

17 Teaching Critical Genre Awareness

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Outside the field of genre studies, writers, scholars, and teachers often think of genres as formulaic and constraining. Even within composition, teachers often see the power of genres to inhibit creativity more than the power of genres to reveal constraint. Genre teaching can indeed be formulaic and constraining, if genres are taught as forms without social or cultural meaning. Genre teaching can also be enlightening and freeing, if genres are taught as part of a larger critical awareness. I argue in this chapter for a genre pedagogy that recognizes the limitations of explicit genre teaching and exploits the ideological nature of genre to enable students' critical understanding. Genres will impact students as they read, write, and move about their worlds. Teaching critical genre awareness will help students perceive that impact and make deliberate generic choices.

Fears that writing instruction can encourage accommodation and assimilation extend beyond genre instruction. Teaching academic writing can privilege academic values if not taught critically (see Bizzell, 1993 for an extended discussion). Teaching literacy uncritically can minimize oral traditions and place negative labels on the less literate (see, for example, Barton, 1999). Teaching disciplinary discourse can promote acceptance of the disciplines' assumptions and existing power structures. Victor Villanueva worries that *Writing Across the Curriculum* is assimilationist, "a political state of mind more repressive than mere accommodation," (2001) in his responding to Donna LeCourt's argument that WAC can foster critical consciousness, using the pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1996). Villanueva seeks a way of fostering critical consciousness in genres other than the personal narrative (which LeCourt recommends). While Villanueva queries whether there is another "genre of engagement," he most wants to help students "maintain the critical and one's sense of identity and agency" (173). Although he might well accuse me of asserting an ideal, a Platonic "Good" (169), I suggest that critical genre awareness, rather than multiple genres of engagement, can help students maintain a critical stance and their own agency in the face of disciplinary discourses, academic writing, and other realms of literacy. I see critical genre awareness as a means to problem posing for students, not just as a way to encompass other genres, even potential genres of engagement.

The genre awareness I argue for is a type of rhetorical awareness, and others have posited that rhetorical awareness can lead to critical awareness and to more deliberate action. Charles Bazerman has summarized how rhetorical awareness

“is precisely critical: rhetorical perception used as a means to distance ourselves from the everyday practice of the world’s business in order to reveal and evaluate the hidden mechanisms of life” (1992). Such rhetorical awareness leads to greater agency: “The more precisely we learn how the symbols by which we live have come into place, how they function, whose interests they serve, and how we may exert leverage on them to reform the world, the more we may act meaningfully upon our social desires” (“Cultural”). Bazerman notes that action must follow awareness: “Criticism, however, is only the beginning of action. Action is a participation, not a disengagement” (“Cultural”). Armed with genre awareness, I would argue, students can distance themselves from the everyday practices of the genres that surround them but also can act, can participate in those genres. Unlike scholars merely studying genre, students wishing to participate in the academy or discipline or profession cannot simply disengage but must follow that distancing with enlightened participation.

In the rest of this chapter, I will acknowledge the limitations of explicitly teaching specific genres, suggest an alternative in teaching antecedent genres, and add a proposal for teaching genre awareness. Although I merely outline these three approaches to teaching genres in this piece, I plan to explore in future work how all three might work together to develop a fuller critical genre literacy. We will need such pedagogies if we are to help students gain critical access to literate worlds constituted through genres.

TEACHING PARTICULAR GENRES

The ideological nature and power of genres has become obvious to genre scholars today, as, for example, the articles in the collection *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre* (2002) attest. With genres understood today as actions in social contexts (based on Carolyn Miller’s (1984) oft-cited article and the ensuing North American genre scholarship), genres become embedded in the assumptions, values, and beliefs of the groups in power as any genre emerges, develops, and changes. To teach a particular genre is to teach that genre’s context. On the good side, that means we teach genres as rhetorical, with conventions that have rhetorical purpose and that can be used to achieve rhetorical aims in rhetorical situations. The result is a much richer teaching of writing than teaching, say, the arhetorical forms of a five-paragraph theme. Rather than teaching a three-part thesis, where to place that thesis, or how to add a transition at the beginning of each paragraph, for example, teachers can teach even the five-paragraph theme as rhetorically situated, with purposes of demonstrating understanding of a subject, audiences who value direct statements and logical connections, and an ethos that gains credibility through reasoning and distance. On the bad side, the contexts that genres carry include ideolo-

