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Writing in EFL: revisiting the project based approach in light of the Australian genre theory

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ABSTRACT

Considering that writing is a fundamental skill in contemporary society, and also that students often have difficulties when acquiring this skill, in both first and second languages, this study presents two approaches that have been beneficial in aiding learners in the inevitable and important writing tasks. By presenting the Sydney school of genre studies and the project based methodology, and by analyzing and comparing their theoretical principles and practical classroom activities, the aim of this monograph is to inspire teachers to reflect upon the use of genres and projects in the foreign language classroom, as well as consider exploring combinations of these two approaches.

Keywords: foreign language writing; genre studies; the Sydney school; project based approach.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Writing well is a fundamental skill in academia and in several work environments. To be able to use the written language to communicate an idea or to explain a fact with competency, i.e., acutely and in a context appropriate manner, is a big challenge for every writer. The various aspects involved in this process, such as range of vocabulary, grammar, clarity, cohesion, coherence, spelling, structuring, among others, make this a demanding task to be accomplished in one's mother language, and even more difficult in a second language.

As a foreign language teacher, I worked for seven years at an English course whose socio-constructivist project-based approach has demonstrated to be effective in helping students improve their writing skills. It is not uncommon, as teachers are sadly aware, for students to have difficulties in writing tasks, and to resist doing them. Although this is a complex issue, one of the reasons for this is that students do not find them significant and cannot connect them to their daily lives. The project-based pedagogy adopted at the course aims to provide a contextualized learning experience and to help encourage students' motivation and engagement, as well as aid in making writing activities more significant. (Hernandez and Ventura, 1998)

Another pedagogy that brings contextual aspects into teaching writing, without losing sight of details, was developed in the field of genre studies. More specifically, the effectiveness of the Australian genre-based approach in classrooms to enhance writing has been extensively researched (Hyland, 2003;

Rose, 2015; Johns *et al*, 2006; Paltridge, 1996, 2001, 2013; Martin and Rose, 2007) and corroborated throughout the last thirty years.

Hence, the first objective in this study is to compare project-based and genre approaches in the classroom in terms of their premises and practices. A second objective of this paper is to provide some practical suggestions for the language classroom, all of which aim to enhance students' skills and engagement.

In order to reach these objectives, I will begin by briefly addressing the history and development of schools and traditional methodologies to clarify my stance on education. Subsequently, I will focus on the development of genre studies, particularly on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach of the Sydney school. SFL scholars and practitioners are well known for developing a wide body of teaching methodologies that have been applied in a variety of contexts in the Australian school system. Some of their activities will be enlisted to illustrate the concepts underlying these methodologies.

Next, in the same section, I will present the general principles of the project based method and the context in which this methodology has been used in my professional experience as an EFL teacher. Finally, I will describe examples of class projects which focus on writing skills and which will be detailed in the appendix sections.

In the discussion section, I will analyze the two aforementioned teaching approaches, in terms of their basic concepts and methodologies, stressing their similarities and differences.

On a final note, this study also aims to provide teachers and educators, as well as course developers, an opportunity to advance in their understanding of genre pedagogy in the EFL classroom. It will also lead to a suggestion of how they can be combined, providing new insights and practices into the inevitable and necessary writing tasks.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

> Language has no independent existence apart from the people who use it. It is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end of understanding who you are and what society is like.
> David Crystal (2010)

If we aim to investigate how teachers can make writing tasks more meaningful to students at all levels, it is important to examine theoretical and pedagogical frameworks that have sought to do that. In my professional experience, I have often noticed that teachers feel more comfortable when the lesson plans and class materials are handed to them, instead of developing their own. While this is obviously easier for teachers, students frequently do not take part or have a say in the development of their learning processes. This is likely to make tasks less meaningful to them. My understanding is that the more students feel that the contents and the learning processes are important to them on a personal level, the more engaged and committed they will be.

In this context of examining classroom practices, it is useful to have a brief overview of the history of teaching institutions in the Western world and discuss how some pedagogical principles found in the early schools have lingered until today. There will also be an analysis of some of the main developments that have taken place over time and, finally, a description of the socio-constructivist educational principles that guide my teaching practice. In my understanding, this is important for two reasons. The first reason is that all my previous studies and training were related to psychology and pedagogy. Summarizing what I have learned about linguistics and genre studies in this specialization course and connecting it to my background as a developmental psychologist are ways of making the linguistic concepts more significant to my daily practice as a language teacher and as a supervisor who trains other

teachers. The second reason is that today there is a great variety of teaching methodologies. Each one expresses particular beliefs about the role of students and teachers in education, and about the learning process itself, so this overview will clarify what I consider as important contributions to the evolution of teaching practices.

2.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCHOOLS AND SOCIO-CONSTRUCTIVISM

> The principal goal of education is to create men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done—men and women who are creative, inventive, and discoverers, who have minds which can be critical, can verify, and not accept everything they are offered.
> Jean Piaget (*in* Ducksworth, 1964)

Before addressing more specifically the issues of teaching writing in a second language, some observations should be made in regards to an important educational stance, which has always permeated my training and professional practice: socio-constructivism. My perspective is aligned with the point of view that upholds that the original school arrangements, more specifically the European model of the late 19th century, are out-of-date and obsolete.

The European model, developed during the 17th and 18th centuries, during the early Age of Enlightenment, valued reason and logic above all else. By the late 18th century, there was an increasingly accepted regard for the importance of universal education provided by the state and not exclusively by the church. Nevertheless, in countries such as France and Germany

compulsory schooling was introduced slowly and was not successfully implemented, until the early 20th century

In Gray (2008) we find that the idea and practice of universal, compulsory public education developed gradually in Europe, from the early 16th century on into the 19th. Eventually, these institutions were separate from the church, modern, lay, full-time, science-based, and also enforced very strict discipline, rigorous hierarchy rules, standardization and physical punishments. This model, which is sometimes called the *industrial model of education*, spread throughout the world. While it is likely that its uniformity was compromised when implemented in many parts of the world, it has been ever since an important basis for the training of most educators and for school procedures in general.

Overall, school children in the 1920s were required to memorize facts, dates, names and other information. The teacher was the only *content provider,* who taught mostly through constant copying, drilling and repetition. One of the main reasons for the criticism of this model is precisely the standardization of contents, procedures and evaluation for all students in a given school system when, in fact, children have variable interests and skills.

It is important to highlight that there has been a clear and significant evolution in teaching methods adopted in the industrial model of education, with thinkers such as Dewey, Froebel, Montessori, Piaget and Vygostky. Numerous adaptations have been made to overcome some difficulties, such as the rigid standards for calligraphy, excessive formalisms and standardization, and there have been attempts to be more aligned with contemporary society, as well as taking into account children's attitudes, interests and possibilities in

the learning process. This does not mean that there are no more problems, but that they are being dealt with, and in various ways.

While the aforementioned contributions as are certainly widely present in schools today, some core beliefs of that obsolete model still remain in use. In general, the educational system still assumes that everyone can and should learn in the same way, preferably through expository lessons in crowded classrooms sorted by age, where teachers *know* and students *need to learn*, using standardized materials and taking regular individual tests.

In contrast, the central aspect of socio-constructivism is the assumption that learning happens not by individually internalizing information, but by constant interaction, either with objects, with other people, with the world or with one's own thoughts and ideas. All babies, children, teens and adults, through different processes and at different levels of development, learn in a collaborative manner. As Vygotsky (1978) stated:

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (*interpsychological*) and then inside the child (*intrapsychologica*l). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57)

From this standpoint, it is predominantly through social exchange that we develop our intelligence and make sense of what happens around us.

Another core feature of socio-constructivism is the principle that learning is more meaningful when you are able to connect new information with previous knowledge and experiences. Thus, individual characteristics such as

personality, life stories, different school and family settings and diverse social, religious and economic backgrounds, amongst other factors, play crucial roles in the learning process and should be taken into consideration in the development of educational policies, guidelines and school *syllabi*. Socio-constructivists tend to view humans as what they really are, multi-faceted and complex beings:

> Somehow our society has formed a one-sided view of the human personality, and for some reason everyone understood giftedness and talent only as it applied to the intellect. But it is possible not only to be talented in one's thoughts but also to be talented in one's feelings as well. The emotional part of the personality has no less value than the other sides and it also should be the object and concern of education, as well as intellect and will.
>
> Vygotsky (undated)

This socio-constructivist educational model is also student-centered, as opposed to the obsolete content-centered model.

Regarding the teachers, they must act more as facilitators than content providers, guiding students through proper inquiry and research activities. Also, they should take into consideration the increasingly relevant role of technology, which has become an important, everyday tool in our lives. It has been able to automate a large number of repetitive tasks, such as correcting the spelling mistakes in texts. Besides, accessing information is much easier than it used to be. As one of the consequences in this scenario, the skills necessary to succeed in the current economic, cultural and social settings are not only about memorization and repetition, but also analytical and critical thinking, creativity, and cooperation.

