomes clear that a metalanguage for talking about texts is required. To acknowledge the relationship between form and function both traditional and functional terms will be used throughout the book, as there is an emphasis on talking about language use in context, and in particular, choices available when writing texts. Much conversation occurs at the group level when considering *Expressing and connecting ideas*. Noun groups will be described as naming the participants in a text; verb groups represent the processes in which the participants are involved and adverbials tell about the circumstantial detail surrounding the actions such as where, when and how. When considering *Interacting with others*, resources for discussing evaluation and attitude are drawn upon as well as the use of speech functions to show roles and relationships between a writer and audience. Discussion of *Text structure and organisation* uses resources for considering aspects of cohesion such as connectives and word associations, or chains across texts. By developing a shared metalanguage to explore the relationship between context and text, the classroom becomes a place of reflection and critical analysis of language choices.

For further detail on the grammar required for developing a shared metalanguage it is suggested that this book be read with reference to *A new grammar companion* (Derewianka, 2011) and *Grammar and meaning* (Humphrey, Droga & Feez, 2012). As indicated by Humphrey, Droga and Feez (2012), talk about language as a system requires a 'toolkit'. This can be shared between students and teachers and fostered in classrooms with conversations initiated, developed and extended around contexts, texts and their features. When students respond to the texts of others by drawing on a toolkit they can then reflect on their own texts and are better able to develop and enhance their own compositions.

Figure 3 demonstrates how the field, tenor and mode are expressed through language choices. This includes potential metalanguage for

discussing both verbal and visual choices made across modes of texts and conceptualises grammar as a descriptive tool for depicting how language works in context. The functional model involves discussion and reflection on language choices which sets up a particular pedagogy placing the focus on pedagogical tools rather than just teaching grammar discretely and out of context (Myhill, Jones, Watson & Lines, 2013).

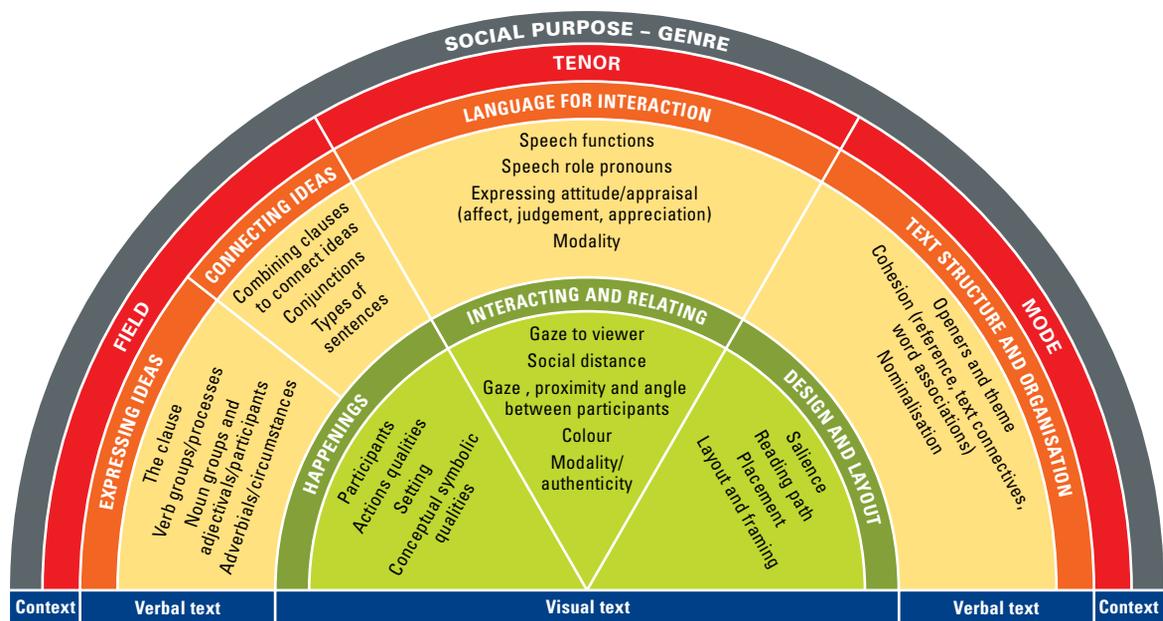


Figure 3 Connecting context to language choices in verbal and visual texts (Adapted from Derewianka 2011; Humphrey, Droga & Feez 2012; Callow, 2013)

