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Reflective writing: the 3D format

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Summary

Literacy research in Australia and overseas has identified the need for students in secondary schools to master the linguistic structures and features of different written genres.

One teacher at Kiama High School in New South Wales has devised a scaffold for students to analyse texts and to create reflective written responses to those texts. Her aim is to develop students' metacognitive awareness of the strategies they need to analyse and evaluate how authors construct meaning, and to convey, in writing, the impact this has on them as readers/viewers. The three-dimensional writing strategy supports students to reflect on a range of texts and to share their analyses and evaluation of texts using a simple format.

Target student group

The strategy has been used with secondary school students at all levels.

Method

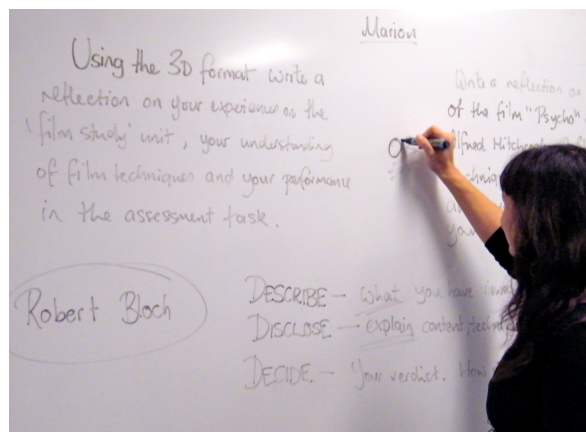
'In English I enjoy looking at poems and songs to get an understanding of what they are saying and the messages that are sent through them. I also enjoy listening to others' ideas about how they see things.'
(Student, Skills Inventory Task)

The three-dimensional writing strategy provides students with a metacognitive awareness of what is required of them as readers/viewers of texts and as writers of text responses. It assists them to move from the literal comprehension of a text to inference; to record their thoughts and feelings about a text they have read or viewed; and to reflect on these thoughts and feelings in writing.



The three dimensions of the strategy

Dimension	Actions
Describe	<p>Outline the event, activity, text</p> <p>Provide details: date, time, place, composer, audience, context, purpose</p> <p>¼ page or 1–2 paragraphs</p>
Disclose	<p>Use the first person pronoun to explain your thoughts, feelings and ideas</p> <p>Use specific examples of features/techniques to fully explain point of view</p> <p>½ page or several paragraphs</p>
Decision	<p>Use the first person pronoun to outline how your thinking and learning has been affected</p> <p>¼ page brief concluding paragraph</p>

