

Technological Ecologies & Sustainability

CHAPTER	14
TITLE	Genre-Informed Implementation Analysis: An Approach for Assessing the Sustainability of New Textual Practices
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OVERVIEW	The implementation of promising new writing technologies in organizations can be a difficult process, particularly for technologies with the potential to address many different organizational problems. To focus and direct implementation efforts, this chapter suggests evaluating pilot efforts with the help of a theoretically informed reflective tool. One such tool, based on North American genre theory, is described and applied to the case of a non-profit educational organization, Tech Year, and the organization's 16-month process of attempting to implement a new writing technology, digital storytelling. The reflective tool, or <i>genre inventory</i> , is described as part of a broader conceptual framework— <i>genre-informed implementation analysis</i> —for the implementation of new writing technologies and their attendant practices. North American genre theory has been most commonly used to diagnose writing and communication problems; here I suggest that the theory also offers a way to understand and focus the potential of new writing technologies in organizations.
TAGS	actual outcomes, analytical tool, apprenticeships, brainstorming, centrifugal, centripetal, challenges, cognitive, college writing, context, copyright*, digital storytelling, discourse, discursive, divergences, documents, field study, form, genre ecologies, genre inventory, genre stabilizations, genre, genre-informed implementation, intended outcomes, interview*, interviews, language, Lisa Dush, material, materials, media, methodology, music, new textual practices, norms, novices, observ*, organizations, practice, pre-inventory, production practices, protocol, reflective, rhetoric, royalty-free, social roles, social, structure, substance, texts, textual, themes, theoretically grounded, theory, topics, use practices, values, videotap*
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Genre-informed Implementation Analysis: An Approach for Assessing the Sustainability of New Textual Practices

Lisa Dush

In the fall of 2005, Madeline Davis, the writing director at Tech Year, a one-year educational and technical training program for 18–24 year old urban youth, attended a 4-day professional development workshop to learn a textual practice new to her and her organization called digital storytelling. Digital stories are 3–5 minute videos, typically personal in their subject matter and consisting of a first-person voiceover and music set to a slideshow of photographs. The video is assembled by the storyteller, using free or inexpensive video-editing software. Although not new, digital storytelling has recently caught the attention of many organizations, especially those with a mission of outreach or education. The digital story-making process has been shown to develop writing, computer, and personal reflection skills, and the digital stories produced within organizations can have great utility as training, promotional, and outreach materials (see Davis, 2004; Hull & Katz, 2006; Hull & Nelson, 2005).

Digital storytelling was attractive to Tech Year, particularly as a curriculum component. Tech Year is a nonprofit program for students with a high school degree or GED; it aims to ready these students, in one intensive year, for college and well-paid work in entry-level technical support jobs. The year begins with a 6-month “Learning and Development” phase, in which students take courses—many of them for college credit—in communication, professional skills, and technical skills. This phase is followed by a 6-month apprenticeship in a technical support job at one of the companies that partners with Tech Year.

The Business Communication course Madeline directed is taken by all students during the Learning and Development phase, and it has at least three primary and occasionally conflicting aims: to prepare students for the writing and communication tasks they will face at their upcoming apprenticeships; to prepare them for writing in college; and to help them work through the personal challenges of moving from their former lives into corporate or college culture. Digital storytelling seemed an appropriate fit with Tech Year’s academic curriculum, as making a story requires a blend of technical skills, writing skills, and personal reflection. Tech Year was also excited about many non-curricular uses of digital storytelling, and imagined, for instance, that staff members might create stories to be used for training, and that student-produced stories could be used for outreach and fundraising.

Like Tech Year, many organizations that attend digital storytelling training workshops find the practice compelling and leave the training eager to implement. But successful implementation and long-term sustainability of digital storytelling is extremely rare. In the case of digital storytelling, the difficulty seems connected, paradoxically, to the practice’s vast potential. Digital storytelling strikes people as easy, cheap, and full of possibility, but it is difficult to channel these possibilities into a focused and sustainable organizational practice. I was present at the training workshop Madeline attended, and I was looking for a case study site where I could explore the reasons behind why the implementation of digital storytelling so seldom works. Tech Year agreed to be this case study organization, and in December 2006, I began spending 5 to 25 hours each week at Tech Year, conducting interviews, observing classes and other activities, and attending all digital storytelling-related meetings and events.