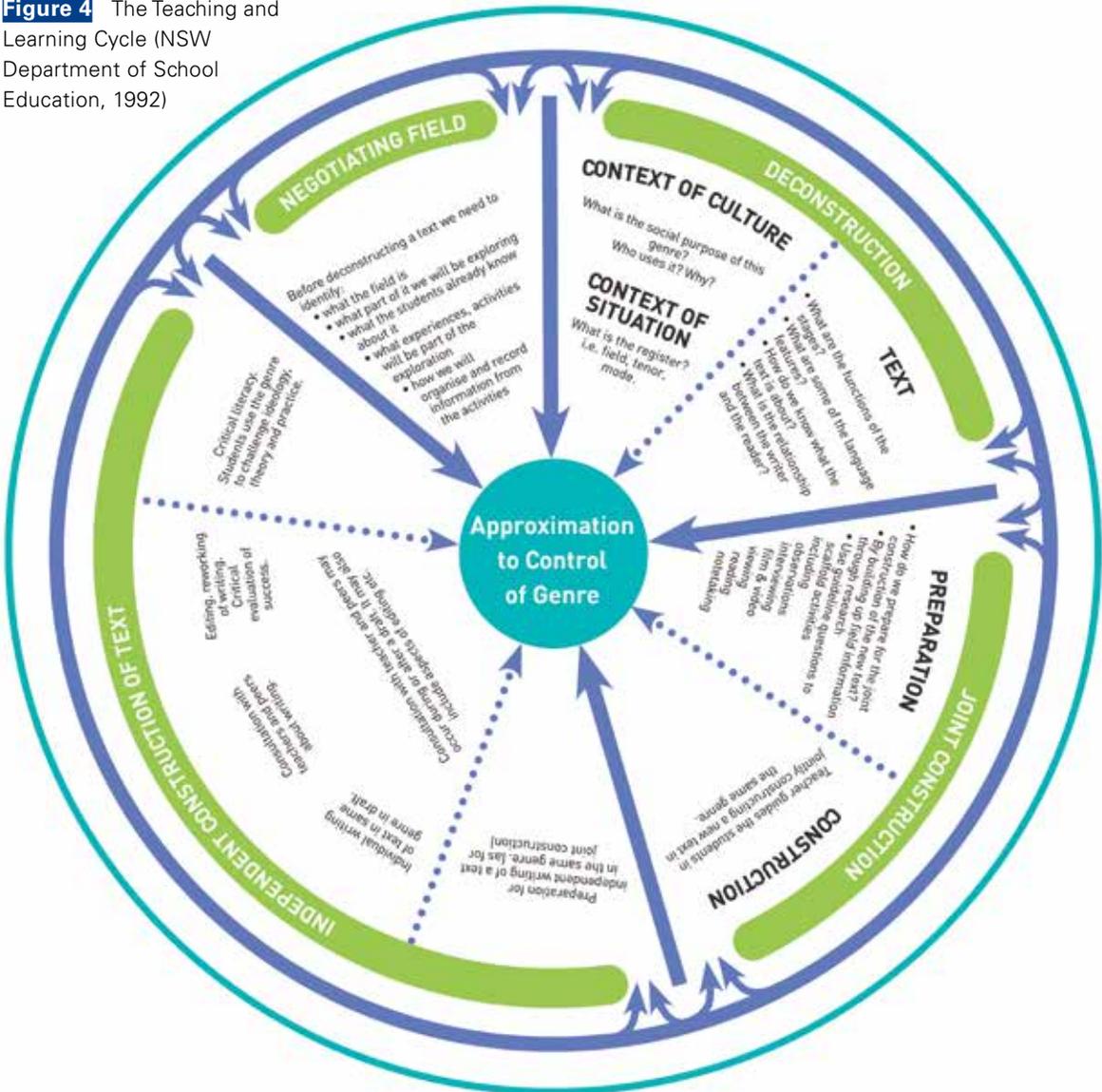
Supporting the learner

To teach writing successfully, careful planning decisions need to be made based on the analysis of the features of texts students will write and consequently the selection of appropriate models for writing. From this strong foundation, teaching and learning sequences can be developed which will effectively support learners. The models in this book have used the teaching and learning cycle to design teaching sequences with a spotlight or focus on a particular stage in the cycle provided within each model.

