

## **A Genre-Based Approach to L2 Writing Instruction in K–12**

by [\*Luciana C. de Oliveira\*](#)

Writing is an essential skill for elementary and secondary (K–12) students. Often, in teacher education programs that prepare K–12 teachers, when literacy is addressed, the emphasis seems to be on reading rather than writing. Preparing teachers to teach writing needs to be at the center of discussions about second language writing (SLW) teacher education.

In the last few years, more research has attended to this crucial area (see, for example, de Oliveira & Silva, 2013, 2016) and called for educators to apply the concept of genre to writing instruction to support second language (L2) writers in mainstream classrooms. Among the various approaches to teaching genres, genre-based pedagogy informed by systemic-functional linguistics has been used in K–12 to support L2 writers in writing the types of texts they will encounter within various disciplines in schools. This article describes a genre-based approach to writing instruction in K–12 and provides some ideas for teachers to implement this approach in their classrooms.

### **A Genre-Based Approach to Writing Instruction in K–12**

This approach uses the concept of a Teaching–Learning Cycle (TLC) to emphasize the role of interaction and guidance in learning to read and write texts. Originally, the TLC was made up of three phases of activity: Deconstruction, Joint Construction, and Independent Construction. After my work in K–5 classrooms, I included the additional, optional phase of Collaborative Construction, explained below. Figure 1 shows these phases, guided by the principle “guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience.” This principle refers to the guidance provided by teachers in talking, reading, and writing about a specific text in the context of a shared experience—a common text, movie, reading. This means that students write about something that they shared as an activity. They wouldn’t write, for example, about their summer vacations, as each student had a different summer vacation (and some perhaps did not have a vacation!) so they bring different experiences to the writing task. Instead, a shared experience is a critical component of writing.

The TLC takes writers through the phases of deconstructing mentor texts, joint construction, and independent construction, allowing students different points of entry and enabling teachers to start at any one of these phases. This process can be recursive and repeated as students become more familiar with specific genres.

“Setting context” is important to build with students as they think of the specific context for writing a specific genre within other possible contexts. The notion of “building field,” or building up students’ knowledge of the content information, at all phases is key as students develop their knowledge of the specific content and the context of particular texts. Students also build a critical orientation to text by not just learning about the genre but being critical of its usage. Starting with the Deconstruction phase, the TLC aims to provide students with teacher interaction, guidance, and support as students go through these phases.