All told, Tech Year spent 17 months engaged in fairly consistent implementation activity: eight more teachers were trained to teach digital storytelling, Tech Year’s founder and CEO made a digital story describing how his early mentoring experiences informed key values at Tech Year, and the organization piloted digital storytelling twice in the classroom. The first



classroom pilot was an elective during the apprenticeship portion of the program; the second was a 7-week unit that used digital storytelling to explore the theme of personal empowerment in two sections of the Business Communication course. In the Business Communication pilot, 28 student stories were produced, and in March 2007 these stories were celebrated at a red-carpet premiere event attended by students, staff, corporate partners, and community members. Tech Year's founder and CEO opened the premiere with a speech on digital storytelling's role at the organization, outlining the many ways that the digital story was a fitting capstone project in the writing course.

In short, there seemed to be momentum for digital storytelling to continue at Tech Year. But in interviews I conducted 2 months after the premiere event, when I asked the question, "Do you consider digital storytelling to be implemented or institutionalized as of now?" interviewee answers revealed an incomplete and possibly stalled implementation:

Madeline Davis, Writing Director: "I don't know. These next few months are going to be really telling."

Cooper McCormack, Boston Executive Director: "It [the Business Communication pilot] feels like it was a huge win, [but] it's not clear that we can repeat it until we repeat it."

Clark Cross, Boston Chief Academic Officer: "Nope, it's not institutionalized. Nope."

In fact, Madeline's prediction was apt—the next few months were telling. Without any fanfare, digital storytelling fell off of the organization's immediate radar and has yet to return. It did not disappear because staff or students were opposed to it, but rather because there was no clear sense of the best utility for the new practice. Tech Year's Chief Academic Advisor, Clark Cross, musing months after the premiere event, characterized it aptly: digital storytelling was, he said, "a solution looking for a problem."

Implementation of innovation in organizations and social settings is complex, and the failure stories are much more prevalent than the success stories. Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky (1984), public policy scholars who wrote one of the classic books on program implementation, offer a grim assessment of implementation feasibility:

Our normal expectation should be that new programs will fail to get off the ground and that, at best, they will take considerable time to get started. The cards in this world are stacked against things happening, as so much effort is required to make them move. The remarkable thing is that new programs work at all. (p. 109)

In many ways, the progress that Tech Year made with digital storytelling in so short a time was remarkable, which makes it all the more disappointing that their efforts ended short of a lasting, sustainable implementation. And, interestingly, despite the CAO Cross' comment, digital stories and digital storytelling *had*, during various pilots, addressed a number of Tech Year's organizational problems. The founder and CEO's story made the organization's mission more clear, compelling, and memorable to potential donors, and proved to be an excellent fundraising tool. Students publicly praised each of the digital storytelling courses as a meaningful learning experience. And the digital storytelling premiere event engaged families in students' Tech Year lives, something that was typically very difficult to accomplish.

But regardless of these apparent successes, digital storytelling was not implemented. In the year- and-a-half since the digital storytelling premiere event, there has been no subsequent digital storytelling activity at Tech Year. And even if the organization were to be motivated to restart their implementation efforts, the 17 months of implementation efforts already completed offer little in the way of clear lessons. Although Tech Year was careful to retain all of their



implementation-related materials—including meeting notes, project plans, handouts used to teach digital storytelling, and the digital stories that were produced—these materials are an archive with no story to tell or implementation direction to imply. Tech Year has no record of what pilots were successful and why, except for the memories of staff and students, many of whom, including Madeline Davis, have now left Tech Year.

What would have helped Tech Year—both during their implementation process and if they ever hope to rekindle their efforts with digital storytelling—is a theoretically grounded reflective and analytical tool that could be used to evaluate each digital storytelling pilot project. Not only would such a tool help the Tech Year staff make decisions about how to focus digital storytelling in their organization (i.e., to figure out what problem digital storytelling might be a solution to) it would also help them to think through what changes must be made to organizational practice and/or digital storytelling so that digital storytelling would be sustainable.

I argue in this chapter that one of the more familiar textual theories in English studies—North American genre theory—might be translated into such a reflective and analytical tool. For those familiar with North American genre theory, which has proven tremendously useful to both workplace and classroom writing researchers who aim to clarify the ways that recurrent text forms reflect and constitute workplace and disciplinary norms, the idea that genre theory can illuminate the dynamics of an implementation effort and provide implementers with direction might seem curious. Certainly, the theory has not been used this way before.

What I suggest is making use of the rich unit of analysis at the center of genre theory, the genre, by using it to periodically assess ongoing implementations of new textual practices. During such an implementation effort, a new textual practice with broad appeal—like digital storytelling—will likely be matched with a number of organizationally important recurrent situations and activities or problems looking for solutions. At Tech Year, these included the teaching situation, with the related exigence of finding an effective way to improve student writing and technical skills; the fundraising situation, with the related exigence of concisely and powerfully conveying Tech Year's message to potential donors; and the student development situation, with the related exigence of providing students with opportunities to prepare them for entry into college or professional lives. During an implementation effort, the suitability of digital storytelling as a response to these recurrent situations and activities are tested in pilots. When these pilots are deployed, we can assess them through the lens of genre theory, analyzing them as what I call *genre stabilizations*. Pilots, or genre stabilizations, are particularly fruitful times for research and insight, with much to reveal about how a new textual practice fits with or contradicts existing organizational norms, as well as the potential it holds to expand and refine the range of available individual action and organizational activity at the site.