To conclude what I consider to be fundamental principles in contemporary education, I highlight two aspects discussed above. The first is the realization that the teaching methods and social arrangements of traditional schools have become outdated. Secondly, as a consequence of the first, various new approaches have been proposed and applied by educators and scholars around the world. All of these efforts have in common the intention to remove students from a merely passive condition of memorizing information to reproduce when taking individual tests, and transform them into individuals who take on an active posture and interfere in and take part in the learning process and exchange knowledge among fellow students and teachers. Alongside the project approach, genre based pedagogy is one of such contemporary approaches that have been proven to be effective. This will be the object of the two following sections.

2.2 GENRE STUDIES AND PEDAGOGY

Writing makes up a fundamental part of our daily lives, and it has done so since prehistoric times. From drawing on a cave wall, then hieroglyphs on a papyrus, up to the latest computer technology, written communication has become central in human societies. Whether it comes shaped as a novel or a grocery list, the intrinsically social and cultural nature of writing is evidenced by the way we have shaped written texts throughout time to fit our needs, and by the way writing has contributed to shaping us as social groups. It comes as no surprise that one of education's primary and most important goals is to teach a child to read and write, beginning at a very young age and continuing to develop these intricate skills throughout the school years.

But how do we master this important communication tool? Saying schools play a primary role when it comes to teaching a child to read and write is true, but also an understatement. It is there where children first establish intense social contact with people who are not from their family, where they learn to share and wait for their turn, where they learn and reproduce a great variety of social and cultural elements, related not only to education but to human and social relationships as well. In other words, schools are a microcosm of the society they are situated in. When we learn to write, not only do we learn the shapes of letters, what they mean and how they sound when put together, but we are also introduced to a symbolic system that encompasses many important aspects of our daily lives.

As children advance in the school system, they are taught about and evaluated on types of texts that will presumably be 'important' in their future social and professional lives. The choice of genre scholars regarding what is and what is not important in terms of writing skills will be elaborated further ahead in this chapter.

The benefits of using genre pedagogy in classrooms have been extensively researched and written about. What I intend to do in the following sections is to describe briefly the process approach to writing, which can be considered a predecessor of genre writing, and present contributions of prominent authors in the Australian genre studies field.

2.2.1. WRITING IN GENRE BASED PEDAGOGIES

Before the 1970s and the advent of the process approach, and in accordance with the obsolete teaching methodologies previously discussed, the product

approach was the most widely used methodology for teaching writing in general, and also for English as a foreign language (EFL) students. This practice meant that teachers' lesson plans would simply present the rules and aspects of a certain type of texts, such as formal structures and grammar patterns. Students were then supposed to reproduce this model. The assessment and grading were made only upon the final product, usually a written assignment that was handed in to the teacher. They concentrated mainly on text structures and on spelling and grammatical accurateness.

Beginning in the 1970s, the use of process approaches began to shift the focus from the final product to activities in the different stages of the writing process, that is, drafts, revision and rewriting. This practice certainly had a positive impact in the language classroom (Tribble, 2011), making the students more active, able to have more autonomy and express more creativity; however it still did not take into consideration important cultural and social aspects of the text, in other words, the external forces that help give it its broader meaning. Nor did it consider the writers' social motivation to achieve a particular goal. Tribble's conclusion is that, "the main benefit of the process approach seems to be that it treats specific writing difficulties" (p. 19).

According to Hyland (2003), while process approaches have been important for moving away from a strictly grammatical evaluation and authoritarian teacher roles and for raising awareness about the complexity of writing itself, they simply do not address how meanings are socially constructed. Genre based pedagogies “address this deficit by offering students explicit and systematic explanations of the ways language functions in social contexts" (p. 18). The term *explicit*, in this context, is central: students must be guided to become aware of the aforementioned external forces that influence different

kinds of texts, such as their purpose, characteristics of the audience and possible effects, so they are able to make more informed choices when writing.

These different types of texts, with diverse forms, language, objectives and social functions, are called genres. Although the concept has resisted several attempts to be clearly and permanently defined throughout time, a genre can be characterized as any form of communication, with particular objectives, styles, format and content which is used by and can be easily identified by a group or society. One definition that clarifies further what genres are can be found in Paltridge (2013), citing Richard and Schmidt (2002:224), and it states:

> (...) a type of discourse that occurs in a particular setting, that has distinctive and recognizable patterns and norms of organization and structure, and that has particular and distinctive communicative functions.

Genres can also be defined as socially constructed meanings, which reflect the social practices of a group. Groups of people, in this context, are called discourse communities, and, as defined by Swales (2016), they are groups of people who have a broadly agreed set of goals, who have mechanisms to communicate with each other, providing information and feedback and who have developed a particular lexis that is used in the group. In this paper, Swales added two new criteria to the ones discussed in previous work: first, the 'silential' relations, because there is a set of words and expressions which do not need to be mentioned to be communicated as they are implicit in this discourse community; and second, the development of certain expectations regarding rhythm of actions of the group and the shared value system.

Knowing in which discourse community a written text will be used is essential both for textual organization and elements, and for successfully getting a writer's message through to an audience. These communities may be arranged according to countless categories, which include, for instance, a religious group, a parent-teacher association, a sports team, an academic conference, or readers of a business newspaper, and so on.

The areas of genre studies and genre-based pedagogies are not homogeneous traditions. In 1996, Sunny Hyon published an article that aimed to "provide a map of current genre theories and teaching application" (p. 693). It became a reference with regards to the different research areas in genre studies. In short, she claimed genre scholarship had evolved into three fields: (1) English for Specific Purposes (ESP), (2) North American Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), and (3) Australian Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Although this rather strict classification has already been examined and challenged by other scholars, as will be discussed later, it is still regarded as an important framework for genre studies.

ESP is aimed primarily at adult and young adult students who already have an upper intermediate or advanced level of English, but is also adaptable to intermediate or high beginners particularly for work purposes. ESP can be described as the teaching of English aiming to meet very specific needs of learners in various areas, regarding vocabulary, discourse, register and so on. For professional reasons, individuals may need to learn, for example, terms and expressions commonly used in the business area or the aviation field, or prepare for a master's degree with a course in academic English, or even want

to improve their language skills to be able to communicate more efficiently during a leisure trip.

In RGS there was a very important reconceptualization of genre made by Miller (1984), who first stated that "genre is a social action". She claimed that the understanding of genre could help account for the ways we encounter, interpret, react to, and create particular texts. This is because the act of writing cannot be separated from the social and contextual perspectives in which it takes place without losing its full meaning. RGS is not particularly concerned with textual elements, but more with the impact the text has in a social context.

Finally, there is the Australian approach to genre, whose educational program will be explored more comprehensively in this study. It is based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, which is concerned with the way language functions in a social setting, but also focuses on textual features and the forms in which they are presented. This approach to teaching and learning in genre pedagogy is most easily observable in educational settings because, through regular cooperation between SFL scholars and schoolteachers in the development of instructional frameworks, it has changed policies and teacher training in the public school system in Australia. Since one of the objectives of this paper is to present actual genre activity suggestions in the classroom, the Sydney school pedagogy will be presented in more detail in the next section.

Although Hyon's triptych framework for the field of genre studies is still a reference for linguists and students many years after the publication of her article, some authors have raised questions about its comprehensiveness. One

author who examines more closely Hyon's framework is Swales (2012). He questions her theoretical segmentation by stating that the article she originally submitted for evaluation simply compared the ESP and SFL approaches in the classroom, but was advised by one of the anonymous reviewers, who we now know was no other than Brian Paltridge, to split it into three traditions.

For Swales, even though this subdivision may still work as a theoretical reference, it does not suffice to contemplate the various forms that genre pedagogy had evolved at the time, and even less now. He also points out that most of the citations made from this article regarded the introductory part, while the practical research and classroom implications were significantly less cited by other scholars.

I agree with Swales when he states that this model does not contemplate all the possibilities in genre teaching. Hyon's framework may still serve as a reference but it should not be taken as a definitive map of genre theories and practices. There are two reasons for my agreement with Swales. One is that, since genre studies have spread throughout the world in many different social contexts, other authors have contributed to research and teaching practices in the field, offering new ideas and reflections. The second is that the immense improvement and expansion of communication technologies in the last decades have brought about new genres that were not around when Hyon published her article.

2.2.2 THE SYDNEY SCHOOL APPROACH

There are many differences between genre traditions, especially regarding their theoretical emphasis and pedagogical practices. As Paltridge (2001)

states, while "ESP and SFL identify structural elements in texts and make statements about the patterning of these elements, (...) Rhetorical studies focuses less on the text features and more on the relationship between text and context." (p. 13) In this section, in accordance with the objectives of this study, I will discuss the ideas of some authors of the Australian SFL tradition who have made substantial contributions to studies of genre in the classroom: Ken Hyland, J. R. Martin and Brian Paltridge.

While Hyland has lately focused more specifically on academic writing, a subfield of ESP, he has done extensive research and publishing in genre studies and second language writing; Martin and Paltridge are also leading figures in the Sydney school of SFL, the former being an acclaimed contributor to the theoretical and academic developments in the field of genre studies in general, while the latter has become a specialist in successfully transporting systemic functional linguistics into the language classroom.