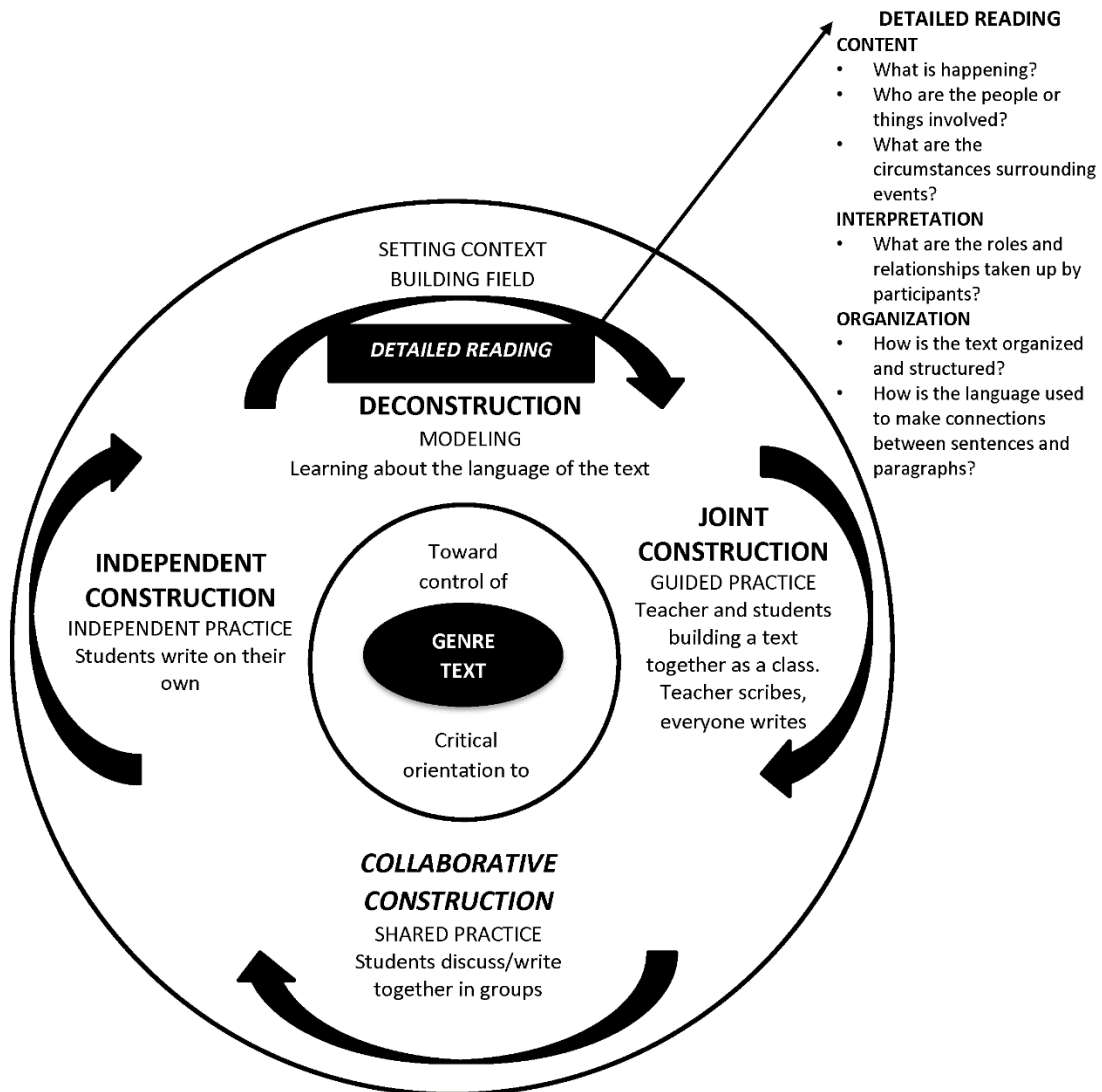


Figure 1. Teaching-Learning Cycle adapted to K–12

## The TLC Phases

### Deconstruction

Teachers introduce mentor texts in a specific genre that students are expected to read and write (e.g., imaginative recount, procedural recount, biographical recount); guide students to deconstruct model texts through demonstration, modeling, and discussions about their purpose, text structures (stages), and language features typical of a specific genre; and build up students' knowledge of the content information. As Figure 1 shows, this is when a detailed reading of the text helps teachers and students to discuss the content, interpretation, and organization of the text, using the questions provided as a guide.

### Joint Construction

Teachers and students work together to write a text in the same genre. In this phase, the teacher and students coconstruct texts that are similar to the mentor texts that they already learned in the

deconstruction phase. Students start using the language features of the specific genre about which they are learning. In coconstructing texts, teachers are expected to provide a bridge for students between their everyday language and the academic language of school so attention will be directed to text organizational issues such as purpose, stages, and language features. The teacher is typically in front of the room scribing while everyone is writing together.

### **Collaborative Construction**

I've added this phase as a bridge between the joint construction and independent construction phases, especially for students in grades K–2 who are novice writers. Students work with other students in pairs or small groups to construct a text together, brainstorming and negotiating ideas, writing, and revising. Teachers continue to support collaborative pairs/groups as needed.

### **Independent Construction**

Students are ready to work independently to construct their own texts in the specific genre. Teachers are expected to minimize their support, scaffolding, and guidance so students are given more opportunities for their independent writing of the specific genre.

These phases of the TLC start with the whole text as the unit in focus rather than individual sentences. Thus these phases enable teachers to support their students in developing their knowledge and control of school genres across disciplines. The concept of genre and its accompanying instructional method has been taken up in elementary and secondary school contexts in the United States to support the academic writing development of English language learners. For more information about genres, see Brisk (2015), Derewianka and Jones (2013), and de Oliveira (2016).

