

Book review

Tardy C. M. (2019.) *Genre-based writing: What every ESL teacher needs to know.* University of Michigan Press.

Reviewed by Subrata Bhowmik

Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

A genre-based approach to second language (L2) writing instruction has gained momentum in recent times (e.g., see Caplan & Farling, 2016; de Oliveira & Lan, 2014; Hodgson-Drysdale, 2016). This, after L2 writing scholars have made a case for years that a genre-based approach to L2 writing instruction provides students with specific goals to achieve and a purpose in writing, unlike a process approach, in which student writing is more or less tangential rather than aimed at a specific purpose (e.g., Hyland, 2003, 2004, 2007). According to these scholars, teachers adopting a genre-based approach can create activities and lessons aimed at helping students achieve small but specific writing goals. Although a number of book-length works addressing various conceptual and theoretical orientations of genre and genre-based pedagogy have emerged in recent times (e.g., Cheng, 2018; Hyon, 2018; Swales & Feak, 2011; Tardy, 2009, 2016), what was missing in the field was a simplified account of genre-based L2 writing pedagogy, providing tangible teaching techniques and strategies for practical applications in the classroom. Christine M. Tardy's book *Genre-based writing: What every ESL teacher needs to know* fills this void.

Upon reading the book, the readers can expect to gain the nuts and bolts understanding about genre-based writing pedagogy without having to put themselves through complex and oftentimes dense academic texts that involve heated scholarly debates over not-so-easy-to-understand theoretical and empirical issues. In contrast, the book is a short and easy read, written in easy-to-follow language that is suitable for academic and non-academic audiences, secondary and post-secondary readers as well as experts and non-experts of genre theory. The book offers key concepts related to genre and genre-based writing instruction in a simplified manner. As well, the book provides helpful ideas for classroom practices for secondary and post-secondary teachers in "application activity" units that are incorporated in most sections of the book. Taken together, Tardy has expertly fulfilled the goals for writing the book that she set for herself as indicated in her

Introduction—to provide teachers “an accessible introduction to genre and genre-based writing instruction.”

According to Tardy, the successful implementation of a genre-based writing pedagogy involves knowledge in three key areas: (a) an understanding of genre, (b) an understanding of the key principles of genre-based writing instruction, and (c) a familiarity with the tools that teachers need to implement genre-based writing pedagogy. Hence, Tardy has organized her book covering these three key areas and divided her discussion into eight sections (note that the author describes the “chapters” as “sections”). The first three sections of the book provide a general introduction and key concepts of genre, the next three sections focus on the principles involving genre-based writing pedagogy, and the final two sections provide tools that teachers can utilize to implement genre-based writing instruction in the classroom.

The first part of the book, encompassing sections 1-3, sheds light on issues such as “what is genre,” “what is a genre-based approach to writing instruction,” and “designing genre-based writing activities.” In section 1, Tardy discusses topics such as conventions, discourse communities, rhetorical situations, and so on. In explicating each of these issues, she uses examples taken from everyday writing activities (e.g., online restaurant reviews, book reviews), which would make it easy for both teachers and students to relate to the importance of genre in learning how to write effectively. Tardy also discusses genre in academic writing and provides several examples. In section 2, she differentiates between genre knowledge and genre awareness to equip teachers with important conceptual framing that they may find useful in planning lessons and writing activities. At the end of the section, Tardy provides five principles to plan genre-based writing instruction. These principles, along with the preceding conceptual framing of genre knowledge and genre awareness, should provide writing instructors with expanded knowledge to plan writing activities for their own context of teaching. In section 3, Tardy lays out important considerations for designing genre-based writing activities, addressing topics such as selecting genres, sequencing and scaffolding tasks, selecting sample texts, making tasks student-centered, and contextualizing genre analysis. This section thus provides useful insights into what to keep in mind when implementing effective genre-based writing instruction.

The second part of the book, encompassing sections 4-6, is focused on illustrating a genre-based approach to writing instruction. In section 4, Tardy discusses genre form and content, shedding light on topics such as the grammatical, lexical, and lexico-grammatical features, multimodal elements, and content of genre. In section 5, Tardy discusses genre practices, focusing on topics such as genre

uptake and networks, composing processes, and distributing and sharing genres. In section 6, Tardy discusses the important issue of the social and rhetorical aspects of genre. She sheds light on topics such as rhetorical situation, communities of users, and identities in genre use. It should be noted that in each section, Tardy's discussion on these topics is followed by ideas for classroom exploration, providing useful insights into classroom activities that teachers can use. Thus, after reading these sections, the readers can expect to gain an understanding about what a genre-based approach to writing instruction entails and what to focus on when adopting such an approach in their own teaching contexts.