gies, norms and values that come to seem unquestioned, common sense—an unquestioned approach to acting through language that runs counter to our academic desire to question the existing. When writers take up a genre, they take up that genre's ideology. If they do it unawares, then the genre reinforces that ideology. When teachers select genres to use in the classroom, then, they are selecting ideologies that those genres will instill in students, for good and bad. Using five-paragraph themes or analysis papers, for example, reinforces apparent objectivity and distance from the subject and Western logic, and it minimizes personal engagement with the subject, emotional appeals, and an understanding of subjects having complexity that's irreducible to parts. Using personal narratives in the classroom, for a different example, reinforces apparent subjectivity and engagement with the subject, and it reduces personal experiences to 3-page stories, requires students to believe that sharing intimate life experiences is healthy and appropriate, and usually values emotional trauma over quotidian reality. In disciplinary discourses, too, particular genres carry their ideological as well as rhetorical contexts. Charles Bazerman and Joseph Little examine the internal rhetorical critiques in the fields of chemistry, anthropology, sociology, and economics, for one such example. Every genre carries with it such exchanges of beliefs and values that we might wish to promote and ones we might think are unfortunate.

Yet we all must teach using genres, in the texts we have students read and in the assignments we have students write. Whether we use genres consciously in the classroom or not, the genres we assign promote particular worldviews just as the topics we have them read about do. The first and most important genre pedagogy, then, is the teacher's genre awareness: the teacher being conscious of the genre decisions he or she makes and what those decisions will teach students.

More explicit teaching of genres, as I've been discussing it so far and as most people think of it, involves teaching students how to write or read particular genres—analysis papers, literacy narratives, sonnets, magical realism. But teaching particular genres explicitly is not the only way to teach genres, and it's a way that has some real controversy to it. Aviva Freedman, in her article "Show and Tell?" (1993), doubted that explicit instruction in genres was necessary or necessarily effective. Freedman's argument that explicit instruction is inadequate was based primarily on theories of and research into second language acquisition, and others have responded to Freedman's argument (most immediately, responses by Jeanne Fahnestock (1993) and by Joseph Williams and Gregory Colomb (1993)). Freedman's article received such attention not only because it was so thoroughly researched and well argued but also because it tapped into many of our fears about as well as desires for using genre studies in the classroom. As Freedman pointed out, writing teachers cannot possibly

possess insider knowledge of all the genres students want or need to learn, so their instruction in particular genres will always be incomplete, no matter how much they want to help students gain access to important genres. Freedman was especially concerned with writing teachers instructing students in genres that they would need later in life, either in other courses or in workplaces. No one, no matter how knowledgeable, Freedman argued, can possibly articulate for novices all the expectations and fine details that mark the texts of experienced genre users. I can teach students about colon titles on academic papers, for example, but I can't teach them exactly which ones will be successful and which fall flat. I can teach students the emphasis on logical evidence in analysis papers, but I can't teach all the expectations for convincing evidence in history analysis papers and in philosophy analysis papers. Removed from the contexts in which people acquire new genres—that is, learning analysis papers in writing classes rather than in history or philosophy classes or, to use Freedman's examples, learning business genres in technical writing courses rather than in actual workplaces—the removed genres that are learned seem too easily reduced from the rhetorical to the formulaic.

Even within their originating contexts, genres entail qualities laden with fears for teachers. As discourse types that evolve within social contexts to serve groups' aims, genres seem too heavily embedded in the aims of the ruling powers for teacher comfort. As rhetorical forms that come to feel normal, genres seem too thoroughly ideological to be taught in classrooms that aim to enable students to create their own universes within their existing political and social structures. I would add, too, that teachers cannot possibly tease out all the ideological import of a genre, both because of the impossibility of that venture and because teachers themselves are wrapped in ideologies.

It is not enough simply to add critique to our explicit teaching of specific genres. Our critical awareness of any particular genre or even discipline can be as limited and incomplete as our knowledge and teaching of a particular genre. Bazerman points out that "Rhetorical criticism, especially if it is carried out with broad sweeps of condemnation missing the detailed processes of rhetorical struggle, may make disciplines seem purveyors of hegemonic univocality rather than the locales of heteroglossic contention that they are" ("Cultural"). To do justice to the genres of a discipline requires far more than any teacher or curriculum could teach. Note the complexity of the analysis Bazerman describes in his positive comment on what rhetorical criticism can achieve:

Rhetorical analysis of the actual communications of the disciplines opens up and makes more visible these suppressed issues of the dynamics and evolving knowledge production of the disciplines.