I continue this chapter with a discussion of how and why genre theory can work to evaluate ongoing implementations of new textual practices. I elaborate in some detail the methodology for what I call *genre-informed implementation analysis*, describing the genre stabilization as a unit of analysis and focusing on how a reflective tool, the *genre inventory*, can be used to analyze pilot efforts during an ongoing implementation. I then briefly read some data from Tech Year using this reflective tool. Finally, I elaborate on what I see as one of the most important advantages of this approach: it encourages serious, long-term engagement with an innovation. This engagement pays dividends by both improving the odds that appropriate innovations are implemented and by helping the organization to scrutinize some of its pre-existing norms.



A GENRE-INFORMED MODEL OF IMPLEMENTATION

Genre theory, as a way to classify texts into categories, has been around since Aristotle's time. North American genre theory developed much more recently (beginning in the 1970s); its adherents suggest that genres should be identified not by their similar surface features, but by similarities in the social action they help individuals and groups to accomplish. Amy Devitt (2004) made a helpful distinction: whereas traditional genre theory would deem business letters a genre, regardless of where or by whom the letters are written, North American genre theory would label business letters written in a company setting one sort of genre and business letters written by students in a business writing course a different genre, because the social action accomplished by each text is different. Whereas traditionally the work of genre theorists was to study individual texts and argue a case for them as exemplars of a broad genre (the novel, the epic poem), the work of new genre theorists is to "explicate the knowledge that practice creates" (Miller, 1994, p. 27) by toggling between the study of texts that are repeatedly used in particular social settings and the social action that these texts facilitate.

Carolyn Miller's 1984 article is the classic reference in North American genre theory. Learning genres, says Miller, is key "to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community" (p. 39) as well as to understanding "what ends we may have" (p. 38) in particular social settings. As a simple example, consider one of Tech Year's important organizational genres (an oral genre): Friday Feedback. Friday Feedback happens each Friday afternoon at Tech Year, when staff and students gather together in a circle and share frank feedback—both positive and negative—directed at specific individuals. Most weeks, the feedback comments are initially focused on a fairly broad set of categories (e.g., time management, teamwork, communication), and the process is always run in an orderly manner, with one of the staff members first taking down a list of individuals who would like to speak and moving the process forward by moving down the names on this list. The practice is designed in large part to teach young people the art of constructive feedback and dialogue.

The genre of Friday Feedback allows members of the Tech Year community a range of action different from if Tech Year had no official genre for feedback, or if it used another model to mediate feedback. As a preview of the upcoming explanation of how textual innovations can be understood with genre theory, imagine if Tech Year did not always have Friday Feedback, if it was an innovation that successfully replaced a formal system of written grievances and no official system through which to give positive feedback. The new genre—Friday Feedback—would offer students and staff new social ends, new roles (for example, staff could more easily publicly praise their students; students could critique staff in a fairly low-stakes setting); it would also change the material circumstances of their interaction (from a system of paper complaints submitted to administrative offices to a recurring Friday afternoon event involving a circle of community members). In Miller's terms, the new genre would give both staff and students a different understanding of how to participate in the actions of their community and likely redefine their sense of what agency they may have as members of Tech Year.

North American genre theory was initially used primarily as a way to diagnose writing problems and identify communication possibilities in disciplinary and workplace settings. It is a particularly helpful theory for exploring the challenges that novices face as they enter new disciplines or workplaces and must work with unfamiliar genres (Beaufort, 1999; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). Other researchers that engage the theory have traced shifts in academic disciplines by examining the changes in important genres (Bazerman, 1988), and have explored how individuals are constrained or empowered by the moves allowed to them in certain genres (Paré, 2002; Schryer, Lingard, Spafford, & Garwood, 2003; Winsor, 2003). Methodologically, North American genre researchers typically identify long-standing textual forms and both study samples of these forms and interview the genre's users.



Looking at textual innovations with genre theory requires a major shift, in that the focus is not on an existing, long-standing genre, but a *potential* genre—a response that *might* be paired with a number of recurrent organizational situations and activities. When the textual form—digital storytelling, in Tech Year’s case—is piloted as a response to a particular recurrent situation, it *temporarily* approximates genre status. By analyzing these temporary genre stabilizations to see if and how the new textual practice fits, clashes with, or offers new possibilities within these recurrent situations and activities, implementers can get a glimpse of whether the new practice has potential as an organizational genre.