The teaching and learning cycle

The 'Teaching and Learning Cycle', sometimes known as 'The Curriculum Cycle' was developed by the Sydney School genre theorists working with teachers in the Metropolitan East Region of Sydney's Disadvantaged Schools Program in the 1980s (Humphrey & Macnaught, 2011). The cycle (see Figure 4) supports the understandings and skills that need to be developed in learning to write. The stages in the cycle are negotiating

Figure 4 The Teaching and Learning Cycle (NSW Department of School Education, 1992)



or building the field, deconstructing text and jointly and independently constructing text. The purpose of the cycle is to scaffold students as they move from high support to the need for less support and as they develop control of subject matter and language choices in the written mode. The focus on handing control over to the students at the site of the ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (Vygotsky & Kozulin, 1986) is evident as teachers continually monitor the support needed during the teaching cycle as they move back and forth through stages of the cycle based on student need. The cycle is a form of macro scaffolding (Hammond, 2001) as teachers consider support through the planning, designing and sequencing of teaching strategies. At the micro level further scaffolding is provided as teachers and students interact around texts in context, their subject matter and particularly their language features.

Building the field

Before considering writing, students need to become acquainted with the subject matter as well as the discourse of the subject. This may involve undertaking a range of experiences and engaging with a variety of texts. Building the field must obviously start before writing begins but it is an ongoing process that develops as students read, write and talk about the subject and refine ways to express their ideas. This process continues during text deconstruction, joint construction and preparation for independent construction. Throughout this book we have used an adaptation of the teaching and learning cycle to show how field is continually built during all phases of text composition (Figure 5).

