

Two Approaches to Genre-Based Writing Instruction: A Comparative Study¹

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Abstract

The authors of this paper compare two versions of a micro-level innovation in teaching methodology of a genre-based process approach to writing. The innovation was implemented during the course of the same academic semester to two classes of second-year English-major university students in Japan. The innovation was successful in that students' writing, as measured by pre- and post-treatment t-tests, improved.

The methodology used by both teachers was the same, a genre-based process approach, but it was implemented via two different syllabi, one focusing on a single genre (the academic essay) and the other practicing a number of shorter genre-texts. This paper reports two different types of findings: an evaluation of the innovation in terms of writing attainment by

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means of a statistical analysis of writing produced under test conditions by the students who received the innovation; and qualitative data based on the authors' observations and students' comments to assess the effect of the innovation on students' perceptions about writing. The paper ends with a discussion of syllabus design choices and their implications for students' development as writers, and makes suggestions for pedagogy and for writing course curriculum development.

1. Study Background and Rationale

1.1 Continuing Deficits in English Language Writing Instruction

Exhortations from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology that teachers foster self-expression in writing, newer textbooks that get students to write extended discourse based on their own ideas (e.g. *Writing from Within*, by Kelly and Gargagliano, 2001, two Japan-based native speaker teachers), and an awareness (if perhaps not use) of communicative methodologies would all seem to indicate a loosening of the writing=grammar/translation stranglehold on writing instruction, although how widespread or substantial any changes in instruction are is still not yet clear.

A movement from writing = grammar/translation to writing = "get your own thoughts down in a paragraph or essay" is an improvement, but we believe this latter orientation still leaves a deficit in instruction. Teaching students about "writing from within," i.e. writing where the focus is on the writer, still leaves the student with an impoverished understanding of the dialogic nature of writing, and the social and cultural contexts

and constraints in which writing takes place.

The concept of genre provides a framework for understanding these wider, deeper issues in writing, and without an understanding of genre (and we advocate that students are taught the term), and the emphasis the concept puts on communicative purpose and how one's purposes get expressed and achieved through the use of stabilized social and cultural forms - genre-texts - (Freedman and Medway, 1994), then students are still likely to leave university with an impoverished understanding of, and thus, impaired control over, writing.

1.2 The Case for a Genre-Based Process Methodology in English Language Writing Instruction

The essential advantage of a genre-based process pedagogy over other writing pedagogies is that emphasizing the notion of genre in writing promotes not only linguistic skills and self-expression but also *rhetorical awareness*. A genre pedagogy sets out explicitly to students from the outset that they as writers are just one element in a configuration: a writer writes in response to a situation, which in their case is individual and particular - an "event", but which also represents an instance of a situation type; a particular type of situation has its typical participants who respond purposefully but in a typified way through genres: "comparable situations occur, prompting comparable responses" (Bitzer, 1968: 13).

Genres represent tendencies in communication, *not* fixed language forms; recurring language forms are only the surface manifestations of communicative strategies, and these are strategies which have a history: the preceding tradition of previous responses constrains linguistic choices

in any future responses.

As for combining the notion of genre with a process approach, a process approach is surely our best approximation, methodologically, of the actual process of writing, and the drafting and feedback cycles of a process approach make explicit the writing's dialogic: the students see responses from a reader (here, the teacher responding in a sincere and non-authoritarian way to global points before addressing errors of language or mechanics) to what they have written. Moreover, a process approach overturns students' misconceptions that the clean copy of a finished product is an instant creation, and it liberates them to make mistakes, by "telling" students that these mistakes are a necessary part of making a good piece of writing - if even Shakespeare crossed stuff out, how much more necessary/unavoidable is it when you are a student writing in a second language?

To employ a cliché, combining a genre-based methodology with a process approach should provide students with the best of both worlds: because particular forms recur in an exemplar of a given genre, second language students are sensitized to forms, while the process approach part of the methodology militates against prescriptiveness in teaching these recurring language forms through the drafting process: students use drafts to approximate and acquire forms, but careful and sensitive feedback from the teacher should allow students to take ownership of their writing through drafting.

A further advantage of the drafting process of the process methodology is that it promotes a nurturing in second language writers of the implicit knowledge that first language students already have, through

inculcation in their culture, of genres in their language. This is because the process of drafting and the process of dialogue with the instructor allow time for L2 students to become acquainted with, and then deepen their knowledge of, the target language cultural and social contexts of writing within an approach whose very *raison d'être* was a revolt against prescriptivism and "instant" writing produced for teacher evaluation.

Both a process approach and a genre orientation to writing, then, prioritize the raising of awareness in students as to what writing itself is and what the possible elements of the contexts of a writing situation are: thus students will learn to understand that there are choices to be made at each stage of their writing in terms of language forms, organization and structure, rhetorical strategy and audience.

Consciousness of these forms and strategies - genres - is a prerequisite for successful written communication in the world outside the university (Anderson, 1993): awareness of them is thus a means to empowerment if they can be managed and controlled by learners.

1.3 The Genre-Based Process Methodology Adopted in This Study

There are three main schools of genre pedagogy², mostly centered in

² Genre pedagogies come in for criticism from proponents of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) because they tend to give explicit instruction and explanation about the genres that exist now rather than emphasizing explanations about how genres are "receptacles", if you will, of power, i.e. they carry, in their language, the established "naturalized" ways of talking/writing of elites. Advocates of genre like ourselves acknowledge this criticism but argue that students need to understand and control the established ways of communicating first, before they go on to express other, different possibilities. We also think that genres grow up even in the politically aware world of CDA, and that these can be just as constraining in the worldviews they express and the knowledge they permit to be carried as the so-called established genres.

the West: the North American New Rhetoricians, the Australian Sydney School (based on Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics, or SFL) and the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) school, which started in British universities and has since spread to other areas of the world. The New Rhetoricians have until recently been teaching mainly L1 students, and perhaps because of this, and the dominance of the process approach, have focused less on linguistic forms and more on teaching about and explaining the macro social contexts in which writing occurs and for which it is produced. The Sydney School and ESP pedagogies focus on linguistic forms, the former because of the dominance of SFL, the latter because it grew out of a need to teach overseas graduates, already experts in their field, how to produce fairly quickly the linguistic forms and structures of English university and professional texts.