Additionally, North American genre theory is grounded in rhetoric, and it has been most widely used to account for what Miller (2007) called problems of “rhetorical production.” Although my proposed analysis allows room for a discussion of the rhetorical work that individuals can and cannot do through digital storytelling, it is important to acknowledge that this vision of genre is not strictly rhetorical. Helpful for clarifying the way I propose defining genres is Peter Medway’s (2002) examination of architecture students’ sketchbooks. Medway makes a case for the generic status of these notebooks despite the fact that they do no explicitly rhetorical work (no one reads them except the authors themselves). Alluding to Miller’s 1984 article, Medway argued that texts like these sketchbooks—which are recurrently used by architecture students to record their notes, sketches, and ideas—both ‘socialize an urge’ (p. 145) and help the students to ‘enact the ends that they have learned they may have’ (p. 145). He concluded,

Genre theory may amount to little more than this; that it’s helpful to be able to say that when people do roughly similar sorts of textual things in circumstances perceived as roughly similar, then we are in the presence of a construct that is a real social fact—and let’s call that a genre. (p. 141)

It is with this looser definition of genre—genre as an indicator and nexus of real social fact—that I move forward.¹

A genre-informed implementation analysis offers four key productive possibilities. First, the theory offers a lean methodology to implementation researchers, be they outsiders or implementing teams looking to document and learn from their own efforts. Implementation projects are often long and involve many people, meetings, and periods of activity. Genre-informed implementation analysis focuses the researcher’s attention on pilot periods, because key information about implementation can be uncovered during pilots. Second, although genre theory itself is complicated, it can be translated into a fairly simple reflective tool—a *genre inventory*—that can be used to analyze and make decisions about an ongoing implementation. Third, genre-informed implementation analysis allows the experience of those who use the new textual practice, including the modifications they employ to the official version of this new practice, to be incorporated as implementation moves forward. And, finally, genre-informed implementation analysis forefronts the flexibility of both innovations and of organizations, reminding implementers of their power to make decisions about how to use a new textual practice and about what individual action and group activity they wish to make possible in their organization.

¹ See also Spinuzzi’s work; Spinuzzi has justified the use of the genre as a unit of analysis when the object of focus is not clearly rhetorical. He defines a genre as a “temporarily stabilized social construct” (2003, p. 43).

A GENRE-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Genre Ecologies

Figure 1 represents a comprehensive genre-informed perspective on the implementation of a new textual practice. I unpack it slowly here, from the outside in, because it is both the key to understanding the view I propose and the basis for methods I later describe.

First, the entire system, bounded by the box, is an organization. Situated within the organization are many genre ecologies, that is, groups of genres that jointly mediate an activity or are available to individuals as they respond to recurrent organizational situations, or exigencies.²