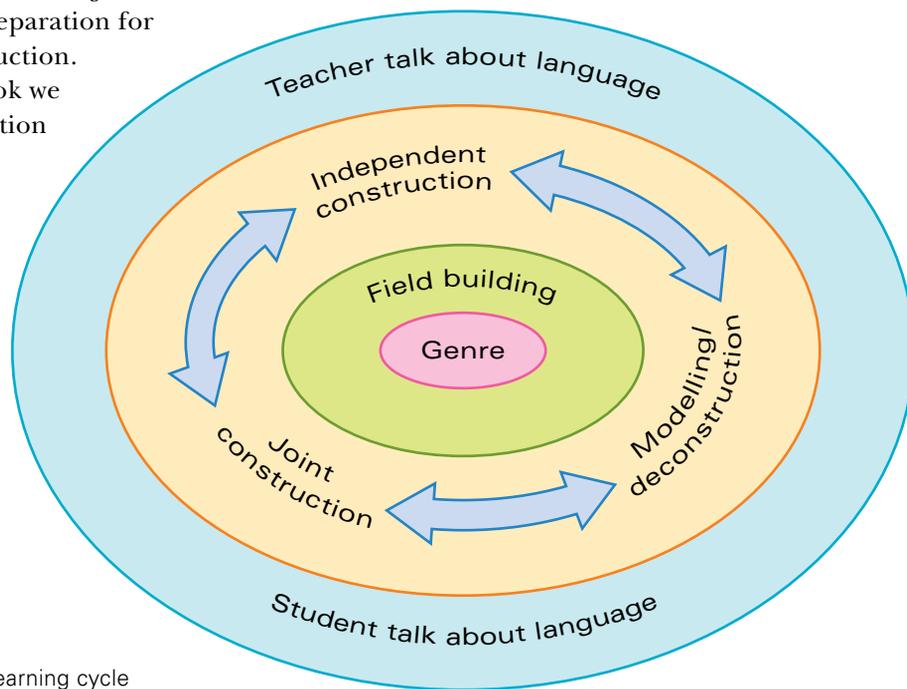


Figure 5

Adapted teaching and learning cycle

Text deconstruction/modelled reading

During the deconstruction stage the teacher guides the students to identify the purpose of the text and how the stages and phases of the text help achieve the purpose. Additionally, language features are discussed which are relevant to the field, tenor or the mode rather than just the field or subject matter only. The preparation and selection of texts at the point of deconstruction has a significant impact upon the teacher-guided conversation during joint construction. Metalanguage and critical literacy can only be developed if there is something interesting to discuss. So, the modelled text must be rich, relevant and engaging. It is important to choose texts that will show appropriate language choices for the purpose and genre. Such texts should build students' knowledge at all levels of text – from whole text, to paragraph, sentence, group and word level (Derewianka, 2011, p. 11). It is important to note that the texts engaged with when reading to build the field will differ to the texts chosen for deconstruction, as the latter will be based on the genre and not necessarily the subject matter. In some of the examples in this book texts have been selected in order to build the field while in others they are based on the genre students are required to write.

Joint construction

Joint construction involves the teacher and students jointly constructing a text similar to the modelled text. There is a balance between the students contributing ideas and the teacher guiding or demonstrating how to develop a coherent text from these ideas. Interactive discussion (see Figure 6) is key during the joint construction as language choices as well as subject matter will be the main focus and these need to be evaluated during the writing process. The purpose is not to develop a finished piece of writing; rather the teacher's focus is on the process of writing and on making the thinking surrounding that process explicit and transparent. Most often a jointly constructed text will need to be developed over several sessions especially when students start to develop longer texts in upper primary classrooms. The choice of writing media is also important, as the students should be given plenty of opportunity to 'share the pen' or 'command the keyboard' and physically as well as verbally share in the construction of the text.

The teacher's role is to use strategies that focus the students' attention on their language choices and to prompt and guide them through questions and statements. Spoken language is central to the activity and in this scaffolded process the teacher is able to both challenge and support

the students (Hammond, 2001). Through paraphrasing and recasting (Gibbons, 2002) the teacher is able to provide the support that is needed at the point of learning. The joint construction provides maximum support in a guided experience that helps individual students to make informed decisions about all aspects of writing from text structure, punctuation and spelling to choices at the level of clause, sentence and paragraph.

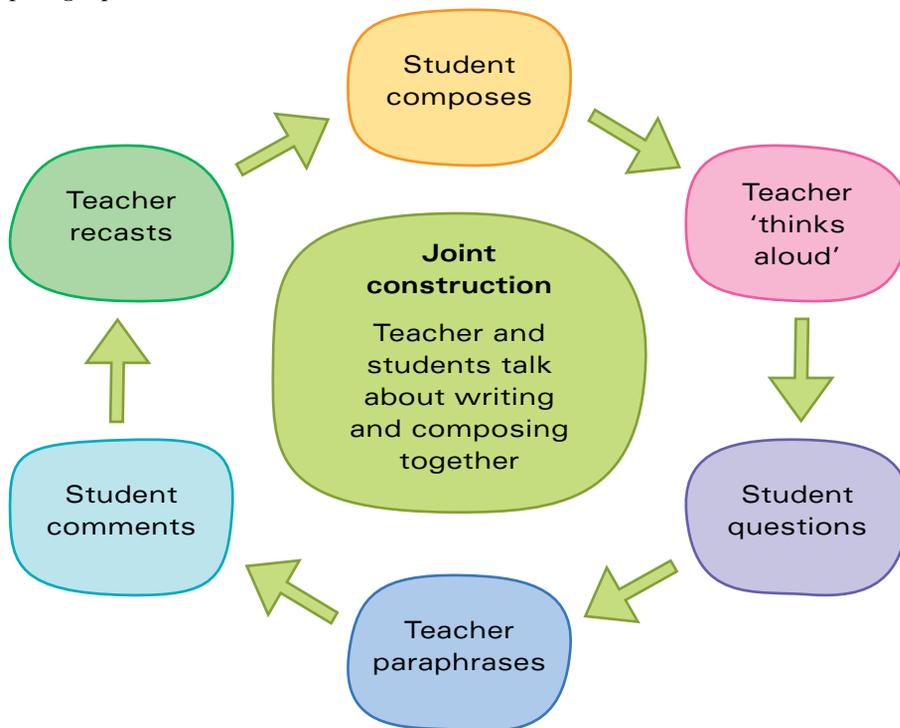


Figure 6

Elements for supporting students in joint construction (Rossbridge & Rushton, 2014)