## **TLC Implementation: A First-Grade Classroom**

I have worked with K–12 teachers on research projects and conducted several workshops to prepare them to implement the TLC in their classrooms. One example is from a first-grade classroom where my research team has been working with the teacher to implement literacy activities related to the books they are reading as part of their literacy program. The teacher—Mrs. Cabana (pseudonym)—and our research team constructed the mentor text to be used during the Deconstruction phase with students (see [Appendix](#)), and we discussed the main language features and genre expectations. Figure 2 shows a Deconstruction example with a *book recount* of events from *Last Stop on Market Street*. Mrs. Cabana focused primarily on the “Record of Events” stage of the book recount genre.

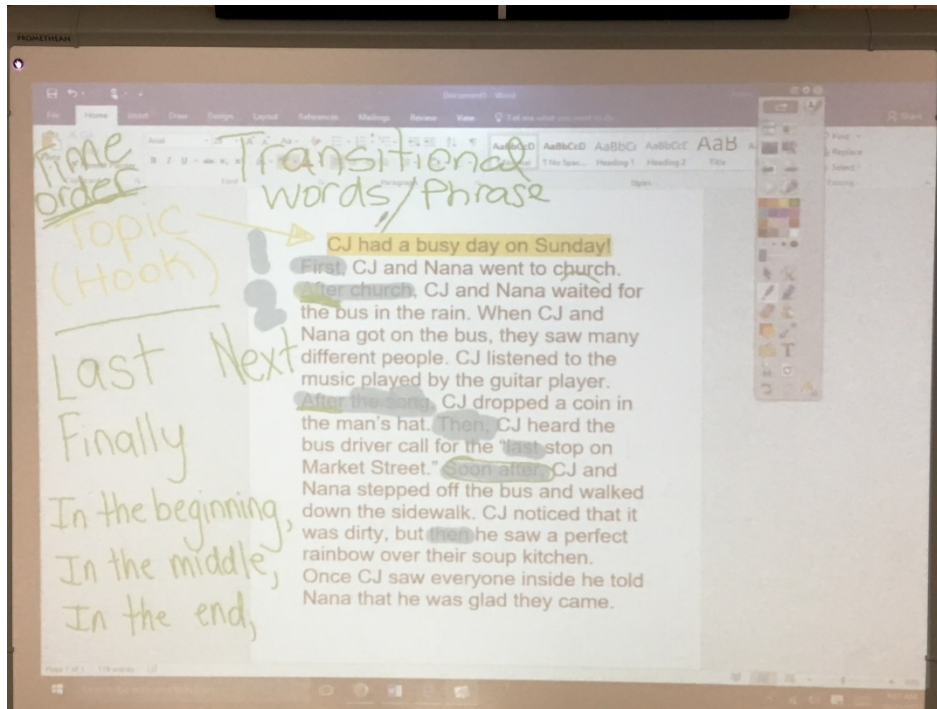


Figure 2. Text Deconstruction of recount for *Last Stop on Market Street*

Mrs. Cabana and students then brainstormed ways in which they could help the community, a main topic from the book they had just read. After that, they decided that they would create Thanksgiving baskets for the community. After a few days and the completion of the baskets, Mrs. Cabana led the class in a Joint Construction of a recount of the events the class had gone through in the format of a letter to the school principal (see Figure 3). The class prepared to jointly construct this text by reviewing the steps they took to complete the baskets. Similar to CJ, the character in *Last Stop on Market Street*, the students went through a series of events to complete the baskets.