The genre-based process methodology adopted by the teachers in this study does not conform exactly to any of the three established genre pedagogies because we consciously wanted to combine it with a process approach for the reasons outlined in 1.2 above, and because we adapted elements from each of the schools to fit our particular second language, formal instruction, Japanese university, inexperienced student-writer context.

In our methodology, we started out by asking students to write in response to a particular situation and/or topic. Only after the students came back with their own ideas on paper did we introduce the genre element, i.e. we then began getting students to shape their writing using the forms, structures and strategies of the genre they were asked to write in. We began explaining genre to the students with discussion of the macro

considerations of audience and social context (i.e. more typical of the approach of the New Rhetoricians). We kept explaining the "big picture" in each class and throughout the drafting process, and as students came closer to the target genre, we then focused on language form explanation and instruction.

Now, the Sydney School of genre pedagogy advocates the explicit teaching of grammar (specifically systemic functional grammar) in writing instruction. The Sydney School systemic teaching and learning cycle (see Hammond et al., 1972) begins with teachers presenting models of the genre to be taught/learned and then teachers *scaffold* (Bruner, 1975; Cazden, 1978, cited in Paltridge, 2001) student writing, i.e. *co-construct*, the text, by providing support with grammar and structure as the students *start* to write in a particular genre.

This cycle could be seen as representing a kind of process, in that students are expected to draft, and increasingly approximate and then control, a particular text, but we take issue with this particular pedagogy for a number of reasons. First, models can be useful, but we disagree with presenting them at the outset because a) it is too easy for teaching to then become prescriptive and teacher centred (Kress, 1993, cited in Raimes, 1998) and b) students are likely to focus more on approximating the model than engaging cognitively with the writing situation. In this way, copying the model increases the likelihood of students substituting a set of work procedures for a conceptual understanding of the task (see Paris and Byrne, 1989). Another objection we have is that focusing on grammar and collaborating with someone else is not what happens when people really write; also, starting out writing with others removes the chances for the

creative sparks of thinking about a topic and situation for the first time to fly: we believe a first draft contains the essence of what the student first thought when encountering a new topic and situation, that this essence continues through successive drafts and thus constitutes a part of student ownership of their writing. Finally, we believe that putting the focus back on grammar, which the Sydney School approach does, is unhelpful for Japanese students because of their background. By this we mean that although Japanese students may be comfortable with a grammar focus initially, they are likely to have a different mind-set about it than students in Australia: for Japanese students, grammar has hitherto been prescriptive and inculcated in terms of mistakes and the avoidance of these at all costs. Starting out on a writing task from the viewpoint of grammar is likely to congeal and compound students' misconceptions about writing = grammar (see 1.1 above).

1.4 The Genre-Based Process Methodology as Innovation

Examination of the students' first year syllabi, first year writing textbooks and talks with the students themselves allow us to claim that the genre-based process methodology adopted in this study represented an innovation: neither group of students had been taught using this approach, i.e. no one had experience of writing genres or of writing them using drafts. The commitment to sustained, explicit explanation of discourse patterns on the part of the teachers and dialogues with students about genre contexts and participants were also new. Another novel element, which we decided to make an integral part of the methodology, was that students were asked to give written feedback to the teachers at certain

stages of the course in order to: 1) provide a private forum in which the dialogue about genre and writing started by the teachers in the classroom could be sustained; 2) help teachers gauge student reactions to the innovation; and 3) see if students were enjoying their writing tasks.

2. Participants in the Study

2.1 The Students

Group A was a class of 24 second-year English majors at a large university in western Japan, 17 females and 7 males. The course was a compulsory 90-minute lesson a week "English Composition" (*eisakubun*, or 英作文) class, and the period of the study was the first semester of a year-long course. A third-year elective course in essay writing presented for the possibility that the students would rejoin the same instructor for another full year of writing study.

Group B was a class of 23 second-year English-literature majors (21 females and 2 males) at a small university in the same city. This course was a compulsory 90-minute lesson a week "Writing Skills" (*raitingu sukiru*, or ライティング・スキル) class, of only one semester in duration; in the subsequent semester the students would be moving on to a different writing teacher. A third year elective writing course was available to these students also.

Both groups had already received two semesters of compulsory English composition instruction in their first year of university.

2.2 The Teachers

Teacher A is a white British female in her thirties, with a number of years of experience in Japan teaching English writing and speaking at the tertiary level. Her teaching is informed by the pragmatic British tradition, which emphasizes preparation for tasks and challenges which students are likely to face in their adult lives³. She also has fairly extensive experience herself as a second language learner-writer, and feels this helps her understand the challenges faced by her students when writing in a language not their own. This background helped shape the syllabus she developed (see 3.2.1 and Appendix I below), which centered on the writing of an extended academic essay⁴, a genre she finds well-suited to the development of conceptual and analytical thinking skills.

Teacher B is a white American male in his thirties, also with several years of experience teaching both oral and written English at Japanese universities. In addition, he has taught creative writing in America to L1 students, and his own educational experience is a blend of academic and fine-arts studies. It is fair to say that this has influenced his teaching philosophy, as has the longstanding American educational emphasis on creativity and self-expression. This background, and the fact that his teaching situation at the university allowed him to teach a semester-length

³ The British pragmatic tradition is often characterized as being concerned to prepare students for the world of work, but in its best incarnation, the tradition advocates that students learn how to think creatively and independently first and foremost as human beings and then secondly as social actors at work (and in theory, creative, independent thinkers should produce better work!).

