



Kathy Rushton and Joanne Rossbridge share a framework for improved extended response writing...

Introduction

Teacher knowledge about language and how it works is critical for not only developing dialogue around texts but can make explicit for students the strategies used by effective writers across subject areas. This requires understanding of the grammatical features of the common genres students commonly are asked to write in the Secondary school.

This article looks at the extended response to support teachers to analyse student writing and examine both the language and literacy demands related to writing extended responses in secondary settings. The following outlines the approach and principles that are drawn upon in both a one-day and three-day CPL courses entitled *Conversations about Text in the Secondary School* and *Developing Dialogue in the Secondary School* respectively.

Making Appropriate Choices - Field, Tenor and Mode Framework for Writing

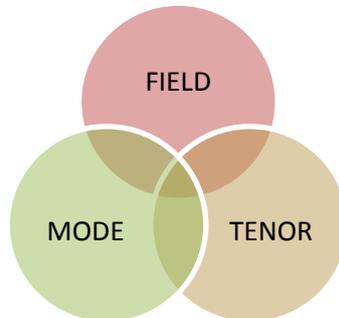
Texts can be discussed using a framework developed by Michael Halliday (Halliday & Hasan, 1985) in which the three critical aspects of the register of the text, field, tenor and mode are utilised to analyse and understand how successful texts are constructed to reflect their context and purpose:

- **Field** refers to the subject matter of the text and this of course will differ across and within subjects;
- **Tenor** is the relationship established between the reader and writer;
- **Mode** addresses the nature of the text itself and the role language plays within it.

When viewed together, all students can be supported to understand the range of language choices which need to be made to successfully realise the purpose of a text for the audience it is addressing.



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For further explanation see Halliday & Hasan, 1985 and Rossbridge & Rushton, 2015.

This helps students to realise that careful reading and note-taking may address Field but to meet the challenges of engaging an audience and establishing a clear purpose for their text a range of other language choices need to be made.

The following framework provides teachers with a time-saving and focussed way to provide the support that developing writers may need at all levels of text from word, clause, group and sentence to paragraph and text levels (Derewianka, 2011).

Choices in Context: A Case Study from the Ancients

The context for writing in secondary schools is provided by the subject areas. Students may be involved in field building through the focus on teaching content around a topic such as an example of *The Ancient World* in History. In addition to acquiring the field knowledge we also need to be explicit about who the audience may be that they are writing for as well as the relationship between the writer and reader.

The following examples show how the field of the writing may be similar but the tenor and mode differs. This can be seen by the more personal connection with the audience in Text 1 while Text 2 seems to convey more authority on the topic. In addition the mode of the texts may differ in that the writing may be more spoken or written-like as evident in Text 2, which sounds more written-like or academic in the way the ideas have been packaged and organised.



Text 1

Have you ever wondered what life was like for women in Ancient Sparta? They had lots of power and could think for themselves more than some of the other women in other places in Greece.

Text 2

Spartan women had a reputation for strength and independence. They enjoyed greater freedom and power than women in other city-states in Ancient Greece.

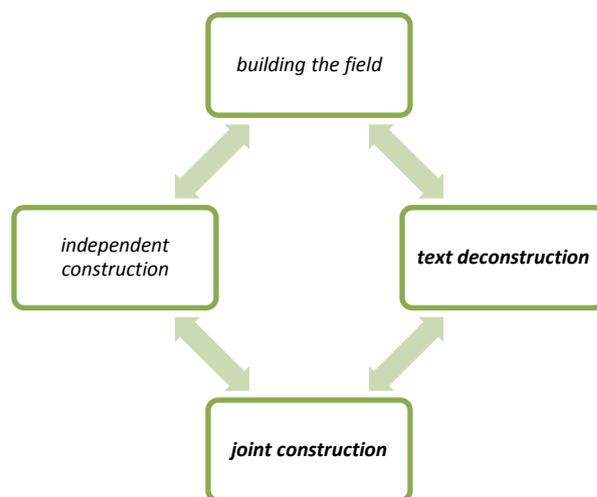
This framework for considering and talking about language choices in context can provide the basis of a strong scaffold (Hammond, 2001; Vygotsky 1986) for adolescent writers.

