NEW PUBLICATIONS   ***   NUWE PUBLIKASIES

Christopher Tribble. 1996. *Writing*. Oxford: OUP. pp 172.

The latest addition to the *Language Teaching (A Scheme for Teacher Education)* Oxford series offers a range of stimulating learning experiences.

The focus on teacher education rather than teacher training means that the central purpose of the book is to stimulate and continue internal development and thus promote informed, reflective practice. Tribble understands the need to take as full account as possible of his readers. In this case, he sees his audience as including students for whom English is not necessarily a first language, and who might have little background in linguistic theory or knowledge of recent approaches to writing. He generally ensures that the content is accessible by using 'plain English' and by offering as many concrete examples as possible. Students are given frequent tasks to do. These invite them to explore the underlying assumptions of various writing assignments so that they can gain a critical understanding of the choices that the materials writers have made, as well as gain the ability to adapt or extend the tasks. In this respect he can be described as encouraging a principled approach.

In line with the usual pattern of the series, the books is divided into three sections: *Explanation* ('What has been said' i.e. an outline of the theoretical background); *Demonstration* ('What has been done', i.e. the relationship between theory and practice); *Exploration* ('What you can do' i.e. small-scale research activities teachers can carry out in the process of their own teaching).

In Section One, Tribble urges an integration of two approaches which have often been viewed as opposites: process writing and the genre approach. Student writers gain both from familiarity with certain genres, but need practice in the process of producing texts that are socially appropriate. The demands of Figures 3 and 4 are particularly useful in showing how the strengths of these two approaches can be combined.

The section tackles a number of large issues, basing the advice given on a comprehensive survey of the work of key figures in text study and writing development. Perhaps it is inevitable that an attempt to discuss complex concepts such as 'discourse' and 'genre' cannot be entirely successful. Pages 33 to 36 would be particularly difficult for the uninitiated to follow because there is an attempt to compress the very complex insights available from Hoey (1983) into a matter of a few pages. On the other hand, the second and third chapters which deal with the roles of writing and the differences between reading and writing are particularly clear.

It seems a pity that the opportunity to press the case for Plain English was not take in this section. Some of the examples used to illustrate the difference between written and spoken English for instance veer towards frozen English. The example on page 9 ('I is a case in point. While it must be conceded that the author was attempting to highlight differences between

written and spoken language, it is important that students be directed to the value of being direct, simple and courteous rather than being laborious.

Section Two looks at a range of teaching materials and offers a means of evaluating the potential usefulness of published materials. South African education students may find the focus on adult material too strong, but they should find it relatively easy to apply the criteria Tribble develops to assignments for primary or secondary school learners. I feel that it is a pity that the practicable instrument Hedge (1988) provides for evaluating writing tasks was not included in this section.

A particularly useful inclusion is the attention paid to responding to student writing. Tribble makes an important distinction between the kind of marking which may be an appropriate response to a *writing to learn* exercise and the kind needed to respond to a completed piece of work. Task 70 highlights the weaknesses in an approach which focuses on sentence-level problems and ignores macro aspects such as overall organisation of the text or the extent to which the content of the text says enough to satisfy the reader.

Tribble believes firmly in the need to create opportunities for learners to serve as apprentice writers. His adaptation of a writing task taken from Willis and Willis (1988:82) is an example of such an opportunity.

Plan a brochure intended for one of these two audiences:

either: fairly well-off tourists or business people on expenses
or: penniless students or hard-up travellers

In groups produce a page of a colour brochure (similar to the first page of this unit) about a town or city other than London. Suggest three or four places (illegible text) for the audience that you have chosen. Plan the page design carefully so that it will look attractive to your readers.

Decide exactly what pictures you would want, then write a description of each one so that an artist could draw it, or so that a picture researcher could find a photograph as close as possible to what you want.

Tribble explains how this task could be adapted to allow students to learn a great deal about the process of writing. He suggests dividing the class into 'art-brief' writers and 'artists or picture-researchers'. Unlike the original task, this adaptation allows learners an opportunity to develop a stronger awareness of the role of context as well as the needs of the audience. By giving learners an opportunity to work in both roles, they would have focused practice in learning to use appropriate writing skills and gain a better idea of the needs of readers by working with the descriptions that have been prepared by other groups:

In this kind of context ... [they] can develop their awareness of the writing processes involved in selecting clear, unambiguous language and organising it in the most reader-friendly way (p. 71)

Tribble argues for the use of models within a critical framework as a means of enabling learners to 'understand how social context influences the way in which writers make textual, grammatical, and lexical choices (p. 79) and to 'develop their own writing style' (p. 78). This should encourage prospective teachers to see the ways in which writing assignments (both those drawn from commercial material and those of their own design) could be adapted to help learners write more effectively in all four of the different sets of knowledge Tribble highlights: content knowledge and context knowledge (genre); knowledge of the language system, and knowledge of appropriate writing processes.

Section Three makes a number of suggestions for manageable action research, which should encourage teachers to test their new insights in the particular context of their own classrooms.

The content of the book is enhanced by the selection of illustrations and diagrams. Three that deserve particular mention are the diagram from Callaghan, Knapp and Nobel (1993: 193) on page 146, and Figures 3 (p. 60) and 4 (p. 68) which provide clear summaries of aspects of writing.

REFERENCES

Hedge, T. 1988. *Writing*. Oxford: OUP.

Hoey, M. 1983. *On the surface of discourse*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

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