⁴ In the first semester, students would be asked simply to write two essays. The teacher explained that producing an academic essay would be the final goal of the course, and students carried out their own research for these first essays, but in this first semester there was no systematic teaching of research techniques or academic essay conventions such as reference sections.

course, influenced the syllabus he developed (see 3.2.2 and Appendix II below), one which stands in marked contrast to that of Teacher A: a creativity-centered course in which students write shorter texts in a series of different genres, and engage in purposeful (though simulated) correspondence with an entity outside the classroom.

Finally, both teachers are relatively proficient in Japanese, so it was possible for their students to communicate with them in that language if they so desired.

3. Study Design and Procedure

3.1 Overview

Before giving an overview of the study design, we need to point out that first and foremost, in this study we did what we were going to do naturally as teachers anyway, i.e. enact the plans we had made, the syllabi, which we thought would be most useful in making our students better at writing. We collected data for statistical analysis essentially to confirm our belief that our methodology was effective in improving student writing, and the qualitative data of logged teacher observations and students' comments was gathered to improve our teaching practices by making sure that the teachers' opinions about how the innovation was going jibed with the students' perceptions of the instruction they were being given.

This study lasted for one semester only because of the two teachers' different second-year writing course timetables: as noted in 2.1 above, Group A would continue with the same teacher for the second semester while group B would be taught by a different teacher for the second

semester.

On the first day of class, students were given a pre-treatment writing task. The students were given one hour to answer a question adapted from the Cambridge First Certificate examination, and they were not allowed to use a dictionary. The *same task* was used and administered under the same conditions, post-treatment. The task had a single question, asking students to submit an *article for a magazine aimed at young people* (and the word *article* was underlined in the task question). In the article, the students were to explain the most significant changes that have taken place in Japan since the time their grandparents were young. The dramatic change that the nation underwent in the twentieth century is prominent in the national consciousness, so this topic was chosen on the rationale that most students would be able to say something about the topic.

After the first semester had finished, all four sets of essays were mixed together and evaluated blind by both teachers, using the ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al 1981). Inter-rater reliability was calculated for the total ESL Profile score of each student. After acceptable rater-reliability was achieved, the scores from the raters were averaged to create a single overall score for each student's piece of writing. Next, 2 tailed t-tests were used to compare both groups to see if they were statistically different from each other pre- and post-treatment, and 1 tailed t-tests were conducted to test for statistical differences between an individual group's performance pre-and post-treatment.

In order to gauge students' perceptions and feelings about the course, as noted above (see 1.4), the students of both groups were asked twice during the semester to provide written feedback to their teachers. The

format of this feedback called for students to group their comments under a "plus" sign (for elements of the course that pleased them), a "minus" sign (for those that displeased them), and a question mark (for points of confusion). Students were free to write these comments in either English or Japanese. Moreover, both teachers regularly asked students about their understanding, their feelings and opinions during each class.

Finally, and following the principles of action research (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988), each teacher maintained a log throughout the period of the study, handwriting thoughts and impressions during classroom sessions, and then completing more detailed accounts of class content on computer after each class.

3.2 Class Syllabi

Both teachers in this study are committed to teaching genres because of the rhetorical awareness and sensitivity to language forms that this fosters, but above all because most, if not all writing, like speaking, occurs in "definite...genres" (Bakhtin, 1986: 78). We are committed to using a process approach because it encourages creativity, promotes understanding of what the act and process of writing is, and it is the best protection of student ownership of their writing.

However, the syllabi we implemented differed markedly. They are described in detail below and in our appendices, but in the main, the syllabi we designed⁵ were a product of our individual beliefs and background, our

⁵ While we agree in principle with creating syllabi on the basis of a needs analysis, we did not do so because: 1) we have to write our syllabi in advance, before our courses start; 2) in our experience of needs analyses carried out among inexperienced writers who have received a lot of grammar training, students' misconceptions about writing, i.e. that writing= grammar, lead them to feel that their needs include more grammar practice.

own attitudes towards writing, and the realities of the timetable. For Teacher A, the timetable presented possibilities: potentially, two years with the same students, with the third year course explicitly entitled *Essay Writing*, or エッセーライティング, and designed to prepare students for writing a graduation thesis. For Teacher B, the timetable imposed constraints: he felt that this one semester was his only chance to get students to love writing and decide to continue with it.

3.2.1 Class A Syllabus

The syllabus of this course (see Appendix I) was a product of both Teacher A's background (British pragmatic tradition and second language learner and writer) and the tangible aims of her university's curriculum: Teacher A sees the second year writing course as part of a preparatory link in a developmental writing chain where the curriculum specifically calls for third year students to write longer, research-based papers in English (and she feels that they cannot write longer papers without experience of writing essays beforehand). Teacher A decided to teach the academic essay genre because it pushes students past simple description and into analysis, thus not only preparing them to write a graduation thesis in English in their fourth year, but also building in them the reflex of thinking critically, which ability she finds empowers students and builds self-confidence.

Teacher A used no textbook in this course, and to avoid reducing the writing act to a simple imitation of a generic model, did not expose students to a sample academic essay at the outset. Brainstorming and discussion techniques were used to generate the topic for the first student essay. Mind-mapping techniques were used for essay organization, and

loopwriting to eliminate redundancy. Discussion of the writing process was encouraged through conferencing sessions with the teacher and among peers. During these weeks the teacher also brought in written materials in a variety of genres (including a poem, for example), not as models for student emulation, but as prods to deeper thinking about aspects of the topics being covered.

In the second half of the semester, students wrote a second essay, and at this time were given greater latitude in developing their drafts, choosing for themselves whether, and if so, when, to use all or any of the techniques introduced in the first half of the semester.