Considering it useful at this point, I will briefly describe the noteworthy implementation of genre pedagogy in the Australian public school system curriculum. Rose (2015) distinguishes three different phases in this implementation process. The first, which began in 1979, happened only in primary schools and aimed to help underachieving students. This action research consisted mainly in identifying writing issues through analysis of students' texts, as well as carrying out trial teaching activities to address these difficulties. In summary, students and teachers deconstructed the text, examining its parts, and then jointly constructed it back together. The genres deemed as important to be taught to students were stories and essays.

In the second phase, teachers and scholars amplified both the audience and the genre scope. Secondary schools were included in the research, and besides the usual school genres there was a special focus on the industry workplace.

In the late 1990s, when the third phase began, genre pedagogy was widely available and adapted to all levels of education. By then, action research had made it clear that learners should be prepared by teachers before attempting to do their tasks individually.

According to the Sydney School teaching guidelines, there are three stages in the writing and learning process: deconstruction and analysis of the parts of a text, joint construction, and independent construction. This scheme reflects the same principles as the Vygotskyan theory of learning, where at first a child is only able to do something with help from a more competent person and, eventually, progresses to being able to do it by him or herself. In language learning contexts, which is the focus of this paper, this means peers and teachers deconstructing and jointly constructing texts, ideas, vocabulary and grammar, sharing experiences and exchanging knowledge, before venturing out individually. Various models have been designed to explain this process, one of which can be seen below:

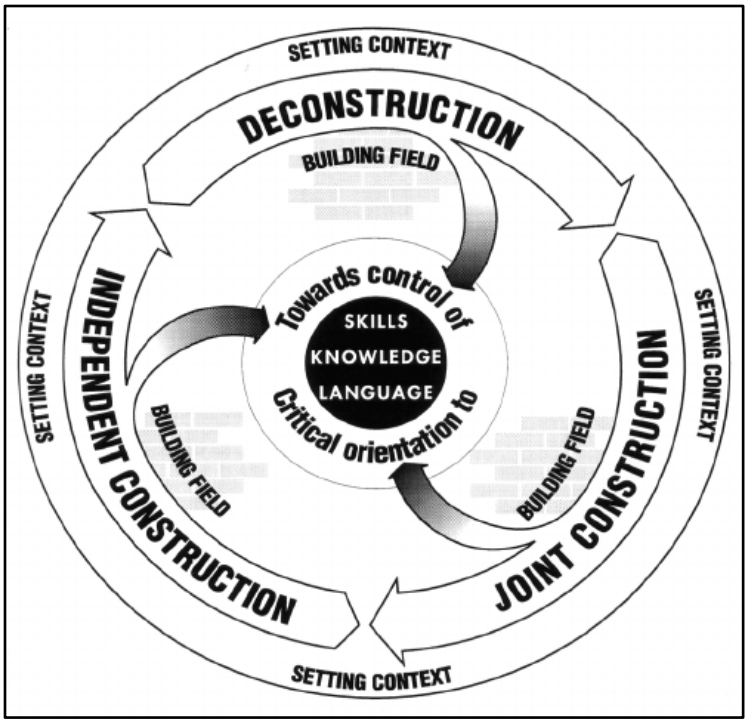

Figure 1: The Sydney School teaching and learning cycle, as proposed by Rothery & Stenglin, 1995

This teaching cycle, as proposed in the SFL approach, is aligned with the principles of socio-constructivism, taking into consideration the interaction between students and teachers, and amongst students, as an essential part of the learning process. Also, it is compatible with Vygostky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between what the child is able to do without assistance and what she is not yet able to do alone but can accomplish with help. The only way of altering this gap, pushing the child towards increasingly challenging tasks and skills is through exchanges with other people, who will generally be more competent than the child. As explained above, Vygotsky states that all learning happens first in social interaction, and only then is interiorized and becomes an individual idea. In

the case of the learning cycle above, this is made evident in the phase of joint construction, which should precede the individual writing tasks.

Regarding how genres are deemed as 'important', Martin and Rose (2007) offer very interesting reflections on the social role of genre education. One is about making choices and narrowing down the types of written material that should be presented to students. Among such numerous genres that are always changing, one may ask: which ones are considered important? In the final chapter of their book *Genre relations. Mapping culture*, Martin and Rose clarify what they consider to be of relevance:

> (...) the status of a genre derives from its power, not the other way round. In post-Fordist global capitalist world order, power has to do with controlling the environment (for production, via discourses of science and technology) and managing people (for consumption, via discourses of government and bureaucracy). The more power a genre has in these respects, the higher its status will be, and the more powerful the people deploying the genre will be (and so the higher their status). (p. 257)

In the abstract field of genre theory there is no such hierarchy *a priori*; all genres have the same importance and no values are assigned to them: the measure of their success or importance is the achievement of the communication goal they had intended. In society, however, this neutrality does not work, and genre specialists are aware that in a given social group, one genre may be culturally relevant, or seriously appreciated, while others are disregarded as ineffective interaction mechanisms. Thus, the individuals who use these 'more important' tools more skillfully hold an advantage in regard to those who do not.

Ultimately, Martin and Rose's pedagogical efforts aim at redistributing and broadening access to these higher status genres by more people and "subverting a social order" (2007, p. 258) where mostly white men are in control. Rose (2010) describes the most important genres in the Sydney School educational approach, in a theoretical perspective in which importance is given to access and control of genres of power that "condition our status ranking in social hierarchies, our claim to authority in institutional fields, and our prominence in public life." (p. 3). Figure 2 below shows the most common genres presented to students:

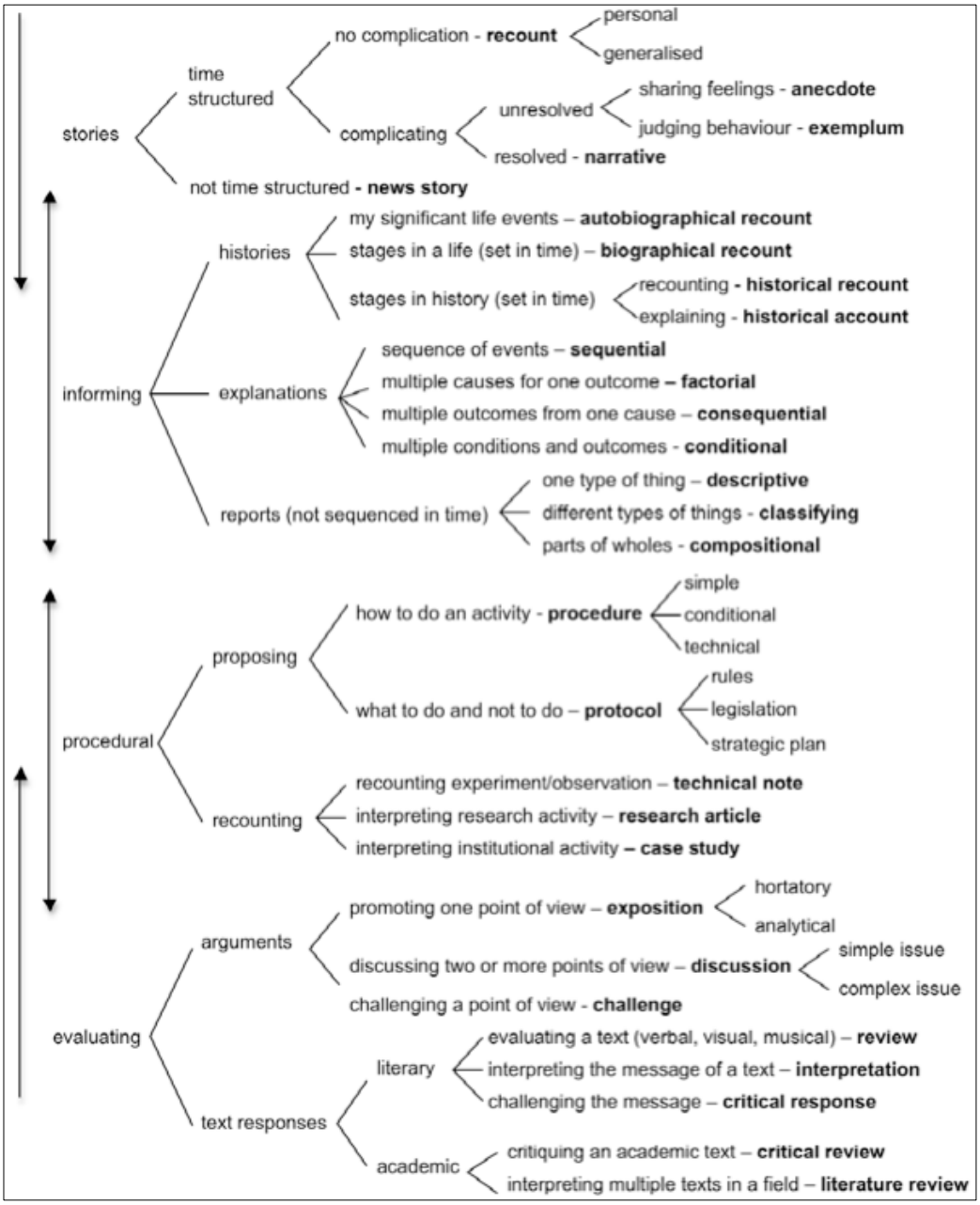

Figure 2: A map of genres assessed in Australian genre pedagogy (Martin, 2007)

Another fundamental aspect of writing in the genre approach is *purpose.* The answer to the questions such as 'what is this text for?', 'what do I want to achieve with this text?' should be clear in the writer's mind before the act of writing. There may be countless purposes for writing, and a written text can have one or more purposes: informing, entertaining, explaining, persuading, advertising, recording, asking for clarification, regulating, instructing and so on. At one point, Swales (1990, p. 58) considered, "communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action".

