EXPLORING TRANSACTIONAL TEXTS—A SAMPLE UNIT

The following unit is an example of one approach to teaching about some aspects of transactional texts. Each sequence, which can be stand-alone and independent of the previous and subsequent sessions, could be a springboard for further explorations of transactional texts. It is assumed that teachers would contextualise the study of these texts.

SEQUENCE 1: TYPES AND PURPOSES

Text: Selection of transactional texts

- Link this sequence with an authentic classroom context. The activities below are linked to an inquiry unit or subject research.
- Prior to the session collect a range of everyday texts such as questionnaires, surveys and forms used for applications, registrations and bank transactions. Include digital/online models.
- Ask the students whether they have ever had to fill out a form or seen their parents do so. Record on a class chart when, for whom, where and why (purpose), and what type (paper-based, digital, tick lists, fill in boxes etc.).
- Distribute the examples collected before the session to small groups of students. They look at the models and compare and contrast the characteristics of each. They share their findings with the rest of the class and this is recorded on the class chart.
- Note the different ways the examples are set out and the structural devices used.
- Introduce or revise the term ‘transactional texts’, which is used for texts that are specifically dependent on the communication between two or more people, to gather or provide information.
- Encourage the students to bring further examples from home and from the wider community.
- Compare the structure and features of digital and paper-based transactional texts.

SEQUENCE 2: QUESTIONS AND QUESTIONING

Text: Digital or paper-based newspaper or magazine article about a person.

- Collect an article about a person. Often magazines or weekend newspaper supplements have articles about celebrities that are suitable for this activity.
- Read the article with the students. Ask them to suggest the questions that would have been asked to generate the information in the article. Record some of these.
- Focus the students’ attention on the question markers (beginnings) and talk about open and closed questions and the qualities of each type.
- Encourage the students to reflect on and share what they know about questions and questioning. Build a class chart to document their learning.
- Select a still or moving image of an incident or stage a role play (children near a broken window, a playground scene in which a child is crying while being watched by other children etc.) and ask the students what they would do and say to find out what happened.
» Alternatively or additionally students can select a favourite text and write questions that
they would like to ask the writer. They can create the questions and either email or post
them to the author.

» They might like to interview people within the school and local community as part of an
authentic classroom experience. They can form questions and email these, or conduct a
live interview and write it up.

» The students compile a list of interview or research questions related to their current
unit of inquiry and use these to guide their research.

**SEQUENCE 3: PAPER-BASED AND DIGITAL FORMAT CARDS**

*Text: Selection of cards*

» Distribute copies of commercial cards (greetings, birthday, anniversary, graduation,
wedding, birth, religious event, friendship, Mother’s Day, condolence, thank you, bon
voyage, get well, congratulations). Before distributing these, mask the text in some of
them. Ask the students to classify the cards and justify their decisions. Note: they may
have many ways of classifying the cards.

» Discuss the purpose and features of the types of cards. Talk about the use of images,
colour and textures and view the cards through a critical literacy lens [see Chapter 1
for information on how to do this]. Read and discuss the verses within the unmasked
cards. Ask the students to then predict the content, style and language of the verse in the
masked cards and then unmask them to check their predictions.

» Compare and contrast digital and paper cards. Talk about the audience, purpose and
features of these texts.

» Students bring to school cards that they might like to share with the class. These might
be in another language, reflect cultural aspects, have family significance, be homemade
and so on.

» The students select an occasion that is relevant to them and the person to whom they
would like to give a card, and then create a digital or paper card to meet this purpose.

**SEQUENCE 4: DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION**

» Link this sequence with an authentic classroom context. The activities below are linked
to the topic of cyber-safety in personal and school contexts.

» Ask the students to list and talk about how they keep in contact with friends, family,
clubs and groups when they can’t meet them in person. As the students share their lists
and categorise the communication means as paper-based or digital and social media.
Discuss the differences between the types. The latter is the focus of this sequence.

» Seek and build on the students’ knowledge of digital and social media; for example:
blogs, phone conversations, emails, wikis, Tweets/Twitter, online forums, Facebook,
SMS, photo- and video-sharing and so on. Discuss the reasons for, and pros and cons of,
each type of digital and social media communication plus the contexts for use and their
language features. Talk about the abbreviations, the unique terms and the use of
emoticons, and compare them with other communication forms.

**ICT: Use an app such as AudioNote to enable students to synchronise notes and an audio
recording.**

**ICT: Focus on cyber safety and etiquette before, while and after students access the web.**
Use an authentic purpose for issuing invitations. Talk about ways of inviting a person to a specific classroom activity, without using face-to-face or oral means. Ask the students to work in groups to decide on the format and then design and produce a prototype that can be sent as soon as it is checked by peers and the teacher. Ask them to note the speed of delivery and response.

SEQUENCE 5: THE TEXTS AND PROCESS IN CONTEXT

» Link a rich task to classroom context. This sequence demonstrates how transactional texts in their many forms can be used for a range of purposes within an inquiry unit.
» Students select an inquiry focus (personal, group or teacher directed) within the classroom curriculum and context.
» They identify the questions to guide inquiry, the primary sources of information (for this purpose at least three people) and how they will best acquire information from each of these sources using a range of transactional texts. Then they:
  - construct the questions, surveys, questionnaires and so on that will help them gain the information
  - write texts to invite people to participate in the inquiry process, attend the presentation of the findings and so on
  - set up a blog, wiki or other online location that can be used throughout their inquiry
  - construct texts to thank and acknowledge the participants
  - create a multimodal presentation of their findings
  - compose evaluation/feedback records that demonstrate their understandings of ways of effectively seeking and recording information from others.