3.2.2 Class B Syllabus

As with Class A, the syllabus used for Class B (see Appendix II) sprang both from Teacher B's teaching philosophy and from the exigencies of the timetable. Also like Class A, no textbook was used. Instead, the teacher informed the class that his friend, an executive at the American consumer-products company "ACME," might be interested in purchasing the rights to any new invention that would make his customers' lives easier. The students' goal was to think of an invention and then successfully sell it to the company through written correspondence. Student inventions were allowed to be whimsical, and any students who wished to change their invention ideas during the course would be permitted to do so.

The course required students to write about their inventions in four different genres, including business letters to ACME, which would be collected and "sent" by the teacher. As in Class A, students were not exposed to samples of any genre exemplar until after they had completed at

least one draft. However, they were always encouraged to think carefully about the intended audience for each composition, and the aim of the student as a participant in the genre, in writing it. The customary answers to those questions (the intended audience being the teacher, and the aim to receive an A grade) were meant to be broadened if not subverted by the simulation format, breaking the link posited by Kress (1993, cited in Raimes, 1998; see also 1.3 above) between genre focus and excessively teacher-centered instruction. In particular, by critiquing the student's invention proposals through reply letters from ACME, the teacher hoped to de-emphasize his role as judge of student achievement (cf. Horowitz (1986) on the feasibility of this goal), and to heighten awareness of written English as a communication medium outside the classroom.

3.2.3. The Ideas of "Tanoshii" and "Kyomibukai" in the Two Syllabi

In our rationale for the study, we noted that we wanted to remedy students' negative, because we feel, mistaken, beliefs that writing in English equaled grammar exercises and translation (see also Miyahara et al., 1995). Both of us wanted our students to learn to enjoy writing, but we differed, because of our backgrounds, beliefs and timetable realities, in the type of enjoyment we wanted to nurture. Teacher A's goal was to take one year and bring students to a point where they would feel intrinsic enjoyment from exploring and testing their opinions through the problem-solving essay task. Her goal was to nurture a feeling of "*kyomibukai*" - the deep interest and enjoyment that comes from an increasing mastery over challenging tasks. Teacher B felt that since he had only one semester with his students, it would be better to spend that time sparking students'

interest in writing through getting them to think that writing is fun. He reasoned that if students get a sense that writing can be fun, they will be more likely to continue with it after they leave his course, and through persevering in writing, they will come to feel the same "*kyomibukasa*" as he does when he writes.

3.2.4 Summary of Syllabus Points of Difference

Class A was exposed to only one genre, the academic essay, while Class B wrote a number of short genre-texts such as exemplars of business letters and catalogue entries for a product they had invented. Class A's academic essay genre is a "serious" one and was treated as such in class; Class B, on the other hand, wrote genres that are also "serious", of course, because "real-world" (business letter, catalogue copy, product testimonial), but Teacher B was intent on exploiting them in a fun and whimsical way. A third major difference in syllabus design was the question of readership, or audience, and this was a consequence of the teachers' genre choices: the academic essay is at home in the classroom: what we mean by this is that it is a school (university) genre where the intended audience is the student's professor(s). The genres written by Class B students are, as well as being "real-world" genres, "outside-the-classroom-real-world" genres with (in the real world) various different readerships or audiences. As noted above (3.2.2), Teacher B attempted to minimize this classroom/real world distinction by the creation of the parallel reality.

In sum, then, Class A practiced, and would continue to practice for one year, one genre where the audience was clear and connected directly to what they were doing: an academic essay in an academic setting for their

university teacher. Class B would practice several genres: this would, in theory, give them more flexibility in fine-tuning their stance towards several different readerships, and also a broader sense of who and what an audience might be than their counterparts in Class A.

3.2.5 Possible Criticisms of the Syllabi

Academically, educationally, and contextually, the rationale for implementing a syllabus focusing on the academic essay (i.e. Class A syllabus) is sound: the students are in a university, majoring in English. At the same time as they research, weigh and analyze data and fashion from it arguments, they learn thinking skills and develop the practical skill of writing.

However, Class A syllabus can be criticized on the basis that not all students go on to write a graduation thesis or become academics, that an academic essay may not be the only form suited to promoting critical thinking, and that it does not automatically inculcate *kyomibukasa* in all students, some of whom might be put off by the difficulty of writing something in English that they had not ever written in Japanese.

The syllabus of Class B practiced real-world genres that the students might be expected to use in the world of work should they get jobs where they will use English. The teacher also hoped to get them to enjoy writing.

This syllabus can be criticized on the grounds that it may not fully develop the critical thinking skills that writing is uniquely placed to nurture, and that in practicing a range of genres, it throws its net wide, but not deep. A counter-argument, of course, is that the burgeoning of awareness in an atmosphere that prioritizes fun is a better, and more

realistic goal for a thirteen-week, semester-long course.

4. Results of the Study

4.1 Inter-Rater Reliability

Pre- and post-tests from both classes were shuffled together with the students' names removed. The essays were rated using the ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al, 1981), which has a high score of 100, with fifty points covering macro-writing issues (content, organization) and fifty covering more surface-level concerns (vocabulary, language use, mechanics).

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation formula was used to calculate inter-rater reliability. The results are shown in Table 4. 1a.

Table 4.1a Inter-Rater Reliability

Group	Reliability
Group A Pre-treatment	0.71
Group B Pre-treatment	0.74
Group A Post-treatment	0.76
Group B Post-treatment	0.76

After acceptable inter-rater reliability was achieved, each student's overall scores from both raters were averaged to create a single score for each piece of writing produced by a student, i.e. 2 pieces per student. Table 4.1b below shows the statistics for the percentage averaged scores for Group A, pre- and post treatment, and Table 4.1c shows the statistics for the averaged scores for Group B, pre- and post treatment.