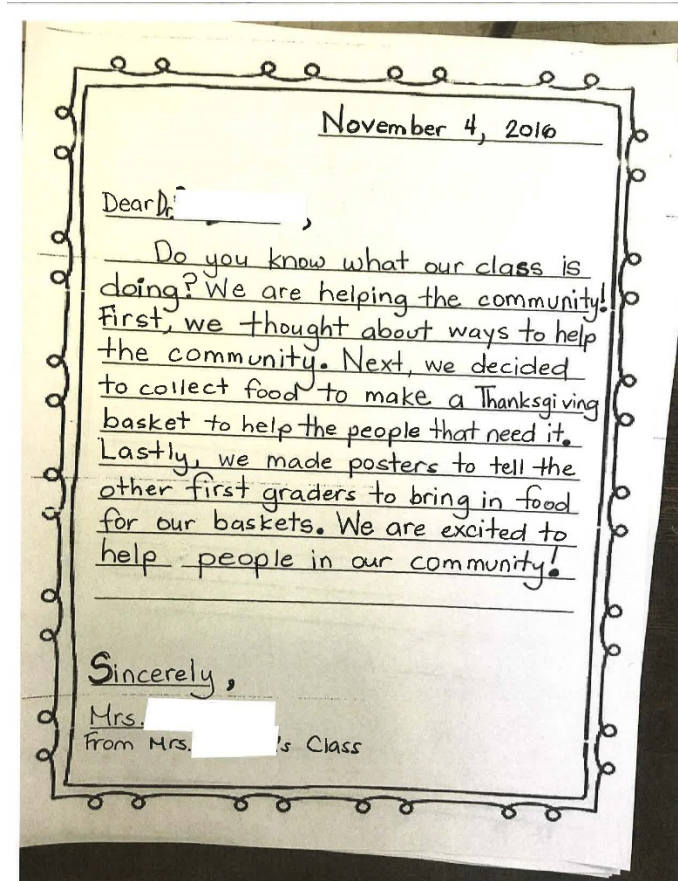


Figure 3. Letter to school principal about Thanksgiving baskets

## Conclusion

This article presented some ideas about how to implement the genre-based approach to writing instruction in K–12 and examples from a first-grade classroom. I hope teachers find these ideas useful for their teaching of L2 writing in K–12.

## References

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***Luciana C. de Oliveira, PhD, is president-elect (2017–2018) of TESOL International Association and professor and chair in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of Miami, Florida.***

## Appendix

### *Last Stop on Market Street* Mentor Text and Language Features

CJ had a busy day on Sunday! First, CJ and Nana went to church. After church, CJ and Nana waited for the bus in the rain. When CJ and Nana got on the bus, they saw many different people. CJ listened to the music played by the guitar player. After the song, CJ dropped a coin in the man’s hat. Then, CJ heard the bus driver call for the “last stop on Market Street.” Soon after, CJ and Nana stepped off the bus and walked down the sidewalk. CJ noticed that it was dirty, but then he saw a perfect rainbow over their soup kitchen. Once CJ saw everyone inside he told Nana that he was glad they came.

Book Recount	Text	Language Features
<b>Orientation</b>	CJ had a busy day on Sunday!	<u>Main Participant:</u> CJ <u>Perspective:</u> busy day <u>Circumstance:</u> on Sunday <u>Processes:</u> had ( <i>being</i> )
<b>Record of Events</b>	First, CJ and Nana went to church. After church, CJ and Nana waited for the bus in the rain. When CJ and Nana got on the bus, they saw many different people. CJ listened to the music played by the guitar player. After the song, CJ dropped a coin in the man’s hat. Then, CJ heard the bus driver call for the “last stop on Market Street.” Soon after, CJ and Nana stepped off the bus and walked down the sidewalk. CJ noticed that it was dirty, but then he saw a perfect rainbow over their soup kitchen. Once CJ saw everyone inside he told Nana that he was glad they came.	<u>Time/Sequence Markers:</u> First, After church, When, After the song, Then, Soon after, but then, Once  <u>Other Participants:</u> Nana, many different people, the guitar player, the bus driver, everyone  <u>References:</u> they (CJ and Nana), the man (the guitar player), he (CJ), their (CJ and Nana), he (CJ), they (CJ and Nana)  <u>Places:</u> church, on the bus, “last stop on Market Street”, sidewalk, soup kitchen  <u>Processes:</u> went ( <i>doing</i> ), waited ( <i>doing</i> ), got on ( <i>doing</i> ), saw ( <i>doing</i> ), listened ( <i>doing</i> ), played ( <i>doing</i> ), dropped ( <i>doing</i> ), heard ( <i>doing</i> ), call ( <i>saying</i> ), stepped off ( <i>doing</i> ), walked down ( <i>doing</i> ), noticed ( <i>sensing</i> ), saw ( <i>doing</i> ), saw ( <i>doing</i> ), told ( <i>saying</i> ), was ( <i>being</i> ), came ( <i>doing</i> )