Nevertheless, although Swales initially attributed great importance to communicative purpose as a genre-defining characteristic, he was open-minded to criticism towards his ideas and worked together with other intellectuals to broaden the understanding about which characteristics define a genre. In Askehave and Swales (2001), they mention the elusiveness of the term *purpose* and recommend that genre theory, "abandon communicative purpose as an immediate or even a quick method for sorting discourses into generic categories" (p. 207). What is readily available and evident for readers is actually only the form and content. On the other hand, they complete, researchers "can and should retain the concept [of communicative purpose] as a valuable - and perhaps unavoidable - long-term outcome of the analysis" (p. 207).

Although many contemporary educational approaches to genre have deeply rooted connections with *communicative purpose* and its implications in pedagogy, the term does not hold the self-evident clarity or the centrality status it used to. There are other factors that weigh as much when determining a genre, such as common structures, textual organization or intended

audiences. In other words, according to this principle, a text could not be considered 'good' or 'bad' *per se*, but should be viewed under the complex light of what its intentions and audiences are, and whether it is effective in achieving its goal.

Brian Paltridge brings a less theoretical, more hands-on approach to genre studies, and agrees that genre can be an organizing principle in the second language classroom. The practical class project activities that I will propose in the next chapter are very similar to his classroom approach, as will be discussed later. He states that "it takes us beyond the level of notion and function into larger units of work on which to base our teaching and learning programs." (2001, p. 3) Here, again, students are guided to develop awareness of features in the text and their relation to the purpose of communication and the discourse community for which the text is aimed.

The notion of genre defined as a 'staged goal-oriented social process' has played an important role in the development of the Australian curriculum. Paltridge (1996) defines staged, goal-oriented purposeful activities as revealing of "the stages through which a user of language moves to accomplish particular social and cultural goals" (p. 4). Furthermore, he defends the idea that developing a successful syllabus should "involve teacher and students in the identification [of target genres] to be relevant to students needs and interests" (p. 19), and also that the texts chosen and the activities to examine them need to be interrelated.

Additionally, he argues that lead-up activities are important ('setting context'), and they should focus on the social and cultural aspects, such as speaker, discourse community and audience, as well as the content and purpose of the

text. Some other elements to be regarded by students and teacher at this point are its tone, key vocabulary and so on.

2.2.3 THE AUSTRALIAN FRAMEWORK IN EFL CLASSROOMS

From the Australian approach to teaching, this section will present several genre-based activities that have been successful in regular schools and which can also be used to develop students' communicative competence in the English as a Foreign Language classroom, with focus on writing. While learning a different language is a challenge in itself, with all the new vocabulary, pronunciation and grammatical rules to follow, to also be able to use language in a context-appropriate manner in various types of social situations may pose as an even bigger challenge due to aspects of cultural differences between the learner and speakers of the target language. Genre pedagogy seems to help addressing such issues.

Hyland (2013) states that the 1990s were marked by a rise in the attention given to genres in the foreign language classroom. In an article where he describes some developments in the field, Abbaszadeh (2013) affirms "genre analysis and genre-based pedagogy have a lot to offer to all those involved in second language education in general and language teachers and learners in particular". (p. 1883) Even though the focus of the Sydney school was not originally foreign language learning, the principles of genre-based methodologies are aligned with learning-centered pedagogy and Abbaszadeh argues that there is huge potential to improve the learners' discourse competence.

We see in Lima (2016) there are three ways of using genre in the classroom - explicitly teaching particular genres, teaching antecedent genres, and teaching critical genre awareness, as discussed by a number of authors (Dolz & Schneuwly, 1997; Bazerman, 2003; Devitt, 2009; Hemais, 2012). Developing *genre awareness* in students is important. This means they should be able to identify those aspects of discourse or generic structures that differentiate one text type from another. Students should be constantly exposed to different kinds of writing. This will allow them not only to become familiarized with more genres and their main characteristics, but also to compare and contrast these characteristics.

Hyland (2003) sees the writing process as much more than a set of cognitive and intellectual abilities. Writing is, in his words:

> (...) a rich collection of elements of which cognition is only one, and to understand it fully and to teach it effectively we need to include in this mix the writer's experiences together with a sense of self, of others, of situation, of purpose and — above all — of the linguistic resources to address these effectively in social action. (p. 27)

From this we can infer that accurate grammar and proper spelling are not all it takes to create a successful text. Students' awareness of the text's functions, goals, social settings and target audience is fundamental. Hyland also states "genre theorists (...) locate participant relationships at the heart of language use and assume that every successful text will display the writer's awareness of its context and the readers who form part of that context" (p. 21). Teaching genres is an act of empowering students to be socially engaged in target

situations, and it helps to make them understood and communicate their ideas in context-appropriate manners.

As we can observe, Hyland has a categorical view of the importance of writing, taking it as the most important skill to be developed in students and the most important aspect of teacher training. In fact, written communication in professional and academic settings is a key element in accessing cultural aspects and accumulating knowledge in our present day society, and this is even truer if you can do so in other languages.

Martin and Rose (2007) provide important reflections on genre-based pedagogies that can also benefit the EFL classroom. They propose a segmentation of texts into four distinct types that should be chosen according to the author's goal: stories, historical recounts, reports and explanations, and procedural. They also classify four possible responses to texts, which may inspire more creative and interactive lessons: personal (describing feelings), review (summarizing and evaluating), interpretation (seeing the message behind the text) and critical (challenging the message in the text).

As Abbaszadeh (2013) points out, "genre analysis does not look only at the influence of purpose on the choice of grammatical forms, but also takes into consideration rhetorical functions" (p. 1880). In other words, the rhetorical function is directly connected to the social order changes proposed above by Martin (2007), as it refers to what the speaker/writer is able to do when trying to convince or persuade others to do or think about something in a certain way, and it also refers to what they intend to produce an effect on, aiming to making changes in the environment. Thus, the rhetorical function is also taken into consideration when evaluation happens.

Linked to this, Martin points out in the same book that good grammar and spelling are important too, and should not be neglected when creating curricula and pedagogical activities. In his words:

> (...) young writers worrying too much about spelling first time round can get in the way. At the same time, invented spelling brands these writers as illiterate, and that's not part of the configuration of meanings they are trying to weave together in their genres. So traditional drilling, memorization and spelling rules do have a role to play. The challenge is getting the balance right, when so many dimensions of meaning are being brought into play. (p. 46)

In Paltridge (1994), we can identify a series of activity suggestions for language classes. Some examples include providing students with a large amount of texts and asking them to classify these texts into categories; providing students with many texts in the same genres so they can try to identify generic structures and peculiar characteristics; dividing a text into various parts and having students assemble it back in the best order; or analyzing questions from real assignments and exams and discussing which kind of text would be appropriate.

In a chapter focused on writing tasks in another book, Paltridge (2001) writes a very important section in which he presents several ideas for genre activities in the language classroom, inspired by Swales' suggestions. In the *color-coding* activity, teachers may present texts in which they have marked parts that indicate the generic structure, and discuss them with students; or students and teacher may jointly identify and mark these discourse categories, e.g., the methods or conclusion sections of an article, or situation-problem-solution indicators.

Another suggestion is *peer review*: students analyze their fellow students' texts and make observations and suggestions. Writing from research or note cards, when pupils receive little initial information and are required to use what they have learned before, as well as their own experience, is also recommended. By investigating their audience, students can raise *rhetorical consciousness*, as it certainly helps them write their texts to better meet the social expectations.

2.3 THE PROJECT BASED METHOD

As stated above, over the last century there has been a significant increase in interest in new forms of teaching procedures developed within this model. The language course, which is the object of this section, uses a variety of strategies to help students overcome any difficulties and learn in a meaningful way. Concepts and teaching practices from ESP are implemented when preparing students for particular examinations, such as Cambridge or TOEFL, but the project methods and the activities that will be presented in this section are clearly closer to the Australian school genre approach.

In general terms, the project based method encourages students to take part in their own learning process through authentic curiosity, exchange and inquiring. It is based on the ideas of the North American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer John Dewey. Inspired by Dewey's propositions on democracy in the classroom, Knoll (2014) defines that "... [projects] regard students as active agents engaged in authentic tasks, solving

real problems, and generating knowledge and skills in dynamic interaction with their physical and social environment, thus creating meaning of themselves and the surrounding world."