Table 4.1b Averaged Group A Scores on ESL Profile, Pre- and Post-Treatment

	Group A, pre-treatment	Group A, post-treatment
N	24	24
Mean	65.83	75.35
Standard Deviation	7.39	6.01

Table 4.1c Averaged Group B Scores on ESL Profile, Pre- and Post-Treatment

	Group B, pre-treatment	Group B, post-treatment
N	23	23
Mean	70.08	75.69
Standard Deviation	5.60	5.66

4.2 T-tests to Compare the Groups, Both Pre- and Post-Treatment

Acceptable rater-reliability was achieved, so a two-tailed T-test was conducted to investigate the difference in scores between the two groups, both pre- and post-treatment. Results (see Table 4.2 below) showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups in the pre-treatment test, i.e. Group A produced writing that was not as good as the writing produced by Group B, pre-treatment.

Table 4.2 T-test (two-tailed) Comparing Groups A and B, Pre-and Post-Treatment

t-value, pre-treatment	0.038101*
t-value, post-treatment	0.842197

*significant at $p < .05$

4.3 T-test for Overall Scores Comparing Each Group's Performance, Pre- and Post-Treatment

A one-tailed T-test was conducted to determine whether there was a difference in each group's pre- and post-treatment performance. For both groups, the t-value allowed us to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that the group had performed at a significantly higher level on the post-treatment essay. The improvement was particularly marked, or rather, the t-test value less likely to be the result of chance, in the case of Group A (see Table 4.3 below).

Table 4.3 T-test (one-tailed) for Overall Scores Comparing Each Group's Performance, Pre- and Post-Treatment

	t-value comparing Group A's performance pre-and post-treatment	t-value comparing Group B's performance pre-and post-treatment
t-test on overall scores	3.91734E-08**	6.87604E-05*

*significant at $p < .05$

**significant at $p < .001$

5. Discussion of Empirical Study Findings and Study Limitations

5.1 Findings

The performance of the two groups was significantly different at the outset of the study: Group B's writing was better than Group A's. Post-treatment results showed that both groups had improved significantly, but that now there was no statistical difference between the groups, i.e. Group A had "caught up" with Group B. Furthermore, the one-tailed T-test post-treatment shows that Group A's improvement is less likely than that of Group B to be the result of chance.

5.2 Discussion

Both syllabi produced statistically significant improvement in student writing within a single semester and this is a cause for encouragement. It could be argued that such fast improvement might be due to the practice effect because the test topic did not change on the pre- and post-treatment test task. However, twelve weeks elapsed between the two tests, sufficient time for the practice effect to be reduced. Also, neither of the groups practiced the test genre or wrote about a similar topic during their courses.

It could also be argued that the rapid improvement was made possible by the students having a stock of grammar training from their first year of writing instruction. We cannot refute this on the basis of our findings, but the question then becomes whether students could not achieve improvement more quickly by starting off in their first year putting grammar to *use* in the sustained service of extended discourse rather than practicing *usage*, to use Widdowson's terms (see also 8.2 below for a fuller discussion).

As regards the specific methodology and the statistical findings of this study, it is intuitively tempting to say, given the results of the post-treatment one-tailed t-test results, which showed that Group A started off "lower" than Group B pre-treatment, but caught up with that group by the end of the study, that an academic-essay-based syllabus is more effective in effecting improvement in student writing than one stressing creativity and experience in a number of genres. The averaged scores for Group A, which show an increase of nearly 10%, from just under 66%, pre-treatment, to just over 75%, post-treatment, are also persuasive of this view. However, it must be taken into account that Group A's pre-treatment scores were significantly lower, pre-treatment, than Group B's, meaning that Group A had

more scope for improvement. Also, the statistical results really tell us only that Group A's performance and improvement were less due to chance than Group B's. Thus, the results do not categorically support, or allow us to call for the implementation of, one syllabus over the other as regards improvement in student writing performance.

Neither syllabus resulted in any student writing in the genre of the magazine article for young people called for by the test task. This had no bearing on the statistical evaluation of our students' writing on the test task since the evaluation tool we used, the ESL Composition Profile, makes no consideration of genre in its marking scheme (and we know of no marking scheme that measures attainment of specific genres), so what we measured was writing *as* a piece of second language writing, with consideration given to global and language specific points, but not to whether the writing approximated a given genre.

However, the fact that not one of the students' pieces of writing post-treatment read like a magazine article raises questions about the efficacy of either syllabus detailed in this study for promoting transfer of skills across genres. We conclude that transfer is probably not possible within such a short time frame for second language writers who are inexperienced and have not been sensitized to the notion of genre in their reading and writing instruction (see also 7.1 below). Nonetheless, our study raises further questions about: 1) what kind of instruction promotes transfer; 2) whether there is an optimal time or timings for a particular kind of instruction at specific stages in a student writer's development and what these matches of instruction and/or syllabus timing and a writer's experience might be; and 3) whether, under what conditions, and how far,

this transfer is possible for target language genres with which a student is unfamiliar, given that second language writers' underlying conceptualization of the social contexts for a particular genre (the deep structure that is posited by Nystrand et al., 1993, among others, and critiqued in Russell, 1997, to explain behaviour such as writing) as well as the textual realization of the genre-texts themselves, may be different from those of the target language.

5.3 Study Design Limitations

Although not really a limitation, since, as we noted above, we know of no evaluation tool that specifically measures genre attainment, and no student in this study wrote in a recognizable genre, we still must note that the ESL Composition Profile was only a sufficient evaluation tool, not an optimal one.

Although we followed elements of a positivist study design (e.g. pre- and post-treatment tests and evaluations), unlike a traditional positivist study, we did not have a Control group with which to compare our "Experimental" groups who received a treatment, i.e. the innovation methodology. The reasons for this were mostly due to the constraints of our circumstances (our timetables, no willing possible collaborators sprang to mind), and the original impetus for the study which, as noted in 3.1 above, was to simply go ahead and do what we would do normally, but then analyze it.