Rhetorical analysis can make visible the complexity of mutual participation of many people necessary to maintain the large projects of the disciplines, the recognition of the kinds of linguistic practice developed in consonance with the goals of the disciplinary projects, the constant struggle between competing formulations, and the constant innovative edge that keeps the discourse alive. Rhetorical analysis can also open up exclusions and enclosures of discourse to see how and why they are deployed and to question their necessity in any particular case. (“Cultural”)

In a course on writing in a particular discipline, perhaps such complex analysis could be achieved for a few select genres. But, as Bazerman writes, “disciplines are not games for beginners” (2002, 2006, p. 24).

Theoretically and pedagogically, then, our desires to give students access to important genres face our fears of generic formula and inculcation. Practically, though, teachers cannot escape genres, even if they want to. Even if we try to ignore genres in our reading and writing assignments, students will use the genres they know as they try to interpret what we ask of them. Ask students to write about the current candidates for president or to apply feminist theory to a literary work, and many will write five-paragraph themes. Ask students to write an op-ed piece on the candidate of their choice, and they still might draw on the five-paragraph theme, but they’re more likely to try to adjust what they know to a different situation. Teach them the nature and strategies of the op-ed genre, and they’ll be even more likely to make conscious and deliberate rhetorical decisions. So genre will affect our students’ learning whether we teach genres explicitly or not. We also need to recognize that knowing particular genres is necessary in the academy, disciplines, and professions. Ignoring that fact leaves knowledge of specific genres as part of the hidden curriculum, as Frances Christie (1985) argues. If we teach a genre explicitly, we will inevitably teach it incompletely, but students will understand more about it than they would have if we had taught them nothing about it at all.

The fears about and criticisms of genre pedagogy that Freedman and others have examined, though, stem from only one type of genre pedagogy: teaching particular genres explicitly to students so that they gain access to and can later use those same genres. I would argue that two other genre pedagogies are at least as important and escape or at least reduce many of the dangers and weaknesses of explicitly teaching specific genres. I will offer an alternative to teaching a particular genre for its own sake in teaching antecedent genres, and I will describe how I teach genre awareness, a critical perspective on genre that I gear

toward transfer to other situations. All three pedagogical uses of genre theory—explicitly teaching particular genres, teaching antecedent genres, and teaching critical genre awareness—can work together to develop a theoretically sound genre pedagogy that can contribute to our writing assignments or structure our writing courses.

FROM GENRE THEORY TO GENRE PEDAGOGY

Although the move from theory to pedagogy is never a transparent one, pedagogy always moves within a theoretical context. Current genre pedagogies in general have moved within substantial theoretical frameworks. Yet different theoretical claims about genre lead to different pedagogies, and those differences have not always been noticed. All thoughtful genre pedagogies share an understanding of genres as socially and culturally as well as linguistically embedded. All genre pedagogies appear to share the same larger goal: to give students access to language, structures, and institutions that are important for their individual, academic, and professional development. Different genre pedagogies result, though, from emphasizing different theoretical concerns.

As I delineate some of the theoretical underpinnings of genre pedagogies, I make no claim to comprehensiveness. These five claims seem to me, at this point in genre studies, to be some essential ones and are the ones around which I base my own genre pedagogy.

- Genres are social and rhetorical actions: they develop their languages and forms out of rhetorical aims and contexts shared by groups of users.
- The spread of a genre creates shared aims and social structures.
- As new users acquire genres, that process reinforces existing aims and structures.
- Existing genres reinforce institutional and cultural norms and ideologies.
- To change genres, individually or historically, is to change shared aims, structures, and norms.

Although teachers may share these theoretical understandings, specific pedagogies emphasize different components at different levels. One might emphasize

the languages and forms that develop, or the shared aims and social structures, or the process of reinforcement, or the ability to change. Focusing on different theoretical underpinnings leads to focusing on different pedagogical responses. Thus, different pedagogical responses to shared theoretical understandings emerge with different goals for learners.

- If genres are rhetorical actions, then learners can gain rhetorical understanding by gaining access to the language and forms of genres.
- If genres are social actions, then accessing genre forms can give learners insight into and agency within groups' aims and structures.
- If genres reinforce existing structures and ideologies, then gaining consciousness of genres can help learners reduce the reinforcement and propagation of existing norms and ideologies.
- If changing genres changes existing norms and ideologies, then learners who change genres can change a group's aims, structures, and norms.