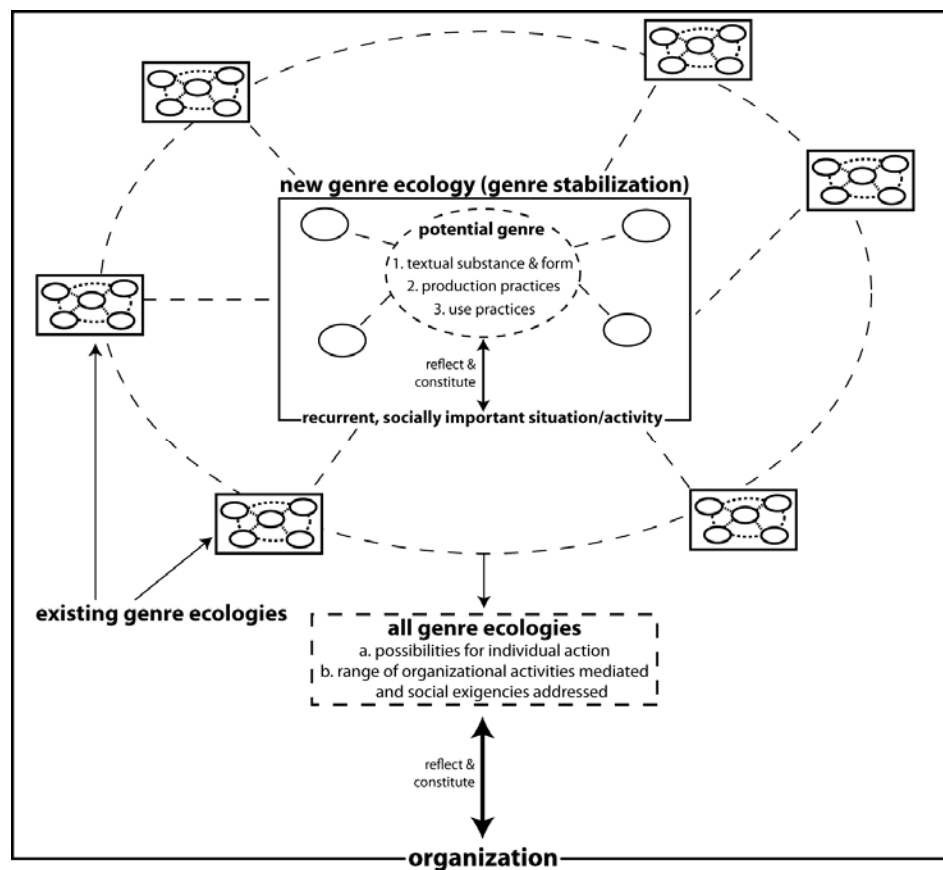


Figure 1. The relationship of genres—existing and new—to recurrent situations/activities and organizational possibilities.

² There are many terms for collections of linked genres that people use to accomplish a particular end (Spinuzzi, 2004). I have selected “genre ecologies” (Spinuzzi & Zachry, 2000; Spinuzzi, 2003) because of all the available terms, it does the best job of suggesting that work and communication are facilitated not just by generic *texts*, but also by the social and material environment (ecology) that accompanies these texts. Ecology is also an evocative metaphor, as Nardi and O’Day (Nardi & O’Day, 1999) have described.



Figure 1 shows six existing ecologies, but any large organization will have countless genre ecologies. In the figure, all of the ecologies are connected by dotted lines, to show the overall interconnection of activities and exigencies and genres in an organization. The collective of these genre ecologies, labeled “all genre ecologies,” and the organization are connected by a double arrow. This designates the fundamental connection between an organization’s daily activity and its genre ecologies. Within these ecologies lie the possibilities for individual action within the organization and the range of organizational activities mediated within and exigencies addressed by the organization. That is, an organization and its genre ecologies mutually define or co-constitute each other—the genre ecologies reflect the organization and the organization reflects its genre ecologies. The “context” that is the organization is “an ongoing accomplishment” (Russell, 1997, p. 513) of people using genres. Of course organizations are made up of people, social roles, values, norms, materials, and discourse; most all of these contextual factors are linked to and realized within genre ecologies. Genres are, to invoke Blake, the grains of sand in which you can see the world. Or as the genre researcher Anthony Paré (2002) said, the genre is a nexus, “fus[ing] text and context, product and process, cognition and culture in a single, dynamic concept” (p. 57).

The large genre ecology at the center of the diagram represents a new genre ecology—a genre stabilization—temporarily formed when a new textual practice is deployed in a pilot. At the center of the ecology is the potential genre—digital storytelling, in Tech Year’s case—and it is surrounded by existing genres that individuals use to accomplish key activities or to respond to the exigencies of recurrent situations. Here again I use a double arrow to indicate the way that this ecology, with its new genre, will construct activity and situation, as well as how activity and situation circumscribe the possibilities for the potential genre.

Finally, at the finest level of detail, are three aspects of text and situation co-constituted within a genre and situation/activity relationship. In looking for ways to articulate these aspects, my main criterion was that the categories selected be comprehensive, yet few in number; I did not want a lot of categories to overcomplicate the analysis. The three aspects that I have selected—textual substance and form, production practices, and use practices—are built upon the “dimensions of genre” that Paré and Graham Smart (1994) suggested researchers studying genres investigate: textual features, writing processes, reading practices, and social roles. I have used Joanne Yates and Wanda Orlikowski’s (1992) more robust terms *textual substance and form* rather than “textual features.” I have also altered Paré and Smart’s terms “writing” and “reading” to, respectively, *production* and *use*, to reflect the digital nature of digital storytelling (and many textual innovations). More significantly, I have dropped Paré and Smart’s dimension of social roles. This choice reflects an understanding that an ecological approach to studying genre is one that incorporates the study of social and material factors into its analysis.

This model forefronts the fairly stabilized yet always flexible nature of organizations. And as far as models for organizational action go, a view of it as linked genre ecologies is fairly straightforward. As I will describe below, the model also points to a reflective tool that is similarly simple.

Evaluating a Pilot with the Genre Inventory

The analysis I suggest focuses on the three co-constituted aspects of text and situation—textual substance and form, production practices, and use practices—and assesses these aspects along three time-based categories, all centered on pilots with (genre stabilizations of) the new textual practice. The first category of analysis considers what the organization *intended* to occur in the pilot: What substance and form did they want to see in the texts

produced during the pilot? What practices did they intend to be used in the production of the stories? What practices did they intend to be used by those who watched and used the finished texts?