The final part of the book, encompassing sections 7-8, focuses on writing activities. Section 7 discusses incorporating play into genre-based writing instruction. It provides readers with overviews of topics such as bending genres or variations in genres, parody, role play, and remixing and redesigning genres, with a goal for teachers to create different writing activities that would expand students' genre knowledge and contribute to their understanding about and improvement of writing. Finally, in section 8, Tardy provides seven tips for teachers about genre-based writing instruction. These tips can be a useful checklist of things to remember when adopting a genre approach to teaching writing.

Overall, this book is an excellent resource for secondary and post-secondary teachers of writing, who are looking for a text that would provide them with practical ideas to implement a genre-based pedagogy in the classroom. Since the book is written in an approachable way (without much use of technical terms), readers would not necessarily need a composition or rhetoric background to fully grasp the ideas covered. As well, Tardy has judiciously excluded dense theoretical discussions on genre to make the text easily accessible. Another aspect that writing teachers might find particularly helpful is that the book offers practical ideas for classroom activities on various aspects of genre.

Although Tardy clearly describes genre-based writing pedagogy, she does not share how a genre-based approach to writing instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs) is different from that of mainstream (i.e., English-speaking) students. To put it differently, it is unclear what specific techniques and strategies are required for a genre-based approach to teaching writing to ELLs. As the title suggests, the book is intended for teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL); the expectation, therefore, was that the author would discuss specific strategies and techniques for using a genre-based approach to teaching writing to ELLs, keeping in mind the unique needs and characteristics of these writers. There was minimal information about this in the book. It is well established in the field of L2 writing that ELLs have unique needs and characteristics as writers.

Consequently, a book focused on ESL teachers should shed some light on the techniques and strategies required to address ELLs' unique needs and characteristics. For example, it would have been helpful to know more about how ELLs' disparate backgrounds may play out when they engage in genre analysis or analyze the rhetorical situations and genre conventions. How would their backgrounds impact the way in which ELLs write or interpret emails (as a genre)? What strategies should the teacher adopt in such situations? These questions remain unanswered. In fact, there was no discussion of ELL-specific teaching strategies and techniques of a genre-based approach to writing instruction. In all fairness, Tardy does mention about ESL and/or L2 writing on a few occasions in the book, but she does so only in passing. Another aspect of the book that could have been strengthened is the equal inclusion of application activities for all major topics. Although Tardy provides many application activities, there are topics that do not have such activities included. Specifically, for example, she could have included activities on genre awareness in section 2 and communities of users and identities in section 6.

In sum, *Genre-based writing: What every ESL teacher needs to know* is a must read for teachers of writing. The book provides the nuts-and-bolts knowledge of a genre-based approach to writing instruction and it does so with easy-to-follow language and content.

References

- Caplan, N. A., & Farling, M. (2016). A dozen heads are better than one: Collaborative writing in genre-based pedagogy. *TESOL Journal*, 8(3), 564–581. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.287>.
- Cheng, A. (2018). *Genre and graduate-level research writing*. University of Michigan Press.
- De Oliveira, L. C., & Lan, S. W. (2014). Writing science in an upper elementary classroom: A genre-based approach to teaching English language learners. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 25, 23–39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2014.05.001>
- Hodgson-Drysdale, T. (2016). Teaching writing through genres and language. In L. C. de Oliveira & T. Silva (Eds.), *Second language writing in elementary classrooms: Instructional issues, content-area writing and teacher education* (pp. 69–87). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hyland, K. (2003). Genre-based pedagogies: A social response to process. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12(1), 17–29. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743\(02\)00124-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(02)00124-8)
- Hyland, K. (2004). *Genre and second language writing*. University of Michigan Press.
- Hyland, K. (2007). Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16, 148–164. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.07.005>

Hyon, S. (2018). *Introducing genre and English for specific purposes*. Routledge.

Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2011). *Navigating academic: Writing supporting genres*. University of Michigan Press.

Tardy, C. M. (2009). *Building genre knowledge*. Parlor Press.

Tardy, C. M. (2016). *Beyond convention: Genre innovation in academic writing*. University of Michigan Press.