Mediation and development of a novice L2 writing teacher's pedagogical content knowledge of genre

Dorothy Worden

Department of English, University of Alabama, Box 870244, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, United States

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

In addition to the benefits genre-based writing pedagogies provide to L2 students, proponents have argued that such pedagogies can empower writing *teachers* by making teachers' genre knowledge central to classroom instruction. Yet genre proponents also recognize that genre-based pedagogies demand far greater levels of content knowledge than process pedagogies, especially given the fact that EAP writing teachers are frequently called on to teach previously unfamiliar genres to students. However, empirical studies of how teachers develop knowledge of the genres they teach remain rare in the literature. The present research addresses this need by presenting a case study of how one teacher came to understand a previously unknown pedagogical genre — the analytic essay — through the process of teaching it for the first time. Drawing on the concept of pedagogical content knowledge from the teacher education literature and using interviews, video-recordings of classroom teaching, and stimulated recalls, this article will demonstrate how the teacher's conception of the genre developed through her interactions with her students and collaborative reflection with the researcher. Implications for L2 writing teacher education and supervision will be explored.

© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Genre-based approaches to teaching writing have become increasingly influential in both L1 and L2 contexts in the last 25 years.[1] At their most basic, genre theories are concerned with the relationship between texts and the social contexts in which they are produced and used. Genre-based pedagogies offer clear benefits to EAP writing teachers, both by illuminating the discourse practices of their students' current and future academic writing communities as well as providing several innovative pedagogical strategies. Yet such pedagogies also place particularly high demands on teachers' subject matter knowledge. While there is a clear recognition among genre experts that teachers' content knowledge is a particularly important aspect of implementing genre-based pedagogies, empirical studies of teachers' experiences with genre-based pedagogies remain rare in the literature (Tardy, 2016). The present study addresses this need by presenting a detailed case study of how one teacher in an English for General Academic Purposes course (Hyland, 2006; Jordan, 1997) came to understand a previously unknown pedagogical genre — the analytic essay — through the process of teaching it for the first time. Drawing on the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) from the teacher education literature and using

---

E-mail address: dlworden@ua.edu.

[1] Several excellent reviews of this extensive literature are already available (see for example, Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993a; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Johns, 2002).

interviews, video-recordings of classroom teaching, and stimulated recalls, this article will demonstrate how the teacher's conception of the genre and how to teach it developed through her interactions with her students and collaborative reflection with the researcher.

1.1. Genre and L2 writing teacher cognition

Genre-based approaches to writing instruction encompass a range of practices based on the varied theoretical and research traditions of genre theory. As a concept, 'genre' does not simply refer to surface regularities of recognizable text types, though all genre scholars agree that such regularities exist. Instead, 'genre' refers to socially-recognized strategies for using language to respond to various reoccurring situations within a given culture or community. All genre scholars agree on these basic features of genre and share a common goal of explaining the "regularities of purpose, form, and situated social action" that characterize genres (Hyland, 2002, p. 115). Yet genre studies is also a diverse field, drawing on multiple theoretical traditions and emphasizing different features of genre in research and pedagogy. Following Hyon (1996), it has become customary to divide genre scholars into three schools: the Sydney School, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and North American New Rhetoric studies (NR) in recognition of these distinctions. Though these schools of thought overlap considerably (Hyland, 2002) their historical origins, areas of emphasis, and contributions to genre pedagogy vary in important ways.

Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (e.g. Halliday & Hasan, 1985), the Sydney School developed through a series of collaborative research and pedagogical initiatives between linguists at the University of Sydney and practicing teachers in the Sydney public schools (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993b). Viewing genre as "a staged goal-oriented social process" (Martin, 2009, p. 13), scholars within this approach have emphasized the social purposes of genres as well as the sequential nature of generic structure and have drawn on SFL to model "how the organization of language is related to its use" (Martin, 1997, p. 4). Because of its deep pedagogical commitments, research in this school has tended to investigate the structure and language of pedagogical genres (e.g. Christie, 1997; Martin & Rose, 2008) and scholars have focused their pedagogical efforts on improving the educational attainment of linguistic and cultural minority students in K-12 schools (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993b) and adult migrants (Feez, 2002). Genre pedagogy in the Sydney School model draws on the work of Soviet psychologist L. S. Vygotsky (1986) who argued that learning occurs through providing appropriate mediation, or scaffolding, that pushes learners' development. This focus on scaffolding can be seen within Sydney School genre pedagogy through the development of staged curricula which move students gradually from familiar genres such as *recounts* to more linguistically complex genres like *arguments* in order to build "learner pathways" which allow "students to move from one genre to another without having to take too much on board" (Martin, 2009, p. 15). In addition to this focus on scaffolding within the curriculum, the teaching/learning cycle (Rothery, 1996) provides teachers with a model for scaffolding learners' genre knowledge and performance. This cycle involves establishing context for a genre, collaboratively deconstructing genre examples to identify the stages and linguistic features, jointly constructing a new text in the genre with the teacher acting as scribe, and students independently writing texts in the genre with the teachers' supervision and feedback.

Like the Sydney School, genre scholars from the ESP approach are largely motivated by pedagogical concerns (Hyland, 2002). Work in this area has built on Swales (1990) definition of genre as "a class of communicative events" responding to "some shared set of communicative purposes" held by a given discourse community (p. 58). As a result of this focus on discourse community, ESP approaches have tended to adopt a "narrow concept of genre" which differentiates similar texts based on the "purposes recognized by members of a relevant community" (Hyland, 2004, p. 44). This narrower concept of genre distinguishes ESP from the Sydney School approach. Whereas Sydney School scholars focus on analyzing and teaching broad rhetorical modes such as narration and exposition, ESP scholars focus on analyzing and teaching language use in specialized settings such as advanced academic writing and professional communication (e.g. Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Swales, 1990). Generally more eclectic in approach than the Sydney School (Hyland, 2004), ESP genre pedagogy focuses on raising learners' awareness of the function and features of genres within specific discourse communities. Common activities involve reflecting on experiences with a given genre, analyzing genre examples, and interviewing members of students' target discourse communities (e.g. Johns, 1997; Swales & Feak, 2012). ESP approaches also typically include some explicit modeling of key genres features such as move structure and lexicogrammatical features (Caplan, 2012; Swales & Feak, 2012; Swales, 1990).

Unlike both the linguistically informed Sydney School and ESP, as its name suggests, North American New Rhetoric Studies (NR) developed out of rhetorical theory rather than linguistics and is largely based in the United States. Often citing Miller (1984), a seminal article which argues for a definition of genre as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (p. 159), scholars in NR emphasize genre context and dynamism. This emphasis on context means that researchers in this school generally "seek to infer social, cultural, cognitive, political, and ideological underpinnings from texts" rather than focusing on the structural and linguistic features of a given genre (Freedman, 1999, p. 765) and tend to rely to on ethnographic research methods and eschew linguistic text analysis (e.g. Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). Because of the emphasis on context within NR's conception of genre, some scholars have questioned if explicit teaching of genres in classroom settings is even possible (Coe, 1994; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Freedman, 1993). Freedman (1993) articulated this view most forcefully, arguing that because of the tacit nature of genre knowledge, explicit teaching is at best ineffective and at worst potentially harmful when well-meaning teachers misrepresent the true complexity of genres in order to make them teachable. Not surprisingly, Freedman advocates an implicit pedagogy in which teachers work to create "facilitative environments" for genre learning by providing ample input of a variety of genres and carefully designing assignments that elicit valued academic