The second category of analysis concerns what *actually happened* during the pilot. This question would again be explored from the three co-constituted aspects of text and situation: textual substance and form, production practices, and use practices. The final category of analysis concerns what the organization *desires*. Based on what happened in the pilot, how would they prefer the textual substance and form, production practices, and use practices stabilize? Practically, the researcher or implementing team would begin their inventory by documenting intended outcomes prior to the start of the pilot; they would track the actual happenings during the pilot; and they would use both of these categories of data to contemplate the desired stabilization after the pilot is complete.

Figure 2 organizes these categories of analysis into a very simple reflective tool, the genre inventory, which can be used by either researchers or implementation teams to analyze a pilot. A separate inventory would be done of each pilot. This is the key reflective tool to use in a genre-informed implementation analysis; it not only helps implementers to reflect on a recently offered pilot, but it also serves as a coherent way to document pilots, so that if an implementation effort is suspended, the work done thus far is retained in a systematic form.

Pilot Use/Genre Stabilization #1	Intended (centripetal)	Actual (centrifugal)	Desired
1. Textual substance and form			
2. Production practices			
3. Use practices			

Figure 2. The genre inventory tool.

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Download tool as rich-text format doc: [14_Dush_genre_inventory_RTF.rtf](#)

The three categories of analysis in Figure 2—what implementers intended to happen, what happened, and what the implementers would like to happen in the future—are intuitively sensible ways to look at a pilot. But they are also particularly important from the lens of genre theory, for they integrate a way to consider both the plans of implementation leaders—most often people with a fair amount of power in the organization—and the modifications made by actual users of the new textual practice. I draw here on Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) and his concepts of *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces that are in constant play during language use. The centripetal force is the official, centralized plan—the way those in charge imagine a new textual practice should look and operate. It is denoted on the genre inventory by the “Intended” category. Centrifugal forces come into play when language users, in the hunt to satisfy their



particular needs, diverge from the centripetal vision of things. For example, in the Business Communication pilot of digital storytelling at Tech Year, Madeline discouraged the students from making what she called “tribute stories,” which were stories that paid homage to a friend or family member but often lacked the sort of story arc that Madeline felt was an essential learning outcome of the digital storytelling unit. A number of students, however, driven by needs more pressing than a good grade in the course—such as a desire to honor a loved one or a need to express their admiration for a friend or relative that had passed away—ignored Madeline’s vision of digital storytelling and produced a tribute anyway.

At other times, centrifugal forces will manifest in what activity theorists call “contradictions” (Engeström, 1990), where behavior learned in a parallel or historical genre causes problems as a person tries to complete an action. One example of this came as both the students and teachers at Tech Year struggled to adjust the way they discussed the stories and essays about empowerment that were intended to be fodder for the students’ digital storytelling scripts in the Empowerment unit pilot in the Business Communication course. Both the students and their teachers were accustomed to approaching these texts from the more familiar framework of critique and analysis, so their preparatory discussions and writing were not conducive to the new activity of crafting a digital storytelling script with a pleasing narrative arc.

Systematically incorporating centrifugal forces into an implementation analysis is important; as Clay Spinuzzi (2003) argued, official planners and designers can learn a lot from unofficial innovations made by the users of a genre. At Tech Year, for example, the students who made tribute stories against Madeline’s wishes were ultimately some of those who were most invested in their projects. Many of them brought their families to the Tech Year premiere and distributed their stories online, both promoting Tech Year and activating parent involvement. That is, their centrifugal impulses and actions produced valuable results, and when reflecting on the pilot, Tech Year would be wise to acknowledge and consider incorporating their innovation. A second reason to consider centrifugal divergences is that they may point to behaviors learned or valued elsewhere—either within or outside of the organization—that will cause persistent problems in the production and use of the new textual form.

Data Collection with Attention to Cognitive/discursive, Material, and Social Practices

Before I discuss what sense the genre inventory tool can make of Tech Year’s pilot efforts, I’d like to briefly address how a researcher or implementation team can collect the data necessary to complete a genre inventory. A perspective on genres that sees them as reflecting and constituting social reality implies taking care to capture all dimensions of that social reality. It is important to characterize production practices and use practices with consideration to three dimensions: cognitive/discourse practices, social practices, and material practices. When completing the inventory of intentions for a pilot, for example, this means asking questions like: How do we imagine people will think and use language—that is, what cognitive and discourse skills will be emphasized—during the production and use of these new texts? Who will be involved? What social relations and roles will different people and groups take during the production and use of these new texts? What tools and other texts will be used during production and use of these new texts, and how will these practices be practically accomplished in space and time?