These pedagogical goals overlap, of course, and one curriculum can pursue more than one pedagogical response. Each represents a potential genre pedagogy, though, with significant differences of emphasis. Focusing on the rhetorically contextualized language and forms of a genre may lead to giving access to particular genres. Focusing on the ways genres develop out of groups' shared aims may lead to focusing on giving access to those groups. Focusing on existing genres as ideological reinforcers may lead to focusing on critiquing genres. And focusing on norms and change may lead to focusing on how individuals might affect those norms and effect change.

Each of these pedagogical responses has potential pitfalls. For a start, as discussed in the previous section, Freedman and others have questioned whether learners could in fact gain full access to the languages and forms of genres. If even experienced users can never fully articulate generic traits, how can teachers help students learn more than a small portion of the languages and forms of a genre? Genre pedagogies need to continue to explain why less than full articulation is sufficient to their aims of giving access to particular genres. The second response, moving from seeing generic form to understanding generic purpose within social contexts, requires cognitive abilities that may be beyond children until a certain level of development has been reached. Genre curricula at different levels, of course, will necessarily address the cognitive abilities at

those levels. The third response requires other cognitive abilities, and some quite reasonably question whether such consciousness is at all possible. Can teachers, much less learners, step outside their own ideological frames to see those within which genres exist? Even if they can, that step outside must be maintained in order to resist the existing ideologies. Finally, genres can be quite resistant to change, as institutions and cultures can resist change. The ability of individuals to subvert an existing genre even temporarily, in a single text, depends on others understanding and accepting that change so that communication has not broken down. Even if individuals manage change in an individual text, that change may have little impact on existing structures and norms if others do not take it up. The pedagogical responses we might wish to make to our genre theories are fraught with challenges and complexities. If we wish our pedagogy and our theory to support one another, we need to confront those challenges and design pedagogies with sufficient complexity to be theoretically sound.

One way to build a more complex genre pedagogy is to build a curriculum that addresses multiple approaches. Genres are languages and forms; and they are processes of developing, spreading, and learning; and they are ideologically embedded constructs. This perspective on genres as things, processes, and contexts draws from an old metaphor from physics applied to language-use by Kenneth Pike and developed for writing by Pike, Richard Young, and Alton Becker (Young, 1970): looking at genre pedagogies through the heuristic lens of particle, wave, and field. Loosely and metaphorically defined, this metaphor requires examining genre as a particle (a thing unto itself), a wave (a process), and a field (a context). Genres are things, with language and form and components that can be analyzed. Genres emerge through a process of development over time, and individuals acquire genres through their own learning processes. And genres exist in multiple contexts, as parts of social, institutional, and cultural contexts, and within ideological frames. I see our common theories of genre and our different pedagogical responses to those theories leading to three approaches to teaching based in genre studies—one that focuses on genre as a particle or thing, one that focuses on genre as a process, and one that focuses on genre in its contexts. Each is valid, important, and has the potential to help learners gain access to sources of power, success, and insight. But each is different from the others and merits consideration for what it can offer to learners.

The table below sketches the three pedagogies and how each treats genre as a particle/thing, wave/process, and field/context. The metaphor is meant to be clarifying but not delimiting. While the metaphor equates teaching particular genres as teaching genre as a thing, for example, the field/context aspect of that pedagogy would teach these genres in larger contexts of genre sets and social settings. While the field approach teaches genres in larger contexts, that pedagogy

still involves teaching generic forms/things to explore and critique.

Teaching Genres as Particles/Things: Particular Genres	Teaching Genres as Waves/Processes: Antecedents	Teaching Genres as Fields/Contexts: Awareness
Goal: to learn to write particular genres	Goal: to learn how to build on prior genres when learning new genres	Goal: to learn how to critique and change existing genres
Particle/Thing: What relevant genres exist? How can they best be categorized?	Particle/Thing: What genres serve as antecedents for other genres?	Particle/Thing: What are the components of critical awareness? How do they apply to genres?
What genres do these novices need to learn?	What genres best establish potential antecedents?	Which genres lend themselves to developing critical awareness?
What are the components of those genres?		What components of genres lend themselves to developing critical awareness?
Wave/Process: How have these forms changed over time?	Wave/Process: How do people draw on known genres when encountering less familiar genres?	Wave/Process: How do conscious writers critique and change genres?
How do experts acquire these genres?	Which parts of these processes can be made explicit and taught?	What experiences do writers need to have to develop genre awareness?
How can novices learn these genres?		How can genres be changed? How can novices participate in that change?

