Creativity, Genre Innovation, and Academic Writing: A Case for Looking Beyond Convention

Written genres have been described in metaphors as seemingly contrary as straitjackets and playgrounds, tools and life forms, and institutions and constellations. Yet, despite a pervasive acknowledgement that genres are neither static nor rigid, less scholarly attention has been paid to the flexibility in genres or the innovations that are possible within specific settings, and this is especially true in the area of academic writing. This talk begins with a theoretical overview of genre innovation and creativity. Incorporating numerous textual examples and data from an ethnographic study of disciplinary writing in an undergraduate science classroom, Professor Tardy will describe some functions of innovation in academic writing, building a case for the role that innovation and creativity play in developing knowledge of academic genres. Finally, she turns to the thorny issue of writing instruction and considers when and how explorations of innovation and creativity might be appropriate for the (first language and second language) writing classroom.

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