Here is where the long tradition of genre research, and of composition research in general, is of great help. It provides us with a sense of a range of methods that can be used to scour these three dimensions of practice related to genre. We might, for example, study cognitive behavior by videotaping writers as they compose and viewers as they watch the new texts, later interviewing them about our observations (Schryer et al., 2003). To identify relevant social and material practices, we can look to ethnographic methods of workplace researchers who have used genre theory (Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999) or the work of



researchers who have examined social and material concerns by combining genre theory with cultural–historical activity theory (Russell, 1997; Russell & Yañez, 2003; Spinuzzi, 2003).

Filling out the first column of the genre inventory—of intended textual substance and form, production practices, and use practices—is, for a researcher, a matter of conducting interviews, sitting in on meetings, and scouring planning documents to assess what implementers want from a particular pilot. For implementers conducting a genre-informed implementation analysis without a researcher’s assistance, a key implementer can draft the list and submit it for a check by others at the organization.

Gathering data during the pilot, to fill in the “Actual” column of the genre inventory is more of a challenge. Although much of the data related to the substance and form of texts made during a pilot can be gathered by examining the finished texts and interviewing authors about these texts, information related to production and use practices during a pilot requires being on site for most, if not all, of the pilot activity, and being able to separate out what is relevant to implementation from what is not. These site visits are best structured by a data collection instrument that keeps the researcher or implementation team oriented toward the particular concerns of a genre-informed implementation analysis. Figure 3 offers one such instrument.

Date	Primary activity is related to (circle one) production or use
Textual Substance and Form	
<i>Substance of texts (themes and topics)?</i>	
<i>Form of texts (structural features, media incorporated, language)?</i>	
Cognitive and Discourse Practices	
<i>Mental and language practices and skills used?</i>	
Social Practices	
<i>Who is involved?</i>	
<i>Social roles?</i>	
Material Practices	
<i>Where is activity happening? What tools are being used?</i>	
<i>What documents and genres are used and/or referred to?</i>	
Note: use a * to indicate possible contradictions or possibilities (centrifugal forces)	

Figure 3. Data collection instrument for documenting pilot activity.

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Download tool as rich-text format doc: [14_Dush_instrument_RTF.rtf](#)

The instrument displayed in Figure 3 asks the researcher to first note whether the observation is centered on the production of the new text (for example, a class session where students are producing their stories) or the use of it (such as a showing event). In most cases, this selection



is easy to make. Data collection is then guided by four main categories. First, *textual substance and form* is a place to note observations about the themes, topics, structure, media, and language that characterize texts at this point in time. Second, the *cognitive/discourse practices* category is where the researcher can note mental processes and skills used in the production or use of texts at this time. Third, in the *social practices* category, the researcher notes who is involved in the activity being observed and what social roles particular individuals and groups take. Finally, the category of *material practices* is a place to indicate how space, tools (including other texts), and time are used. The instrument also reminds the researcher to be on the lookout for problems and possibilities by noting possible centrifugal forces at work.

In terms of practically implementing a genre-informed implementation analysis, having a rigorous data-collection instrument is important. When all of the various aspects of genre are accounted for during data collection, generating relevant inventories is much more straightforward.

A GENRE INVENTORY OF A TECH YEAR PILOT

The appendix shows a completed genre inventory of Tech Year's final digital storytelling pilot, the Empowerment unit in the Business Communication course, which ran from December 2006 to January 2007. The students spent the first 3 weeks of this unit reading and writing on the theme of personal empowerment, with an end goal of generating a digital story script from a portfolio of writing created during these weeks. The next 4 weeks were devoted to digital story production. On the genre inventory, I have aligned intended outcomes with actual outcomes of roughly the same sort, to highlight convergences and divergences. While I leave it to readers to examine the specifics of the sample inventory, it is important to understand the general moves required to interpret and act on such an inventory. Once the pilot is complete and a list of intended texts and practices is compared to actual texts and practices, it is important to ask three questions:

- 1) What went according to plan and what diverged from the plan?
- 2) What are the sources of the divergences between our intended plan and the actual pilot?
- 3) In light of this pilot, what do we want, in terms of textual substance and form, production practices, and use practices, if we proceed with implementing digital storytelling as a tactic to answer to this recurrent, socially important situation or activity? In other words, how do we fill in the "Desired" column?

The concept of North American genre theory as presented in Figure 1 gives us guidance on where to look for answers to the three questions above. During this pilot, a fair number of key intentions were realized. Almost all of the students completed their stories in the time allotted and on an empowerment theme. The writing teachers handled the majority of the teaching. The stories were showcased in a premiere event. But there were also many divergences between intentions and actual happenings.

