# An exploratory study of academic literacy socialization: Building genre awareness in a teacher education program

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

As apprenticeship models have evolved, language teacher education (LTE) has increasingly adopted evidence-based approaches to teacher preparation. Intended to promote subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and procedural knowledge, LTE curricula often target novice teachers' agency, identity construction, and critical awareness. An ongoing challenge facing LTE involves cultivating candidates' disciplinary knowledge and facilitating their socialization into professional discourses, yet little research has examined the role of genre awareness in language teacher development. This article explores two aspects of teacher learning in LTE: (1) influences of implicit and explicit genre-oriented practices designed to raise genre awareness and (2) teacher candidates' perceptions of genre-oriented instruction as a source of professional knowledge and skill. Guided by mixed-methods action research principles, the authors analyze quantitative and qualitative data from 58 teacher candidates in a US-based, graduate-level LTE program. Data collection methods included a questionnaire interrogating students' academic literacy experiences, and focus group discussions. While supporting the goal of developing candidates' pedagogical content knowledge, findings suggest that some methods for cultivating content expertise are perhaps insufficient for promoting critical disciplinary knowledge and appropriating genre expectations. The article discusses the potential benefits of genre-oriented approaches designed to enhance novice teachers' genre awareness and critical literacies.

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Extensive research has been conducted on genre pedagogy and its effectiveness in language teaching (LT) and literacy education in EAP and ESP contexts (Flowerdew, 2015; Hyland & Shaw, 2016). As "frames for social action," genres furnish learners and teachers with "guiding principles for achieving particular recognized purposes by means of language" (Hyland, 2009, p. 26). Genres and genre pedagogy serve as versatile tools for learning and teaching language and literacy (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Devitt, 2009; Hyland, 2004b, 2007; Johns, 2002; Paltridge, 2001). Nonetheless, the role of genres and genre pedagogy in language teacher education (LTE) remains largely unexamined, perhaps because LTE curricula tend to focus chiefly on cultivating teacher candidates' content knowledge and procedural skills (Hüttner, Smit, & Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2009). The investigation described in this article represents an initial attempt to discern how learning about genres in a graduate LTE program contributes to the development of teacher candidates' professional knowledge and skill.

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## 1. Challenges and goals of language teacher education

Teacher educators largely embrace the premise that LTE must equip teacher candidates with the expert knowledge and procedural skills necessary for effective classroom instruction in diverse sociocultural settings (Hedgcock, 2009; Liu & Berger, 2015; Richards, 2008, 2010; Roberts, 1998; Tsui, 2009). A major challenge facing novice teachers involves working with learners who must become proficient users of multiple social and regional dialects. In an era of inexorable globalization, language learners must perform succesfully in "super-diversity spaces," social and geographical spheres of activity charac-terized by dynamic, multilateral flows of people, commodities, information, and ideas (Blommaert, 2010). The "multilingual turn" has correspondingly shed light on translingual practices, skills, and knowledge — and their roles in language instruction (May, 2014). English-language education, including EAP and ESP, has consequently shifted toward English as an international language (EIL) as a pedagogical target (Alsagoff, McKay, Hu, & Renandya, 2012; McKay, 2012). Language teachers must therefore know "how [language] works and how it is learned" in wide-ranging contexts, as well as "how learning takes place … through social interaction" (Murray & Christison, 2011, p. xiv).

To enable their learners to meet such complex demands, pre- and in-service teachers must become keenly aware of language structure and use, new linguistic realities, and strategies for using language skillfully in multilayered contexts (Celce-Murcia, 2014; Liu & Berger, 2015; TESOL, 2015; Valdés, Kibler, & Walqui, 2014). A priority for LTE thus entails preparing candidates to become professionals capable of functioning in dynamic heterogeneous educational settings. A more specific but equally salient challenge for LTE involves preparing future practitioners to analyze any EAP or ESP genre autonomously, "with a view to teaching it to learners who… are not necessarily familiar with the conventions of their future discourse communities" (Hüttner et al., 2009, p. 100). In this article, we examine dominant conceptualizations of the teacher knowledge base before exploring processes by which LTE can impart content knowledge and cultivate teacher candidates' procedural skills. This background discussion frames the research questions motivating our study of MA students' literacy socialization processes, which are supported substantially by their emerging genre awareness.

### 1.1. Teacher knowledge

LTE theorists such as Graves (2009), Richards (2010), and Roberts (1998) distinguish multiple categories of teacher knowledge believed to be necessary for effective classroom performance. *Subject matter knowledge,* for example, entails explicit familiarity with instructional methods, learning theories, and language structure. *Pedagogical content knowledge,* in contrast, includes familiarity with curriculum development, teaching methods, and classroom management. *Procedural knowledge* (or *skill*) involves a teacher's repertoire of technical competencies, such as lesson planning, pedagogical reasoning, observational strategies, and the like (Borg, 2006; Graves, 2009; Hedgcock, 2009; Richards, 2008, 2010; Roberts, 1998). Some controversy in LTE surrounds the relative value of these knowledge categories and their rightful role in LTE (Chappell & Moore, 2012; Freeman, 1994; Freeman & Johnson, 2004; Hedgcock, 2002; Johnson, 2009; Yates & Muchisky, 2003). Further disagreement involves what should constitute suitable pedagogical content knowledge (Richards, 2010). Although these debates continue, LTE curricula typically identify some combination of these sources of knowledge and skill as appropriate goals for language teachers (Liu & Berger, 2015).

The promotion of explicit standards for language teacher preparation, certification, and performance (e.g., TESOL, 2014 2015) exemplifies this effort to formalize domains of expertise thought to be essential for successful classroom instruction. For example, Liu and Berger (2015) proposed an integrative framework for novice TESOL professionals, which articulates three knowledge domains and their components: (1) language and culture; (2) instruction and assessment; (3) profes-sionalism. Aims embedded in the language and culture domain include knowledge of "the nature of human language" (phonology, morphology, lexicosemantics, syntax) and "the similarities and differences between English and the native language …" (Liu & Berger, 2015, p. 65). Goals in the cultural and intercultural competence domain feature the social and interactive dimensions of language use, including a complex understanding of "language and culture and communicative styles and skills." Teachers must further understand "how language use is influenced by social and cultural contexts" and "different communication styles reflected in authentic teaching materials" (pp. 66–67). The adoption of such standards demonstrates that knowledge of — and about — the form, meaning, and use of language is essential to teacher development; what remains undetermined, however, is how LTE can efficiently cultivate this knowledge. The present study examines how systematic work with genres in the academic socialization process of teacher preparation influences the emergence of lin-guistic expertise — particularly at the discourse level — as well as content and pedagogical content knowledge.

### 1.2. Academic literacy socialization and apprenticeship in LTE

LTE curricula typically include courses or modules that target a combination of academic knowledge, methods, clinical ("hands-on") practice, and reflection — a blend of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and procedural knowledge and skill (Borg, 2006; Richards, 2008, 2010; Roberts, 1998). Teacher preparation programs may vary widely with respect to the relative weight assigned to these knowledge domains. Whereas some models assign equal value to multiple domains, others assign higher priority to procedural or content knowledge (Graves, 2009; Johnson, 2006).

Some observers have proposed that LTE curricula that privilege procedural skill over explicit academic knowledge may insufficiently equip candidates to grasp the underpinnings of their practice (Borg, 2006; Chappell & Moore, 2012; Hedgcock,