In this pedagogical philosophy, researching, debating and organizing information is something students and teacher can do together. The easily accessible Internet is widespread and has become a major tool in human relations, both personally and professionally. Students and teachers are no longer restrained to only a few sources of information, a limited number of textbooks and standardized materials, since the Internet is literally at the tip of their fingers and is an endless source of data, testimonies, stories, charts, messages, news, pictures, documents, reports and so on. In fact, there is so much information that some thinkers say that one fundamental aspect in the new role of teachers should be to guide students through this immense amount of material and advise on how to filter and organize it so the process becomes a meaningful learning experience, and not just large chunks of random information which do not relate to each other.

Regarding the theoretical framework that comprises the pedagogy adopted in the course, it is mostly based on the ideas of Spanish educators Hernandez and Ventura (1998) and their proposal for classroom project strategies. According to Hernandez (2014), the project based perspective to teaching is necessarily jointly built among teachers and students. The lesson planning and evaluation are constructed in the process, and are not predetermined. This methodology will be further detailed below.

2.3.1 CONTEXT

At this point, it is important to note again that given my previous studies being in the Education and Psychology fields, I had become quite familiar with authors from a socio-constructivist and Psychology background. It was only after the beginning of the Linguistics specialization course that I realized that many of the classroom procedures adopted in this course take into consideration the multidimensional natures of language, as do systemic functional linguists and teachers.

The course is located in Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro, and was founded 13 years ago. It is physically a small course, with five classrooms. There are a little over one hundred students, most aged from 3 to 16, although there are some adult lessons as well, and around eight teachers. Classes are also small, up to eight pupils, and teachers have regular meetings and supervision with the coordinator to discuss and develop each lesson plan, to try to ensure the best possible activities according to the groups' particularities and needs. All students come from high-income families and attend private schools.

A psychologist and English teacher who is also the current director, alongside a fellow educational psychologist, developed the lesson plans within the project-based methodology. Although initially designed for kindergarten students, this approach has been successfully adapted for all ages over the years. Projects are not the only proposed activities for dealing with different contents and grammar rules that should be taught, but they are certainly very much present throughout the course curriculum. While at younger levels

projects may be adopted as the only teaching strategy, as children advance in age, lesson plans should alternate between projects and instructional activities.

2.3.2 PRINCIPLES OF THE PROJECT APPROACH

This description will focus on four main teaching principles that play pivotal roles in the methodology in the language course.

The first of these guiding principles is, of course, constructivism. In language classroom practice, this means, for example, that lessons and projects should be built upon what students already know about something, their vocabulary and previous ideas and hypothesis about any given subject. This is the reason that each lesson plan is meant to be unique, since it is done according to differences amongst groups, rather than being the same lesson plan for very student in the same level. It is the teachers' duties to make appropriate choices for specific groups and also to provide adequate scaffolding for students, as much as they need but without 'thinking' for them, helping them to advance.

A second principle is that learning always happens in interaction: with people, texts, ideas and so on. Activities should not only be planned considering their spontaneous occurrence, but also considering such interactions central to the learning process. Teachers should be aware that, at times this interaction (of information, decisions or ideas) might happen silently, within one's thoughts. Additionally, they are expected to be more a guide than an instructor, and this methodology moves away from the top-bottom design of traditional education. This is consistent with the Australian perspective, which also uses the Vygostkyan approach to teaching as guidance through interaction in the context of shared experiences.

The third important characteristic in the syllabus and the methodology developed and adopted by this course is that grammar topics and rules are never the main focus of lessons, whereas developing communicative competence is at the core of each class and is the goal of each activity. Many times, for example, students are presented with everyday, practical usage of a certain verb tense and only come into contact with its more specific rules of application *after* they have had a chance to use it in their own sentence constructions. Other good examples of this communication skills prominence are the big posters with an irregular verbs table, grammar rules or specific vocabulary, which are prepared in class by the students, are displayed on the walls, and can be consulted as they speak, write and even during tests.

The last principle is that the course regularly uses class projects with every group, although they are not the only approach in the classrooms. This means that for several lessons, the group orbits around a central theme or problem, that classes are connected to each other, and are certainly not only about a specific grammar aspect. Rather, students become immersed in a certain subject or spend time researching and learning about different aspects of one topic. They become explorers and investigate what they find interesting in the world, and 'learn by doing'. Textbooks are taken as nonessential, and may be used as needed, but the learning comes from experiencing their environment and reflecting upon it. A project method classroom values participation and collaboration to solve purposeful problems, which Dewey regarded as reinforcing citizenship and democratic values. There have been interdisciplinary projects in different areas of knowledge, such as Literature, Biology, History and Arts, and across all age levels.

Hernandez and Ventura (1998) recommend adopting roughly five steps when carrying them out: (i) creating with students a problem-situation, which may be simple or complex, and should be puzzling and appealing to the group; (ii) raising, analyzing and discussing information on this problem, while planning actions to understand or solve it; (iii) trying out these solutions; (iv) reviewing progress and evaluating success; and finally, (v) recording results and, optionally, having a final product.

In these procedures, where the interest of students is central, various subjects which make up students' daily lives, like social media, photography, TV shows, movies, songs, bands and so on, have been turned into custom made projects for the course and adapted for different fluency levels. Notwithstanding, however present throughout the course curriculum, projects are not the only proposed activities to approach different contents.

Although there are necessary differences among age levels, the initial approach to the project theme applies to all ages and levels: before the teacher starts 'teaching', students' voices are heard and considered fundamental when developing classes and materials. This is what socio-constructivism refers to when it affirms students' previous knowledge, beliefs and hypothesis should be considered.

The goal is appraising what they know, not defining whether it is correct or incorrect. To cite a practical example, instead of showing children pictures and telling them the names of the wild animals when presenting for the first time, teachers might ask students to name/draw as many wild animals as they can. The results may be confusing with pets and farm animals in it, depending on age and to what extent children have grasped the concept of *wild animals*

in which they might include pets and farm animals initially. At this point, however, there are no corrections or interventions, and the list should be finalized as the group of students reaches agreement on the term.

The catch here is, in spite of the 'correctness' of the previous knowledge of students, the teacher will be the guide who will help them research and confront information so that, eventually, they will be able to either confirm their initial hypothesis ("the cow is a wild animal, because we can't have one at home"), change or broaden their concepts ("even though cows are not pets, they still need humans to take care of them at the farm, but lions need no help from us"). For older students, of course, this means brainstorming a certain subject (education, sports, slavery, social media, health issues, professions, or technology) and taking notes on the main ideas presented by other students. Here, again, after reading and debating, gathering new information and exchanging it with peers and teachers, students have the chance to defend their ideas, or explain what made them change their minds.

The main goal, in this methodology, is not to memorize rules and words, but to learn how to use the language appropriately in specific situations. Grammar is not the focus; it is a tool to improve expression skills to achieve a certain communicative objective. Referring specifically to writing, which is the focus of this paper, teachers are oriented to value the capacity to present an idea clearly, or to defend an argument, rather than only look at spelling or sentence construction.

As it will be made clearer in the next chapter, although it may appear that these activities can be improvised, perhaps owing to the flexibility regarding

their application to different fluency levels and groups of students, they are in fact planned very thoroughly and carefully.

In the discussion section, the project based method principles described above, which are in clear alignment with the ones in the Australian genre based curriculum, will be assessed more thoroughly.

2.3.3 CLASS PROJECT PROPOSALS

When carefully planned and carried out, project activities have demonstrated in practice their potential to engage students and develop their writing skills through contextualized activities. It is important to note that it should mainly be the students who set the tone and pace for the projects, while teachers, therefore, should adapt their lessons and guide them to the development of a certain skill.

With the intent to be brief and true to the flexible nature of the projects, two projects will be described below, in outlines. Since it is not possible to give straight-to-the-point directions due to this very flexibility, teachers should have assistance when detailing each group's activities in the actual lesson plan, helping them deal with unexpected circumstances, both positive and negative.

2.3.2.1 CLASS NEWSPAPER

This fertile project happens when a group is invited to create a newspaper, with all the different sections and elements that a real one would have. When

it is finished, they print it out, make copies and distribute them to the whole course, which brings about valuable feedback from other groups.

Furthermore, this activity is especially rich considering the wide range of genres we are able to find in a newspaper. From movie reviews to crime reports, obituaries to advice columns with responses by specialists, from horoscopes to comic strips, the diversity is such that teachers and students should, in fact, narrow down beforehand which ones will be appraised.

Another considerable advantage is that this activity can be adapted to various levels of proficiency.

Usually, this small project will take 8-10 classes to be concluded. In the first part, students will be guided through an exploration of different sections of the newspaper, and hopefully develop awareness of some of the important elements which comprise the journalistic language.

At the end, students are expected to choose two or three sections of the newspaper and produce short articles, or ads, or pictures with informative subtitles, which will be put together to make something close to a 'proper' newspaper. It will be diagramed, printed out and distributed to other students, as well as placed in the reception area of the course, for any parents or visitors who wish to read it.