Writing Pedagogy

The genre based pedagogy known as the Teaching Learning Cycle was originally developed by Sydney School genre theorists... (it) has proved a powerful resource for scaffolding literacy development, with numerous published units of work documenting and/or guiding its implementation...

(Humphrey & Macnaught, 2011, p. 99)

The *Teaching Learning Cycle* includes building the field, text deconstruction, joint construction and independent construction. Our focus is on supporting teachers to undertake the more challenging text deconstruction and joint construction.





We consider that the critical dialogue about text occurs during text deconstruction and joint construction (Rossbridge & Rushton, 2014). In many classrooms texts are modelled but the rich language about language, *metalinguage*, can only be developed when the teacher and students talk together about the language features of the texts they are reading or writing (Lemke, 1989).

For this reason one of the courses involve the conversations about text that teachers can develop to support writing development (Rossbridge & Rushton 2010 & 2011). By using the field, tenor, mode framework for writing, not just the field (content) but also the tenor (relationship) and mode (nature) can easily be the focus of these conversations.

What a conversation might lead to

The following transcript provides an example of the conversations which might occur between a teacher and students. In this example from a whole class joint construction the notion of perspective in History texts is explored by considering the development of the noun group to name participants in events.

Student: Dan would say he's like a visitor because he wouldn't say he is trespassing or doing anything wrong. He'd say he's visiting and helping out his country.

Student: You probably know that their settling there as a new country.

Teacher: So are you saying he's a settler?

Student: Yeah. Like saying he would know he's not really going to be going anywhere.

Teacher: So, is he a visitor or a settler?

Students: Settler.

Teacher: What have we built? *Dan, who was a young British settler.* What have we just built?

Student: Noun group.

Teacher: Yes, we've built a whole noun group with an adjectival clause.

(See Rossbridge & Rushton, 2014 & 2015)

Key principles for developing a critical dialogue about text

- The key principles for developing the critical dialogue about text are, in our view, language, the learner and the support or scaffold provided for the student. The teacher needs to be very clear about the language needed to write target texts as well as having a clear view of the purpose of



talk in the classroom. The dialogue can be supported by questioning, Think Alouds (when the teacher verbalises their thinking as they read for meaning to model the thinking skills required for comprehension) and other strategies which provide opportunities for talk and substantive communication.

- The learner needs to be both engaged and supported to undertake risks (Hammond, 2001) if they are to master the challenges of writing an extended response in an academic context. The support needed is not just modelling but the ability to hand over the tasks to the students (Gibbons, 2002 & 2006) at the right point, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Hammond, 2001; Vygotsky, 1986). This may require both micro and macro scaffolding when programming and teaching.
- One of the most important understandings about language development is that it can be viewed on a continuum from spoken-like to written-like language, the mode continuum. At one end of the continuum is oral language which differs from written language mainly in its density. Written language is lexically dense in the sense that more meaning is carried in fewer words (Halliday, 1985). The challenge teachers face is to support students to develop the lexically dense texts which are valued in our education system.

Nominalisation and theme are two very useful tools for writing cohesive texts in the secondary school

Using the framework of field, tenor and mode two very useful tools for writing can be drawn upon. These are the features of nominalisation and theme which can be identified in texts. Students can be taught how to use them to make their texts more effective. Nominalisation is a resource that allows writers to change verbs, conjunctions and adjectives into nouns.

Making Language More Powerful

We should *reduce mining* near the coastline.

The **reduction of mining near the coastline** will result in greater preservation of coastal ecosystems.



In the example the verb group in the first clause has been turned into a noun group (nominalised) and placed at the front of the second clause in **Theme** position. By doing this the main focus of the writing can be put up front, the writing sounds more written-like and by repackaging the first clause into a noun group the writer is able to add additional information.

Such conversation and dialogue around text enables students to take on knowledge about language in the context of texts and apply to their own writing.

The use of these features relates to the genre of the target text (Macken & Slade, 1993; Martin & White, 2005; Martin & Rose, 2008). While unfamiliarity may initially challenge students when teachers become adept at deconstructing both modelled and student texts even very young students are able to grasp the concepts and begin to utilise them in their writing.

Our CPL courses demonstrate a range of strategies for developing extended responses which include the effective use of these features and support students to master them.

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