The lack of a Control group taught with a different methodology means we have not "proved" that the methodology we used is more effective than a traditional grammar-translation method or say, a process approach

minus the genre component. Since other studies attest to (but, crucially, as is the case with our study, do not *prove*) the ineffectiveness of the grammar-translation method both in terms of promoting writing improvement (Takahashi, 1994) and proficiency (Silva et al., 1997), and have found that it in fact inculcates the mistaken belief that writing = grammar practice or translation (Miyahara et al., 1995), we do not particularly regret the absence of a Control group taught with grammar-translation, but we have to acknowledge that such a study is probably necessary in order to refute or confirm our assertions.

In addition, a study that compares a straightforward process approach with the method introduced here would be beneficial in revealing the effects of the respective methods on student writing proficiency, attitudes to writing and their awareness of the different aspects of writing tasks.

Another limitation of this study is its failure to get enough information from our students regarding their thoughts and perceptions about what they were doing when undertaking a writing task. At a minimum, we should have given the students a questionnaire, after both the pre- and post-treatment tasks, asking them to report on what they perceived themselves to be doing as they carried out the test task, e.g. whether they thought about their reader(s) or genre as they wrote. Such information would have perhaps elucidated for us points on which we can now offer only speculation, such as why students did not write in the genre prescribed by the test task, and by asking the students, we would perhaps have been able to know more about whether one syllabus was better at promoting *awareness* of the higher order dimensions of reader and genre awareness (see Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987), even if the students lacked the skills at

that stage to realize these elements in their texts. Ideally, we could have supplemented post-treatment questionnaires with face-to-face interviews, in order to attain a fuller picture of our students' knowledge of writing task dimensions after learning with a genre-based process approach.

6. The Qualitative Study: Teacher Observations and Student Feedback

6.1 Qualitative Study Design

As noted in 3.1 above, qualitative data in the form of teacher observations of class procedures, their feelings about the class atmosphere, and the recording of comments or exchanges that took place with students in class, was gathered by the teachers in class in real time, and then reflected upon, and elaborated in, logs kept on computer files.

Students were also asked to write down comments and hand them to their teacher at the midway point of the course and again at the end. The format for students' feedback is detailed in 3.1 above, but essentially called for students to make positive or negative evaluations of a particular class and/or the course as a whole, or to ask questions about things that were unclear to them. Students were free to write these comments in either English or Japanese, and examples of their feedback appear in 6.3 (Group A) and 6.5 (Group B) below.

6.2 Teacher A's Overview of the Course

Teacher A was pleased with the students' improvement in writing proficiency in this course and feels the syllabus is within the students'

capabilities with the following caveat: the initial learning curve is very steep, so the key issue in implementing this type of syllabus is managing student affect. She also stresses that in her previous experience, the curve flattens out somewhat by the second semester⁷, and students relax more and produce good academic essays.

Teacher A's suggestions for pedagogy using this type of syllabus would include proceeding slowly, not emphasizing the goal and demands of the academic essay at the outset, and allotting more time for in-class writing so that students actually have some writing for the teacher to see. Boekarts (1992) notes that students may use coping or avoidance strategies, e.g. not do the homework, if they find tasks too difficult.

6.3 Reactions from Group A

The comments show a range of reactions. Perceptions that the class content was difficult did not significantly diminish in the second round of students' comments (i.e. by Week 11). However, it is interesting that students put comments about difficulty under *BOTH* the plus and minus signs: the first positive comment (see Table 6.3 below) in Week 6 talks about difficulty alongside the burgeoning satisfaction of mastering a skill; this sense of achievement is echoed by another student who hints at difficulty when talking about an advanced essay, but who can now, in Week 11, write one. Negative comments about difficulty are made in Week 6 in connection with homework, and perhaps not surprisingly, since this is the stage in the

⁷ Unfortunately, due to personal circumstances, Teacher A was unable to teach this class again in the second semester, so cannot give definite assurances that this class, like others she has taught with this syllabus, would have become comfortable with the innovation.

course when students were handing in their first essays and embarking upon their second papers. In Week 11, students are now exhibiting an understanding of the difficulty: the writing course is "so different" from their previous experience.

A number of students mentioned that individual comments on their work, from the teacher and from other students, helped them to navigate this unfamiliar course content. Comments like "Even in Japanese I'm not good at putting my own thoughts into writing" make clear what a challenge this syllabus presented to many of the students - these second language student writers were being asked to do in another language something they had very little experience of doing in the mother tongue.

Table 6.3 Selection of Group A Student Reactions

	Week 6	Week 11
+	<p>The lesson is a little hard for me, but I improve my skill in English little by little, I feel.</p> <p>I like brainstorming and to write what I think about a topic in my own words, not just interpreting Japanese sentences.</p>	<p>I am more thinking about anything than before I take this class.</p> <p>Getting individual comments was very helpful.*</p> <p>I can write an advanced essay now.*</p>
-	<p>Not only for me, but also for everyone, this lesson's assignments are difficult.</p> <p>This class is hard for me; even in Japanese I'm not good at putting my own thoughts into writing.*</p>	<p>I want to write thing which I like.</p> <p>Because the content of this course was so different from what I've studied before, this class was difficult for me.*</p> <p>There are a lot of homeworks!</p>
?	<p>Am I going to use appropriate words or sentences? I can't use difficult words or sentences.</p>	<p>The content of the handouts was too difficult for me to understand.*</p>

* translated from Japanese

6.4 Teacher B's Overview of the Course

Teacher B was satisfied with the effectiveness of this syllabus in increasing student writing proficiency, but had the following two reservations. First, student feedback confirmed his impression that a number of students were unfamiliar with the creativity-centered course content, and felt somewhat intimidated as a result. Second, a syllabus involving a smaller number of genres would have provided the opportunity for a more extensive use of the process method, though of course at the expense of a reduced emphasis on genre, and accordingly, diminished genre awareness on the part of the students. A genre-based approach implemented at this stage of learner development probably necessarily entails a compromise between genre awareness and awareness of writing as a process.