Field/Context: What are the genre sets these novices need to use?	Field/Context: What future genres might these writers need antecedents for?	Field/Context: How will developing genre awareness affect writers' interactions with existing genre users?
What genres do they already know?	What genres do the writers already know as potential antecedents?	
How will learning these new genres affect their interactions with the larger context/culture?	How will learning these antecedents affect the writers' interactions in future contexts?	

TABLE 1: THREE PEDAGOGIES

ONE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

Each of these genre pedagogies, like all pedagogies, has its own advantages and pitfalls. Each genre curriculum, in combining these pedagogies, takes on both advantages and pitfalls and develops its own strengths and weaknesses. To exemplify how these pedagogies lead to specific practices, I will describe one I have developed for my own use, based on my theoretical preferences and classroom experiences and designed for college-level students in writing classes, at both the first-year and advanced levels. My approach combines teaching particular genres, how to use those genres as antecedents, and how to critique and potentially change genres.

Beginning with genre as particle, I note again that any genre pedagogy must use some particular genres, at least as examples. My goal in choosing and using particular genres, though, is not to teach any particular genre fully and thoroughly so that students have acquired the genres. Rather, I aim to give students enough experiences with those genres that at least some elements of those genres might serve as antecedents when students acquire unfamiliar genres in the future. I agree with Bazerman and Little that we have a “pedagogic responsibility” “to teach students to speak and write for academic purposes in first and second languages” (2005). While teaching academic purposes and academic registers, however, we cannot possibly teach all of the specific academic genres that students may need in academia. Although we cannot teach students a specific genre fully, the genres that we do teach and use in the classroom can serve as scaffolding for later genre acquisition, as these partially learned genres act as antecedents for other genres (see Chapter 7 of my *Writing Genres* for a fuller discussion of antecedent genres (2004)). In treating particular genres as antecedents for learning future genres, this pedagogy shifts from genre as particle to genres as wave or process.

Students in my first-year composition courses, for example, often have encountered in previous schooling the genres specified in the benchmarks from the Kansas State Department of Education, genres labeled narrative, expository, persuasive, and technical. The expository and persuasive papers for high school students involve benchmarks for using thesis statements and different kinds of details with an emphasis on meeting the readers' needs. I can see their prior experience with these genre elements in the early writing they do in my class, and I can build on those antecedents as I help students learn to develop more complex theses, integrate logical reasoning with personal experience, and serve the needs of different readers as well as their own needs. When I assign particular new genres, like the analysis paper, I intend to give students other writing experiences that can transfer to the writing they do in their major classes or in their workplaces. When I assign public genres like pamphlets, brochures, and organization websites, I aim to add public audiences and purposes to their generic repertoire so that they have more non-academic rhetorical antecedents to draw from in their political lives. I assign genres that supplement the genres they already know in ways that might serve as antecedents when they go on to other courses and other writing situations. I do not expect students to master any of these genres. I hope instead to have given them generic material from which to draw when encountering new genres. In my current teaching work, I am focusing on how to help students with other important parts of the process: helping them learn how to transfer from one set of genre material to new writing tasks. Whether any pedagogy can be successful at achieving such transfer from one genre to another is a question for more research.

My use of particular genres itself has a further purpose, treating genre as field: I want students not only to add to their repertoire but also to learn to critique the genres they know and encounter, with an end possibility of changing the genres that need to change to better serve their needs. The end goal is a critical consciousness of genre, a genre awareness—a conscious attention to genres and their potential influences on people and the ability to consider acting differently within genres. Some evidence does support that students can develop genre awareness and that it can transfer to new contexts. Sunny Hyon found, when she studied the reading of second-language students, that students did develop a general genre awareness out of instruction in particular genres; that genre awareness then transferred to reading and writing other genres as well (2002). Focusing on critical genre awareness with my own students is a major way I fight my own fears of teaching genre. Rather than just inculcating students with existing ideologies through established genres, I work to help them become more aware of the shaping influence of genres on their thinking and communicating. Without developing their genre awareness, people are more at the mercy of existing genres and existing power structures and dynamics. With a more highly

developed genre awareness, people have a better chance of seeing how genres act upon them and of affecting those actions.