For more detailed procedures, refer to Appendix A.

2.3.2.2 MOCK TRIAL

In this project, during which we simulate one or more courtroom cases in class, teachers and learners role-play attorneys, defendants, judges and so on, and students are asked to produce a final written assignment, usually either a sentence or an appeal. For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on this written assignment rather than the oral debates that take place in these mock trials.

In actual courtrooms the spoken and written forms of the legal genre are rather complex, with various terms in Latin and very specific vocabulary, and these genres are definitely not something students are required or expected to know at an early stage in life. Nevertheless, this activity still works wonderfully as a means of developing critical thinking and arguing skills. From what I have consistently observed in classrooms where this project was carried out, students tend to engage in this activity especially because of a healthy, but rather energetic, competitiveness among the characters involved: they all want to be right and win the case.

Usually, moral ambiguity in a court case is an element that favors the emergence of contrasting opinions and enriches debates, as opposed to a case in which *right* and *wrong actions* are easily identified. Some examples include: self-defense injuries or murder, criminal negligence, unintentional harm or injuries, or even mental health issues which may have played a role in a case. On the other hand, presenting straightforward cases, such as domestic violence or child neglect, may be a chance for students to practice their arguing skills in a context where they do not agree with the argument, and this

can be quite interesting as well. Lastly, there are infinite ideas for trials with characters from fairy tales, stories, novels, movies and TV shows. Some ideas include Alice in Wonderland *vs.* The Queen of Hearts, The Big Bad Wolf *vs.* The Little Pig Who Survived, and The Empire *vs.* Luke Skywalker and so on. For this paper, a self-defense case was chosen, as shown in Appendix B.

One more important note to be made here is that, because of the particularities of the legal genre, we recommend that teachers adapt their material to suit each age group and language level, removing expressions in Latin and other elements which may be overly confusing for language learners and divert the focus of the activity. The time needed for this project will vary on the class size, but it usually takes at least 4-6 classes.

As it should be observed, the main focus of these activities is not to obtain perfect grammar or spelling scores, although this is taken into account during both the activity itself and the evaluation of students' written assignments. Some genres have consistent verb tenses or specific sentence structures, for example, which can be taught or revised during the activities. Nevertheless, the fundamental goal is to create written materials that are consistent with the writer's objective and appropriate for the intended audience.

The detailed procedures for this project can be found in Appendix B:

In the next section, other relevant aspects regarding the activities will be highlighted and examined in light of the Australian genre pedagogy.

3. DISCUSSION

In this section I will briefly discuss similarities and differences between the Australian genre pedagogy and the project-based approach I have been working with for twelve years. The methodology adopted by the language course presented in this study has been developed, applied in different contexts and updated for nearly 20 years. It is based on a solid framework grounded in child psychology and cognitive development associated with constructivist learning theories, whose principles are in thorough agreement with the Systemic Functional Linguistics concepts.

One of the outcomes of this study is my greater awareness of similarities between SFL and the Project methodology. To illustrate this, I will cite elements of Systemic Functional theory present in the language course curriculum and in the lesson planning throughout all ages and fluency levels in the course.

First, the projects and activities adopted are constantly concerned about the pragmatic and social features of language, and this concern influences the lesson planning and learning process.

Also, this pedagogy aims to help students develop higher thinking functions and create meaning for the world through social exchanges. In the same manner, SFL explores language in its social context. In Halliday (1978) we find a clear explanation that because it stands as a metaphor for society, language transmits social order, as well as maintains and modifies it. The main objective in both pedagogies is to help students develop analytical and

reflective skills, which they may use to further understand and influence the world around them.

The student-centered standpoint and the importance of social interaction present in both pedagogies are also clear. Teachers are no longer their only source of information. As teachers and instructors guide students, they break down ideas, reflect upon actions and facts in the world and what they know and believe. The aim is to prevent possible inconsistencies and contradictions. Besides, there are opportunities to compare and contrast their ideas on a given subject with other people, and enrich their own perceptions. Both pedagogies consider previous knowledge of students, for in order to accommodate a new idea or piece of information, the learner does not simply replace the old one with the new. All the necessary conceptual changes that need to take place demand constant interaction between old and new ideas, mediated by other people, social groups and cultures.

Moreover, both approaches are focused on raising students' genre awareness by identifying different structural elements in each genre. To mention more practical elements, I will illustrate some of the Sydney school activity suggestions that are also used in the project-based pedagogy of the course. The genre learning cycle tells us to deconstruct, analyze, jointly construct and independently construct; these are the same steps taken in the projects, when students break down and analyze newspaper clippings and sample court sentences with the teacher and the group before writing their own pieces. Also, classifying texts is a common practice in genre-based classrooms, and it is also what happens when a project activity requires sorting out text samples, as was done with newspaper clippings and random texts. When becoming familiar with the news or the legal genre, students also take into consideration

who the readers are and are guided to adapt language accordingly; the Australian approach has shown how central the awareness of the audience is in their classroom activities.

According to the Martin and Rose table presented in the theoretical background chapter (figure 2, p. 21), regarding the most common genres presented to students and that we can identify in the newspaper project, students may work with several types of texts: stories, information, procedure and evaluation. Examples include news stories, descriptive reports, interpreting research material and reviews. In the courtroom project, the focus is on evaluation and, more specifically, on argumentative skills. Students are asked to discuss one or more points of view and promote their own, as well as critically challenging other opinions, aiming at the enhancement of their rhetorical skills.

Finally, similarly to Systemic Functional Grammar, grammatical aspects are seen as tools to better express one's opinion or defend an idea, and knowing them is not a goal in itself. This does not mean rules are not presented, but only that they are presented as they are needed to achieve a certain communicative goal in the context of the projects. Also, if necessary, it is possible to focus on more specific aspects, such as spelling or vocabulary, or even a new verb tense. To cite one practical example, in order to introduce the Past Simple tense to students there is a project called *Heroes* in which the activities happen around describing and researching about a person each student chooses. The criteria are: students chose someone they really admire and who has already passed away. To be able to talk and write about this person, they will inevitably need to put the verbs in the past tense, and learn how to do so in a context in which they are personally interested.

Although this study has only brushed the surface with respect to comparing these pedagogies, a significant difference stands out and should be mentioned. It refers to the Sydney School context setting activities. One aspect that seems to permeate activities in genre pedagogies is that language, in whichever format, should be inserted in a context that makes sense for the learners. At the language course, the projects, although not the only teaching strategy, are mandatory and always take a considerable length in time. They challenge students with an intriguing question, a problematic situation, or a narrative, providing a main subject or theme as backdrop for the language learning exploration. These activities may last from three classes to three months, but there should be room for flexibility, since the same project may largely vary as they are planned and carried out based on each group of students. Learners get to take part, actively helping to build and direct these projects, and it is this interest and familiarity with the context that helps provide a deeper and more meaningful learning experience.

In the research conducted for this study, I was not able to find any specific guidelines in the Australian approach regarding rules of activity extent or material proposal for lengthier classroom projects. Further investigation would be necessary. However, in the Australian pedagogy it also seems that learners can be given isolated tasks without examining the subject more closely. This type of training may be important, for instance, with the purpose of taking standardized tests, whether in school or in other institutions, when students are often given a random topic and a limited timeframe to organize ideas and write.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is always stimulating when you, as an educational practitioner who uses a particular set of principles to guide your methodology, come across diverse theoretical frameworks and academic data to support teaching practices that you can verify are successful in helping students thrive, both on technical/academic and personal levels. Being presented to the practical and theoretical frameworks of genre studies allowed me to notice the analogy with the metaphor implicit in the work with class projects: There is always more than one path to reach a destination.

The course activities proposed in this study are aligned with the principles presented previously by the steps in the SFL learning cycle, where teacher and students deconstruct and analyze together various elements of each text, studying its basic structures, as well as other important socially related aspects of discourse, such as social contexts, intended audiences and goals. Genres are relatively stable and are defined over time by social conventions that may differ in each society. At the same time, they are always evolving, changing, along with the social contexts they are in, and becoming familiar with them is being able to manage important social tools.

Regardless of which framework is adopted, genre pedagogy usage seems to be increasingly adopted in the classrooms, and it should be there to stay. Texts are social constructs, and addressing them in the manner that genre practitioners do is perfectly aligned with the leading-edge socio-constructivist concepts of education. Expanding the use of genre pedagogies in schools and other teaching institutions is definitely beneficial for students in all ages, as the advantages for learners have been extensively demonstrated.

In this study, I have made a brief but original and, hopefully, relevant analysis of the similarities between the Sydney School genre pedagogy and the project-based educational principles and practices adopted in the language course. While the latter approach is relevant to the neo-socio-constructivist theory and to educational reform in general, in my opinion the genre studies field offers an even more context specific theoretical and practical support for developing writing skills in contemporary EFL classrooms.

Despite the exploratory and theoretical nature of this research, one possible outcome is considering that the idea of combining the genre approach with the project method is effective in the EFL context. Further investigations would have to be carried out to validate the benefits and assess limitations of this pedagogical alliance.