6.5 Reactions from Group B

In this group, too, the reactions are varied. Some students welcomed the departure from their past experience with English writing, while others found it daunting. (Negative comments were fewer in the second round, bearing out the progressively greater acceptance described in White's (1988) "innovation adoption curve.") Several students believed the simulation to be real, which makes understandable the objection to being asked to "send" a business letter before being taught its format. Questions were focused persistently on the final exam (the post-treatment test), since the teacher had not told the students what it would cover.

Table 6.5 Selection of Group B Student Reactions

	Week 6	Week 11
+	<p>We can learn how to write a formal letter. It is very useful!</p> <p>The class contents are very interesting, and the OHC is a good idea.*</p> <p>It is interesting that we really send our letters to the company.</p>	<p>We did writing unlike anything I have done in any other class.*</p> <p>Not to study only grammar like Japanese teacher, I like it very much.</p> <p>I was happy to get a long letter from Mr. Ben Veggar.</p>
-	<p>I wanted to learn the form for writing a business letter before writing to the company.*</p> <p>It is difficult to invent. I want to concentrate on thinking about sentences.</p> <p>Homework is difficult.</p>	<p>There was a lot of homework. I couldn't understand your English sometimes.</p> <p>It was interesting to learn to write business letters and send them to a real American company, but there was lots of homework, and I wanted to do other things.*</p>
?	<p>What should we do for the exam?</p>	<p>What kind of test are we going to take?</p>

* translated from Japanese

7. Discussion of Issues Raised by this Study

7.1 Building Genre Understanding: Broad or Deep?

The statistical results do not allow us to say that one syllabus is better than the other in terms of producing better student writing after thirteen weeks when the writers are inexperienced. Neither group in this study had practiced writing in a magazine article genre, and no one from either group approximated the genre in their post-treatment writing, which indicates that transfer of skills from one genre to another is unlikely to take place in the early stages of a writer's development because the writer simply does not have the rhetorical resources and/or may be using up all of their

available cognitive capacity just to produce extended discourse (and, in the case of this study, doing this under time constraints and without a dictionary).

As the statistics are inconclusive, we will turn to what theory has to say about learning one genre exclusively, in-depth and for a prolonged period (Group A's academic essay), and learning a variety of genres (Group B's letter and catalogue copy, etc.) where each is allocated a shorter period of instruction/learning time.

A syllabus like that of Class B would seem better suited to the initial stages of student understanding of genre—to an appreciation of what a genre *is*, and of how it is shaped by social and cultural contexts involving both the writer and the intended audience. Genres are defined by their differences from one another, so a syllabus that requires students to write in at least two of them would appear more conducive to this initial step in genre awareness. Moreover, including more than one genre in a syllabus can serve the function that Perkins and Salomon (1988) call "hugging": exposing similarities in genre types to better facilitate "low level transfer" of student skills from one genre to the next.

However, for Japanese students, long accustomed to thinking about English composition almost exclusively in terms of grammar and vocabulary, regression from their new consciousness of genre is a constant possibility. Thus, several students from Group B concluded their post-treatment test by writing: "Thank you for listening." Through long familiarity with the spoken genre of the English speech (or more properly this particular Japanese school-competition version of the English speech), students have over-learned one of its conventions, and by pressing it into

incongruous service in a written composition they indicate that genre understanding has not yet firmly rooted itself in their habits. It may be inevitable that a multi-generic syllabus, in providing so many opportunities for low level transfer in such a short period of time, also provides opportunities for what Perkins and Salomon (1989) call "negative transfer," the application of inappropriate knowledge and skill to a situation whose novelty is not fully recognized. However, then again, there is always the possibility that negative transfer will correct itself as learners' experience of writing grows, and it could be argued (since our findings cannot tell us what students were thinking) that in fact, the negative transfer of "Thank you for listening" from the speech to the magazine article at least shows some awareness of genre.

A syllabus such as the one taught to Group A, i.e. one that focuses on the single genre of the academic essay, is unlikely to result in either regression or negative transfer because learners have learned one genre exclusively. Unfortunately, in this study, prolonged, in-depth practice of one genre did not result in students transferring skills from this genre to another, and common sense would say it is unlikely to: first language writers who are expert in one field and its genres are novices in a new one, so second language learners are less likely to become familiar with, or apprehend, an "insider's rhetoric" (Kaufers and Geisler, 1989: 306) unless they are exposed, and learn how to sensitize themselves to, other genres. This exposure and sensitization is probably achieved more quickly by reading, although again, Group A students read several genres apart from the academic essay, and transfer of skills from one genre to another did not take place. It is common sense that if we are aiming for transfer as well as

writing proficiency, students need to practice writing in more than one genre in order to achieve some measure of versatility.

7.2 Learning to Write and *Tanoshii* versus *Kyomibukai*

As mentioned in 3.2.3 above, Teacher B believed a fun (*tanoshii*) class was a principled means toward the end of deepened student commitment to writing and would result in *kyomibukai* feelings at some later point in his students' careers. Class A availed itself of a more protracted timespan in an attempt to instill *kyomibukai* without stressing *tanoshii* feelings as a precondition.

Interestingly, though Class B was intended as the more immediately enjoyable of the two, a number of students in the class (see Table 6.5) were intimidated, at least initially, by the novelty of the course content. Some were plainly happier studying grammar at the sentence level as they had always done in the past. Though White (1988: 139) and others have long pointed out that any innovation in language teaching will initially be embraced by only a small number of students (the "innovators") and never by all, it is all too easy for teachers, particularly those from a Western background, to make the mistake of seeing a creativity-focused syllabus as self-evidently "fun."

Teachers may have to face the fact that the initial stages of coming to grips with one of the most difficult skills all people in industrialized societies are expected to master - writing - is never going to be seen by students as being fun, especially when the writing is conducted in a second language. More encouraging is that student comments point to a deepened commitment on their part to writing (see Tables 6.3 and 6.5) because they

are starting to understand writing better.