Developing genre awareness is no easier than developing any other kind of critical consciousness. I structure my curriculum around the same tagmemics heuristic, of helping students see genres as things, then as processes, and within larger contexts. Rhetorical analysis is a start, as Bazerman argued earlier. Seeing genres as things, with elements that have purposes rather than rules, opens students to see genres as created by people to achieve aims, not just as pre-existing and irrevocable constructs into which they must fit. Seeing genres as processes, which emerge and change, is a second component of the curriculum. And seeing genres as serving the aims of groups, institutions, and cultures is the third component. Combined, these three elements help students to understand genres as created, dynamic, and ideological constructs. When they learn a new, antecedent genre, I hope they thereafter learn it with some consciousness of genres' rhetorical nature and of their potential for adapting to writers' particular purposes and situations.

To help students understand genres both intellectually and experientially, I lead students through a series of assignments that have them analyze, write, critique, and change or rewrite genres, a series of assignments that gives some idea of how my conceptualization of genre pedagogy translates into practices. I juggle my selection of particular genres to include both genres that might serve as antecedent genres for students and genres that might help them step aside from their ideological contexts. As Heather Bastian argued at the 2007 Conference on College Composition and Communication, students more easily perceive genres' constructed nature in genres with which they are less familiar. She suggests having students analyze first a genre outside of their own culture or time—genres from the past that no longer exist or have been dramatically altered—or genres from other cultures, countries, or unfamiliar institutions. Analyzing such unfamiliar genres helps students to see that all genres serve groups and reinforce particular ways of viewing the world. When they return, next, to more familiar genres, they are better prepared to accept that their genres, too, represent particular viewpoints that shape their experience of the world. The process through which I ask students to approach these particular genres leads them through analyzing, writing, critiquing, and then changing genres, what I call rewriting genres. Cycling through these processes multiple times reinforces that genre analysis is not meant to stop at accommodation or assimilation but move to critique and change. Both particular genres and processes are perpetually embedded within larger contexts since I define genres from the start as rhetorical and social actions developing within particular social and cultural contexts.

This sequence of assignments, sketched below, includes genre as particle,

wave, and field and aims toward helping students gain a critical genre awareness. Of course, these projects expand and condense, and constitute smaller or larger assignments, depending on the length of the course and the levels of the students.

- Project 1: analyzing a familiar, everyday genre as a class, learning the techniques of rhetorical analysis
- Project 2: writing that familiar genre differently, with a major shift in treatment of purpose, audience, subject, or setting
- Project 3: analyzing a genre from another culture or time, working in groups to gather samples, analyze the genre, and learn about the historical or cultural context
- Project 4: analyzing an academic genre chosen as a potential antecedent genre, working as a class on a common genre
- Project 5: writing that academic genre within a specific writing task for this class
- Project 6: critiquing that genre and recommending specific changes that might better meet each student's needs
- Project 7: analyzing, critiquing, and writing flexibly another potential antecedent genre, chosen individually to serve the individuals' needs (depending on the group, either a public genre or a future major or workplace genre)

What I intend to achieve through these experiences is to start the process of enlightening students about genres. As they move from familiar to unfamiliar, back to familiar contexts and on to less familiar contexts, they have the chance to discover how contexts shape genres. As they move from analyzing to writing within to critiquing to writing with changes, they have the chance to discover how genres shape them and how they might shape genres. The results can be writers with expanded genre repertoires, including more potential antecedent genres, and writers with expanded genre awareness, including heightened sensitivity when they encounter new genres in the future.

Like all curricula, of course, this one slips in practice as it encounters real students with real intentions and reactions. It works for some better than others. I have not done the research required to claim effectiveness for this curriculum. And I am certainly not claiming any part of what I am teaching is unique or necessarily original. What I do intend is to contribute to the discussion of how genre theory can translate into sound and effective pedagogy by offering my own conceptualization and curriculum that derive directly from my knowledge of theory.

If we can teach genres in ways that acknowledge our inability to teach any genre thoroughly or completely and that help students to question as well as follow generic expectations, then we will come much closer to easing our well-founded fears of genres' power. Genre pedagogies can become part of a larger critical education, with the full powers of genre recognized and students' powers enhanced. As teachers of writing, we must use genres, but we must use them knowingly and deliberately. As scholars of genre, we know enough to achieve that critical awareness—of genres and of our fears of genres.

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