Independent construction

At the point of independent construction, students can approach the development of a text similar to the one that has been modelled and/or jointly constructed. This may be on their own or with a partner, as they would have at this stage, talked their way into writing (Lemke, 1989). Individual students will have been able to problem solve with peers and the teacher, as mentor, would have answered questions about the subject matter and all the choices they will need to make when writing. Like all other aspects of the teaching and learning cycle the focus for independent writing is not solely on the production of a text as an objective but on supporting students to describe and defend their choices in developing a text.

How to use this book

The purpose of this introduction is to outline the process for developing knowledge about texts and language and then the application of such knowledge in supporting students through careful pedagogical choices. The three sections of the book that follow provide models for working with imaginative, informative and persuasive texts. In each section the models focus on working with texts to write for a particular purpose. Within each model a curriculum context is identified and then a modelled text is analysed in order to show the teacher knowledge required for making choices regarding the use of the modelled text for deconstruction (or field building). Language features are identified and colour coded in the modelled texts in order to highlight the potential language focus and metalanguage that can be developed with students. This knowledge is then applied to a particular focus or ‘spotlight’ on a stage within the teaching and learning cycle, for example field building, deconstruction, joint construction or independent construction. At the end of each model possible steps in the entire teaching and learning cycle are summarised. A summary of the contents of each model in the three sections is presented in the following table.

The choices made in this book are not exclusive but rather indicative of what could be chosen as text and language focuses for students of a particular grade. With the use of rich modelled texts and purposeful writing contexts, the teaching focus and suggestions presented in each model can be adapted across a range of grades. We have used the framework provided by the *Australian Curriculum: English*, looked at language, literature and literacy and noted the ways in which they overlap and inform each other across subject areas and grades.

Appendix 1 provides a table which tracks the development of grammatical knowledge across all the models. This is based on the *Australian Curriculum: English*. Appendix 2 provides a planning proforma which follows the process used for planning to ‘put it in writing’ throughout this book.

Section one			
Writing in the imaginative world			
Subject	English	English	English
Writing	Narrative	Literary recount	Narrative
Reading	<i>Don't let the pigeon drive the bus!</i>	<i>Silver Buttons</i>	<i>Blueback</i>
Language for expressing and connecting ideas		Verb groups (processes) and adverbial/prepositional phrases (circumstances)	
Language for interacting with others	Speech functions: statement, question, offer, command Visual features: speech bubbles, demands, gestures, stance	Visual features: mid/long shots	Figurative language such as simile, metaphor and personification
Language for text structure and organisation			
Spotlight on the teaching and learning cycle	Independent writing	Text deconstruction	Text deconstruction

Section two			
Writing in the informative world			
Subject	Science	Geography	History
Writing	Procedural recount/ experiment report	Comparative report	Historical recount
Reading	<i>Race some beads</i>	<i>The difference between the Amazon and Daintree rainforests</i>	<i>Aliens</i>
Language for expressing and connecting ideas	Action, perceiving and relating verbs/processes, general and specific nouns/ participants, adverbials/ circumstances		Noun groups/ participants
Language for interacting with others			Vocabulary to convey perspective
Language for text structure and organisation		Word associations and conjunctions	
Spotlight on the teaching and learning cycle	Building the field	Joint construction (editing)	Independent writing

Section three			
Writing in the persuasive world			
Subject	English	Science	History
Writing	Discussion	Exposition	Exposition
Reading	<i>Parachute</i>	<i>School drop-off and pick-up zones</i>	'Stolen Child: Mathinna's story'
Language for expressing and connecting ideas		Connecting clauses and conjunctions	
Language for interacting with others	Evaluative vocabulary		
Language for text structure and organisation		Connectives	Nominalisation and passive voice
Spotlight on the teaching and learning cycle	Building the field	Text deconstruction	Independent writing