8. Suggestions for Pedagogy

8.1 Managing Innovation

The genre-based process approach, in either of the forms it was implemented in this study, represents an innovation in a Japanese classroom. White (1988) writes of the issues that can arise when teachers introduce innovative coursework. A classroom innovation will invariably produce resistance; it brings no guarantee of wholesale acceptance even by the end of an extended trial period; its prospects for success decline as its complexity, and divergence from previous student experience, increase.

Boekaerts (1992) defines two modes into which students, confronted with a novel task, may respond. Those with ample task-relevant skills and advantageous personality traits (self-concept and motivation) are likely to engage in a "mastery" mode, leading to an enlarging of resources through learning; students without those skills or traits are prone to shift into a "coping" mode, with the defensive aim of preventing a loss of resources (such as self-esteem).

In a syllabus like that of Class A, where the difficulty of the goal is obvious to the students from the get go, Teacher A stresses managing student affect by checking student understanding regularly and by being prepared to shift down a gear when introducing new techniques. She argues that creating a community of writers is not just fancy sounding jargon, but a necessity: If student-writers see themselves as writers and offer support to others, they may relax more and start to see new tasks as a

challenge rather than a threat to self-esteem.

It is just as important for the teacher of a "fun" syllabus (like Class B) to spot early on in an innovation those students who are shifting into coping mode, and take steps to prevent it becoming a reflex. Students unaccustomed to being asked for creative input may find the prospect of thinking up an invention idea not so much fun as daunting. In his study of innovation, White (1988: 143) calls for the syllabus designer to "provide for feedback mechanisms to identify and cope with barriers and problems arising during the period of attempted implementation." To that end, the student feedback sheets used in this study (on which students were not required to write their names) were meant to monitor student attitudes, and alert the instructors to such problems. In addition, both teachers set aside time in the course (see Appendices I and II) to address concerns brought up by their students.

8.2 Syllabi and Writing Development

If the best way to improve writing is by doing it, then students need to start producing extended discourse in their first year of university using their grammar knowledge from high school rather than spending another year of writing instruction on grammar-translation, treading water proficiency-wise and confirming their misconceptions about writing into the bargain.

We are convinced of the superiority of a genre-based process approach, and its suitability for providing opportunities for learning that build both linguistic and socio-linguistic competence (see Wenden 1995), but until we have a study that isolates the respective effects of a process approach and

a process approach that incorporates genre on student writing proficiency, skill transfer, attitudes towards, and understanding of, writing, we are left with the nagging feeling that using a genre-based approach with inexperienced learners involves compromise and a diminishment of either awareness of cultural forms and contexts (genres) or writing as process.

Thus, we offer the following two suggestions for a first year course: 1) first year students start writing with a genre-based approach that follows a similar format to the syllabus of Class B (real-world genres, but not necessarily with the simulation format) for one year. A longer time frame would provide more opportunity for building genre awareness and integrating this with knowledge of the writing enterprise. Or, if teachers are concerned that combining genre and writing at an early stage represents too great a cognitive load: 2) a process approach for the first semester followed by a genre-based process approach in the second.

Students who received a first-year course designed along the lines described in the previous paragraph would have a sound understanding of the writing process and thus could usefully fill in a needs analysis, whose results would shape the subsequent syllabus. Such a needs analysis would have to offer a choice of real-world genres that students might be expected to write when they enter the world of work as well as the choice of learning how to write essays and academic essays, since the graduation thesis may turn out to be the one piece of writing in English that an English major student actually does. Even where no needs analysis is conducted, some combination of "real-world" genres and academic essay is still probably necessary in a university writing curriculum.

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Appendix I: Class A Syllabus

First Semester (the period of the study)

Lesson	Lesson Content
1	Students and their reading habits (English and Japanese): extensive and intensive reading; skimming and scanning. Students will be expected to read a lot for outside information for their papers.
2 to 5	Students prepare first paper to hand in. The lessons will help them, using the techniques in brackets, to: generate ideas (brainstorming), organize them (mind mapping), get rid of repetition and redundancies (loopwriting), generate more ideas (loopwriting, summary practice, peer discussion) and improve the general overall quality (conferencing sessions with teacher and their peers). Students will be encouraged to take advantage of teacher's office hours to come and discuss their work.
6 to end of term	Students will be asked to write a second paper; this time they will work more independently in getting the drafts ready, using the techniques in brackets above (if they find them helpful). In class, we will work on readings to develop ideas and language use. We will also work hard to refine the grammar and vocabulary of both students' previous paper and new paper, once the new one has progressed to the stage where such polishing of grammar, vocabulary and mechanics is useful.

Appendix II: Class B Syllabus

Lesson	Lesson Content
1	Teacher will explain course contents, introduce invention theme.
2 to 5	Teacher will introduce brainstorming and mind-mapping techniques to generate and organize invention ideas. Outside reading, introduced by the teacher, will prompt students to think about salient features of inventions (how they work; who is the intended user; what need they satisfy). Each student will write (in several drafts each) a detailed description of their invention, and a letter to the patent office claiming their right to their idea. Through OHC work and peer conferencing, students will begin to familiarize themselves with the instrumental and cultural aspects of genre.
6 to 9	Students will move on to two new genres: a business letter to

	<p>ACME, and a short story featuring their inventions. Teacher feedback on their business letters will come in the form of reply correspondence from the company. OHC work and conferencing will be used to deepen generic understanding (including cultural considerations), and move on to sentence-level grammatical and stylistic concerns where appropriate. By Lesson 9, all students should have received second (acceptance) letters from the company.</p>
10 to end of term	<p>Time will be set aside in class to discuss concerns which have arisen on the student feedback forms. Teacher will introduce final genre: copy, with illustration, for the company catalog. This genre will be generically compared and contrasted with the other genres introduced so far. Each student will be expected to include a testimonial, under the invention title, from a character in their short story. Teacher will give out layout specifics for final catalog-copy draft, collect this draft, and assemble and distribute class catalogs.</p>