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APPENDIX A - Instructions for class newspaper project

I - Teacher asks students to describe a newspaper. 'What is it for?', 'Who writes it?', 'Which ones do you know?', 'Do you or does someone in your family read any? In print or online?', 'Which different sections are there?', what do the photographs refer to?, and so on. Takes notes for further consulting.

II - Teacher presents samples of newspaper clippings and read with students, then asks them to classify into the different sections: politics, world news, horoscope, sports and social events, police reports, comic strips etc. Next, students say what they think the authors were trying to do/accomplish with their writing, and whether they think they were successful in this. Also, teachers should bring up the questions regarding potential readers: who reads this type of newspaper? Was this appropriately written for them? Or what audience would be interested in this information?

III- Teacher asks students to bring samples from online international newspapers, and does the same activity of analyzing and classifying them. Yet another possible activity at this point is inserting other random texts (a personal email, a grocery list, a song lyric) among the newspaper clippings and observes whether students can identify the genres and explain why they do not belong in a newspaper.

IV - One issue that constantly appears in this project is the factuality of what is written in newspapers, as opposed to a narrative story or a poem, for instance. One very rich activity is to use articles about the same subject or event from different sources. This way, students can be guided to observe

variations in the same genre. Teachers should help the group to identify the differences and discuss how the articles cover the subject or event, regarding their size, focus, rhetorical organization, choice of quotation, vocabulary which may reveal negative or positive bias, pictures, deep investigation x superficial approach and so on.

V - Teacher asks students to choose one article/piece that they found interesting and have them orally summarize to the class what it is about. It would be very useful at this point to raise awareness of significant differences in spoken and written discourse by asking questions such as if they would use the same words to explain the content of this article if you: (i) were a news anchor at the 7 o'clock news? (ii) were describing it to a young child? (iii) were delivering school presentation about it?. Have them try to describe differences they were able to observe, and indicate other important ones which may have been left out.

VI - Teacher invites students to create a class newspaper. The final product will certainly vary enormously depending on class size and language level, but there is no *right* or *wrong*. Have them decide which sections should appear first, which ones cannot be left out, which contents and subjects they want to write about. Divide tasks between students.
Note: quite often students wish to invent news and stories rather than telling or retelling real news items. This is entirely acceptable as long as the genre characteristics are maintained. There are many examples of *fake news* and satire websites, such as *The Onion* or *The Borowitz Report*. One can also wish to, for instance, tell an imaginary fairy tale in the form of a police report.

VII - When the writing itself has begun, the teacher should guide students and help them make their writing appropriate to their goals. Also, peer reviews are useful at this point.

VIII - When texts are 'ready', teacher asks students which other elements there are in the pages of newspapers. Usually they cite things such as photographs and their captions, tables, charts, adverts, and even crossword puzzles and horoscope. Decide with students which ones they want to include in their newspaper and guide them through their composition.

XIX - Lastly, students and teachers work out the design details, layout, diagramming etc. of the newspaper, before printing, making copies and distributing it around the school and at home.

APPENDIX B - Instructions for mock trial project

I- Teacher asks students what they know about courtroom procedures: why trials happen, whether they have ever been to one, whether they can describe what happens etc.; raise and take note of specific vocabulary, list people and professionals who are involved, list some of the rules which must be followed in court etc. Teachers should take note of important words and expressions on the white board. Another idea is to show pictures of courtrooms, or to name characters from famous movies or TV shows which take place in such settings. As often happens in this stage of the project, if any elements that are important for the understanding of this specific case are not brought up spontaneously by students, teacher should bring them up and explain them.

II- Students and teachers build a brief timeline of what happens in most lawsuits. It does not have to be a detailed description, since the present activity requires just an overall idea of the order of events: crime - investigation - indictment - trial - defense and accusation - deliberation - sentencing - sanctions. Ideally, this timeline and also the relevant vocabulary and expressions should be crafted by the students into a poster and left in a visible place, where students can refer to as they speak or write about trials or judicial procedures throughout the project.

III - Teacher explains the proposed activity: students will take part in an adapted and short version of a mock trial of a woman who has been charged with the first degree murder of her husband, but claims it was self defense.

IV- Teacher brings examples and excerpts of (adapted) legal texts regarding similar subjects or criminal situations that will be appraised in the mock trial

in the classroom. This is the first moment when they will come in touch with the legal written genre, so teacher should draw students' attention to specific structures, verb tenses and the general 'tone' of the text. Also, the teacher will present students with parts from closing statements regarding crimes related to self-defense; optionally, if the teacher chooses to present an even bigger challenge to pupils, s/he can present the texts with gaps in the place of some of the legal vocabulary and have students fill them in.

V- Students come up with a few general rules regarding the written legal genre, either individually or in pairs. Compare and debate with others. This step is extremely important and should not be rushed through: allow students enough time to identify and be familiarized with the elements of legal writing. When there is consensus, the group makes a short list of these general rules. This guide does not need to be complete; it should reflect what students know at a certain point and be edited at any point during activities

VI - Teacher presents the case US vs. Dominique Stephens to students and clarifies important vocabulary such as self-defense, manslaughter and first- and second-degree murder. This can be done in several different manners and must be well suited for the skills, interest and preferences of each group: reading aloud or silently, storytelling, puppets, role-playing, video, comics etc. This full mock trial is actually several pages long, thus the teacher should read thoroughly beforehand and make the most appropriate planning decisions, always considering students' interests and needs.

VII - After being familiarized with the case, the teacher can ask students to summarize their opinion orally and comment on what they thought were the

most important factors. The teacher can hold a short debate assessing the reasons for their choices.

VIII - For the next step, teacher should once again assess what is best for each group, but there are many options to choose from: students may decide whether they prefer to take the role of the prosecution or the defense, and write closing arguments; or they may all take the role of the judge and write a sentence for the defendant, explaining he reasons for her being found guilty or innocent; or even, if this is the case, the teacher gives a sentence and students have to write an appeal. What is important is to have them recall and use those structures and vocabulary that they learned before and that should be used in courtroom contexts.

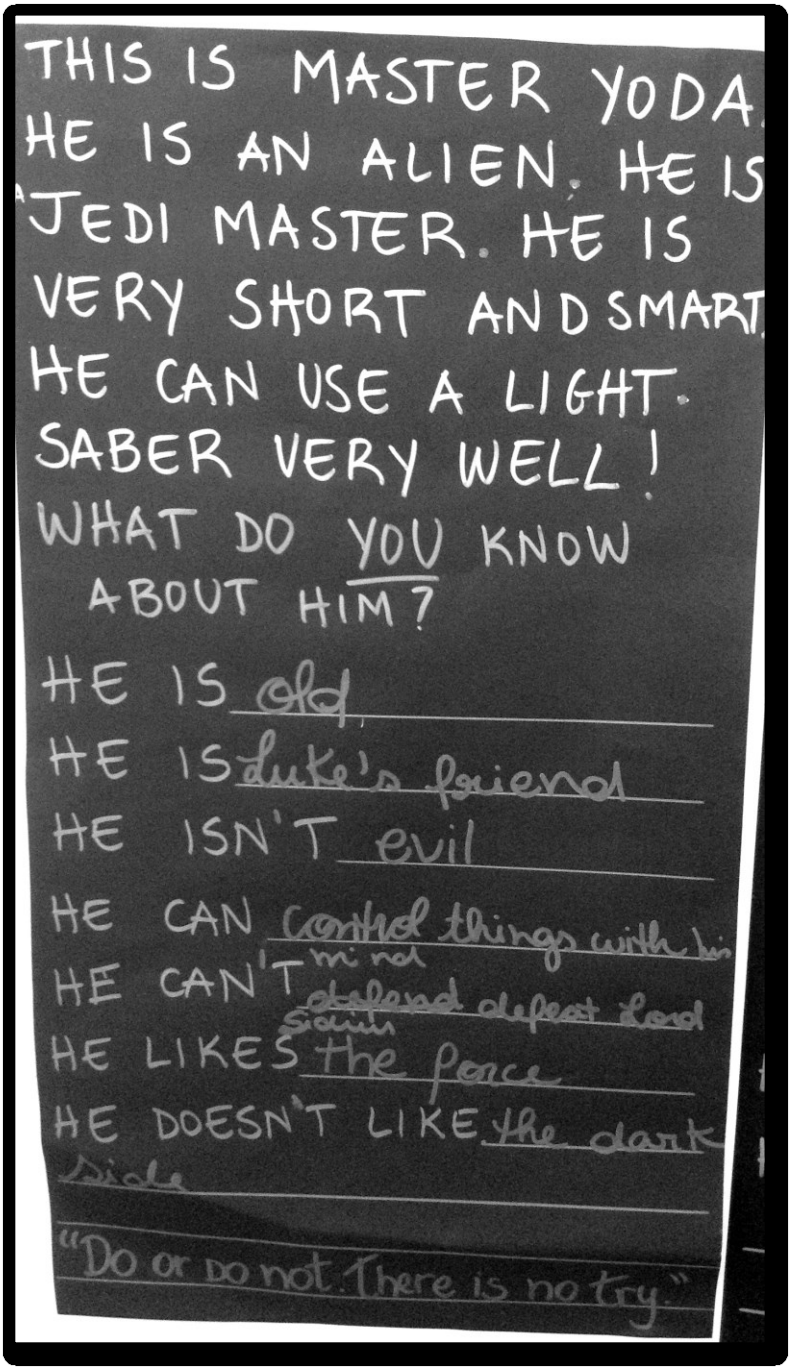
IX- Regardless of which paths the teacher might have taken in the project, it is important to have a defined goal, whether it is a specific communication skill or the answer to the project question, a written or oral task. Students ideally should also be aware of the goal from the beginning. In this mock trial project, as is in most activities, it is necessary to adapt the intended goal to the necessities, interests, language skills of each particular group. Teachers should use creativity and make sure to adjust to different situations and conditions. The option presented in previous step VII may be this final writing assignment, for instance. Alternatively, with beginners, teachers can ask them to write two or three sentences presenting their opinions; for intermediate students, instruct them to also give reasons for their choices; for advanced speakers, the activity may even challenge them even further with an expository essay.