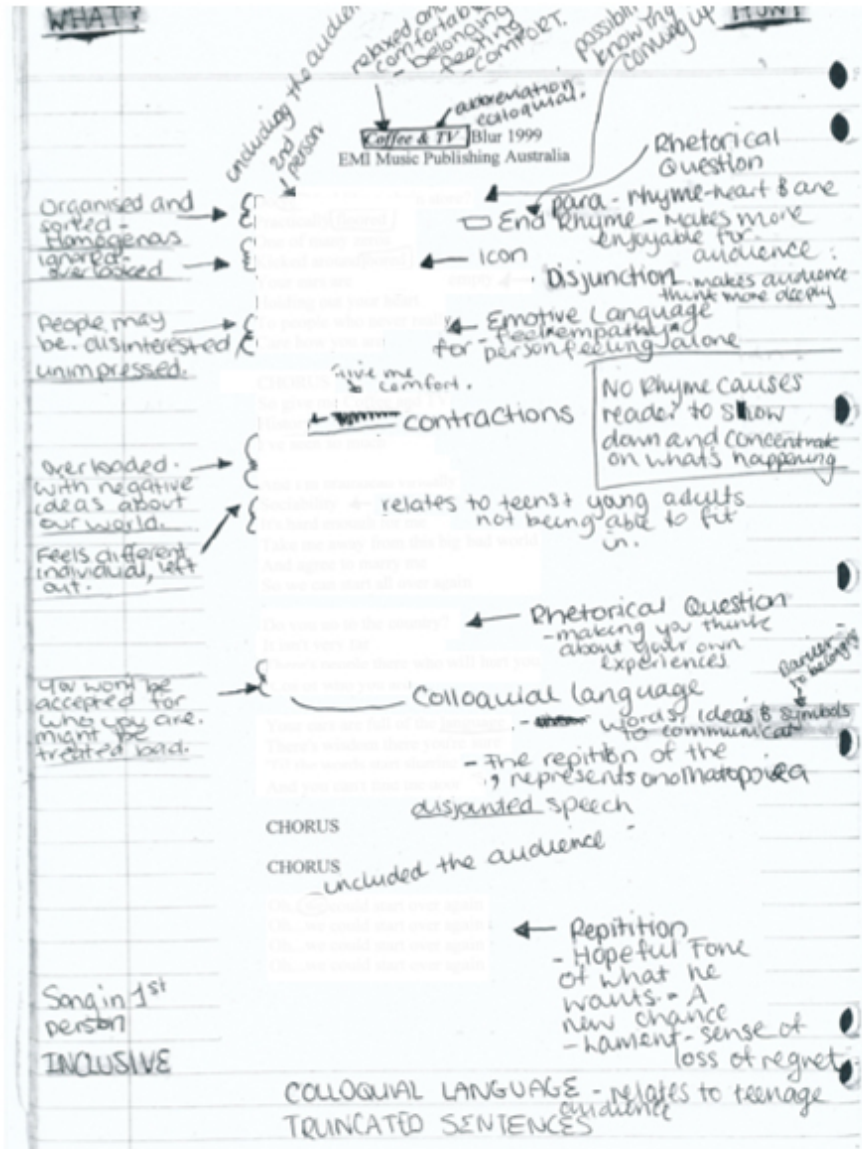


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Over time, students can add more detail to each of the dimensions of the strategy.



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Results

Observations of student work over a period of six years have enabled the teacher, Kerri-Jane Burke, to determine the success of the writing strategy. She believes that the strategy extends students who are capable writers and supports those who need additional support to read/view a text, think about its meaning and convey this in a written reflective analysis. She has observed students developing confidence in their reflective writing after initial success with the strategy.

Lessons learned

The lessons that Kerri-Jane has learned through using this strategy have been shared with other teachers via professional publications and conference presentations. In these, Kerri-Jane has showcased the potential of young writers who are considered and insightful in responding to texts, and thus the impact of the three-dimensional writing strategy.

Kerri-Jane has also shared the evidence of her students' growing self-confidence and efficacy as writers through her support for creative writing festivals, where her students' compositions of stories, poems and multimedia texts demonstrate their understanding of how writers create meaning for an audience.

Next steps

Kerri-Jane is teaching students at her new school to use the three-dimensional writing strategy. She plans to continue to support young writers through creative writing programs and to highlight to students the strategies that effective readers and writers draw upon when they engage in the complex process of reflecting on texts.

Research base

Literacy research in Australia and overseas has identified the need for students in secondary schools to master the linguistic structures and features of complex written genres. Classroom-based research has highlighted the need for explicit instruction around different genres and the audiences, contexts and purposes that shape the written structures and features of texts (see Christie & Derewianka 2008). Comprehensive studies of adolescent writers attest to the importance of focused attention on the cognitive strategies necessary for effective writing (eg Olsen & Land 2007).



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Studies have also identified what experienced readers and writers do when they construct meaning from texts (see Flower & Hayes 1981); the interrelationship between reading and writing (Tierney & Shanahan 1991); and the significance of self-efficacy, engagement and self-belief to the writing process (Alvermann 2002; Olsen & Land 2007).

The three-dimensional writing strategy developed by Kerri-Jane Burke is an example of a metacognitive writing scaffold, designed to make explicit to students the structures and features of writing which is reflective, analytical and evaluative. The strategy encourages students to develop a range of skills in identifying features of a text, critically analysing its meaning and making an evaluation of the impact the text has on them, as a reader/viewer (see Burke 2007; 2009). In this way, the strategy assists students to move from the 'personal to the analytical' in reflecting on their responses to texts.

The three-dimensional writing strategy supports the interrelationship between reading, thinking and writing in the NSW English curriculum. Students in the middle years are required to master the genre of reflection to consider their own processes of responding to and composing texts. They also need to include an element of reflective writing in their creative writing. Senior level students are required to write reflectively for their external exams.

To date, the three-dimensional writing strategy has been used with hundreds of students to develop their capacity to present analytical argument and extended text response, but it has particular application for those students who find writing difficult.

Further reading and links

Alvermann, DE 2002, 'Effective literacy instruction for adolescents', *Journal of literacy research*, vol 34, no 2, pp 189–208.

Burke, KJ 2007, 'Reflective writing: the 3D format', *Metaphor*, vol 4, pp 65–6.

Burke, KJ 2009, 'Year 10 students reflecting on the classics', *Literacy learning in the middle years*, vol 17, no 1, pp 35–40.

Christie, F & Derewianka, B 2008, *School discourse: learning to write across the years of schooling*, Continuum, London, New York.

Flower, L & Hayes, JR 1981, 'A cognitive process theory of writing', *College composition and communication*, vol 32, pp 365–87.



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Olson, C & Land, R 2007, 'A cognitive strategies approach to reading and writing instruction for English language learners in secondary school', *Research in the teaching of English*, vol 41, no 3, pp 269–303.

Pressley, M 2004, 'The need for research on secondary literacy education', in TL Jetton & JA Dole (eds), *Adolescent literacy research and practice*, Guilford, New York, pp 415–32.

Tierney, RJ & Shanahan, T 1991, 'Research on the reading–writing relationship: interactions, transactions, and outcomes', in R Barr, ML Kamil, PB Mosenthal & PD Pearson (eds), *Handbook of reading research*, vol 2, Longman, New York, pp 246–80.

Contacts

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