APPENDIX C - Class material examples

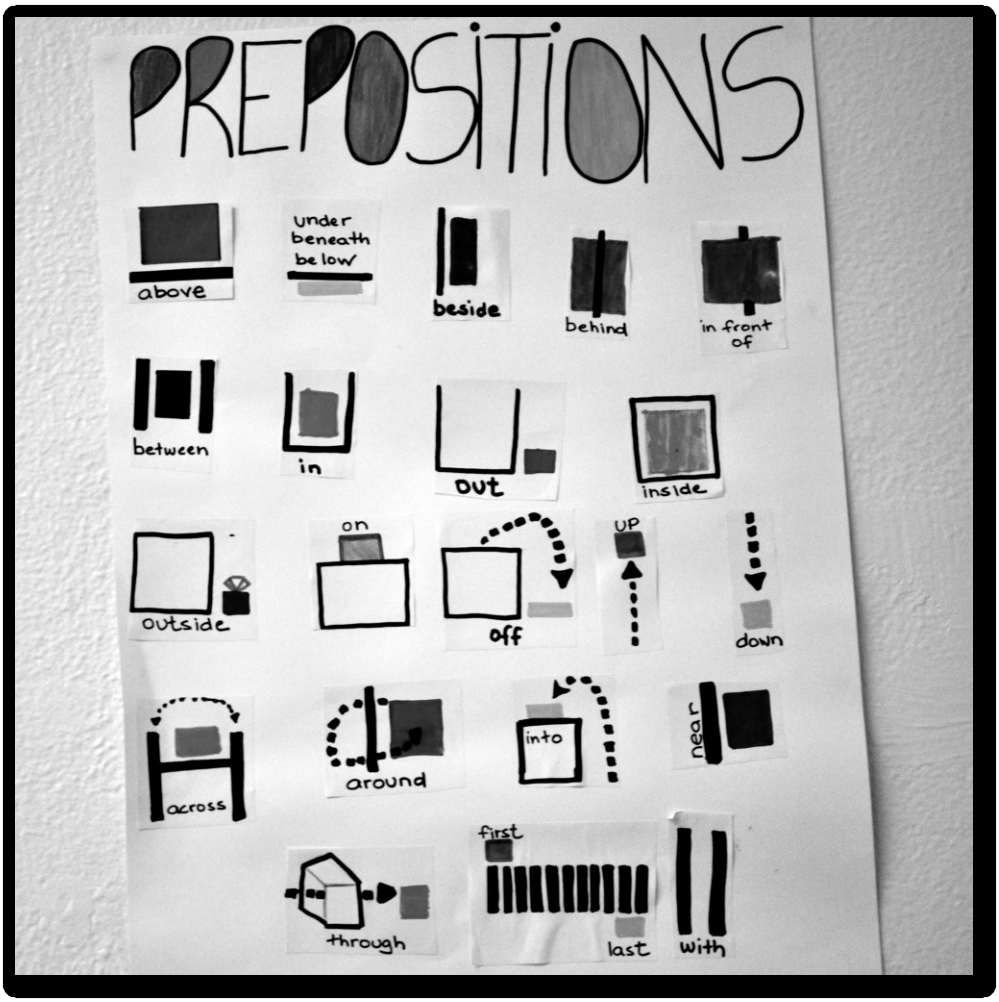
I have provided below some examples of posters made by students during some language course activities, alongside a brief description of the context in which they were made. These posters were hanging on the classroom walls and served as reference for students at all times, including during tests.

This was the first poster made in a Fashion project, where an all-girls group of 8-9 year-olds brought their favorite dolls to class and designed and produced beautiful and exclusive clothing for them.

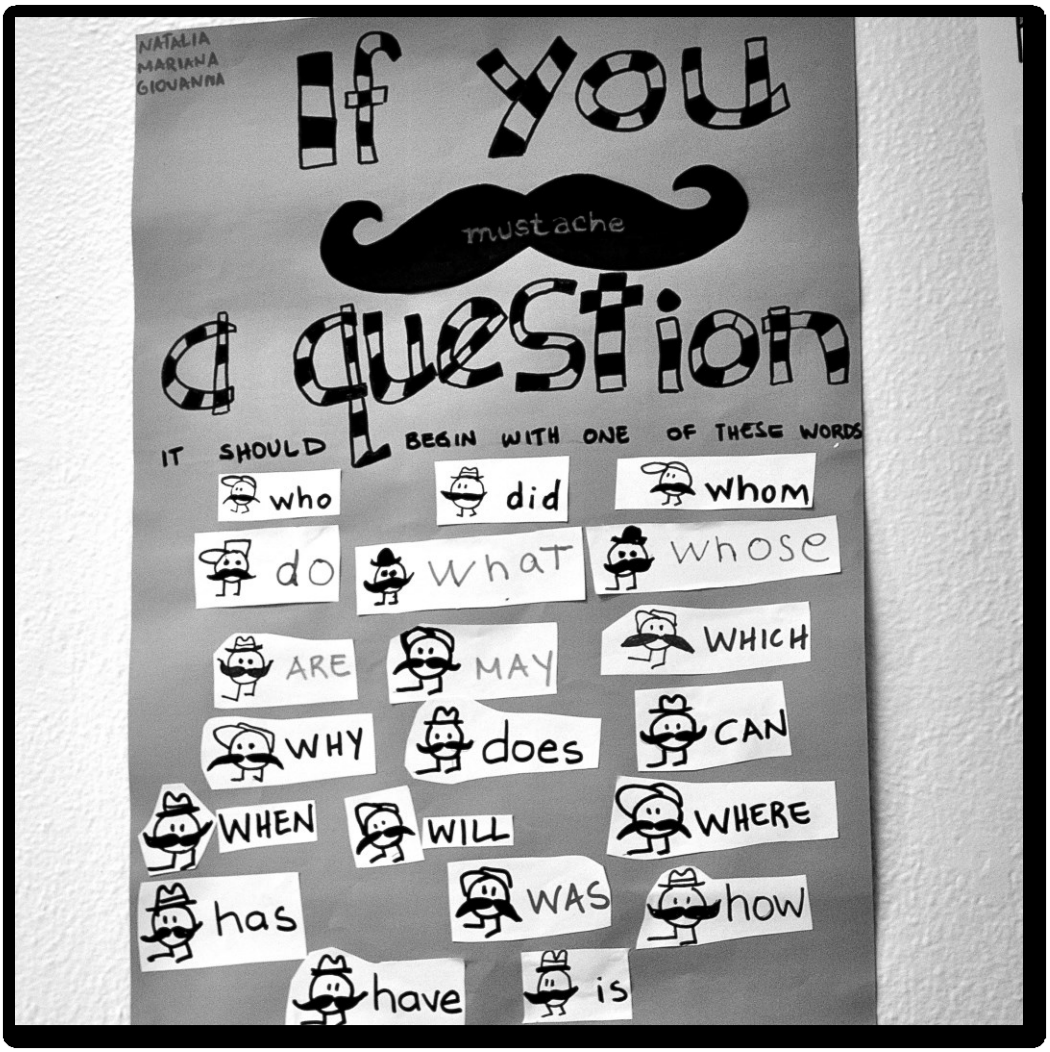
This poster was prepared in the context of a Star Wars project by a Level 1 group (6-7 years-old). The teacher writes the character description according to what students say, and also the structures they are learning in this context (he is..., he can't... etc.). It was placed at the waiting area where all students go through, and they were the ones who completed the sentences. The poster was, eventually, brought back to class for analysis and expansion.



This particular poster was not produced in the context of a project, but it was made based on the needs of a specific group who had great difficulty with prepositions. The teacher proposed and assisted with the activity. It hung on the wall for the most part of the year, and students could refer to it whenever needed.



Similar to the poster described above, this group realized their uncertainty when constructing questions, and prepared the poster below to aid them in this challenge.



A student in a beginner adult group who wanted to better express feelings and emotions made this poster. The teacher planned several lessons around this theme and helped each student build sentences according their personalities.