Divergences suggest both problems and possibilities. When investigating divergences between planned deployments and actual results, there are a few places to look for problems. First, if there are endemic discrepancies between intentions and reality—if very few things go as planned in the pilot—then it is wise to look for some sort of systemic imbalance between the new practice and existing organizational norms. Perhaps the new textual practice is an unsuitable match for the recurrent, socially important situation or activity that it has been used to mediate in the pilot. Usually, when the key users of the new practice are involved in the implementation, they have enough knowledge to avoid this problem, but it can be a problem with top-down implementations. Second, discrepancies between intentions and reality can



occur when other organizational genre ecologies do not match very well with the ecology connected to the new textual practice. Identifying any of these potential contradictions is important, even though they may lead implementers to the realization that the new practice is too much of a stretch to fit in the organization (at least at the time of the pilot). There were early indications of such incompatibility at Tech Year by a few members of the technical teaching staff who felt that the technologies used to make digital stories were not the same sort of technologies Tech Year students needed to learn for their apprenticeships (and thus that the teaching writing ecology was out of step with the technical training ecology). Such problems are major and may lead implementers to significantly adjust or even abandon their implementation plans.

A more manageable set of problems comes when some of the practices that accompany other genres in the ecology are contradictory to those required by the new textual practice. For example, Tech Year used a method common in writing courses to help students generate their digital story scripts: the students wrote short responses to readings, movies, and multimedia art on the theme of personal empowerment and then compiled these short texts into a portfolio. The intention was that each student would select their favorite document from this portfolio and this would be, with minor changes, their digital story script. But the textual and cognitive practices required to complete the responses in the portfolio were not particularly helpful to the act of writing a story script with a narrative arc. If producing a good script was the goal, having the students revise a single action-driven story, shaping and refining its narrative arc over time, would have been a better technique.

A final source of problems is when the personal exigencies and activities that individuals are involved with outside of the organization influence their behavior. Those students who wrote a story script with a MySpace audience in mind—stories that were inappropriately personal or too casual for a school assignment—are an example of how the pull of other exigencies and activities can cause problems.

Although the previous divergences have been presented as a source of problems, they are also a source of possibilities. As a simple example, when the story production process began, Madeline told the students that they could not use copyrighted music. To drive this point home, she spent some time teaching them how to find royalty-free music online. But several students, again driven by needs more urgent than heeding Madeline's decree, used popular songs in their digital story. One student, David, made a story about a best friend who died of cancer. For him, it was essential to have a song beloved by this friend as the soundtrack. David decided to write an email to the record company, and, surprisingly, was granted permission to use it in his digital story. In another case, a student named George used two popular songs in his digital story. George's story ended up winning the staff and student-voted "Best Picture," and his spot-on musical choices had a lot to do with the overall effect of the story. Tech Year, in evaluating the Empowerment pilot, might look at whether the success some students had with using copyrighted music might warrant loosening the restriction in subsequent offerings.

In cases where there are discrepancies between intentions and actual occurrences, but the pilot is not overrun by discrepancies, organizational members can work together to generate a list of questions related to these discrepancies. These questions should cover both problems and possibilities, ranging from questions about how certain practices that worked well were deployed, so that they might be successfully repeated, to questions about modifying particular expectations based on unexpected problems or successes, to questions about making material adjustments so that problems might be avoided. Different questions will emerge from each pilot, but at root these questions will all circle back to the same concern: What practical changes must we make to sustain this new practice?



GENRE-INFORMED IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS: IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTERS

A genre-informed perspective on implementation suggests that successful implementations are targeted implementations. When an organization is introduced to a new textual practice that appears to have many utilities, they should recognize that focusing their implementations around one or two primary organizational uses will likely speed organizational adoption and enhance sustainability of the new practice.

To this end, an implementation effort should begin with a *pre-inventory* of the new textual practice. A pre-inventory requires that in-depth, genre-informed brainstorming be done on the front end of an implementation project to see if and how the new practice might operate in various potential genre ecologies. This brainstorming, aided with questions like those in Figure 4, can help implementers predict which of many possible organizational uses for the new practice is or are most feasible, and also may help them anticipate problems that may arise due to poor fit with existing contexts.

- 1) What recurrent, socially important situations and activities are we most interested in using this new textual practice for?
- 2) If we implement this new practice in the particular situations and activities listed above, will it allow the organization and individuals within it to accomplish action that current practices do not? If so, what actions?
- 3) How do we want the texts produced to look, in terms of substance and form?
- 4) What cognitive and discourse practices will be utilized to produce the texts? Are these practices familiar? Manageable? Desirable?
- 5) Who will be involved in the production of the texts? What social roles will they occupy? Will this new practice ask people to relate to each other in unfamiliar ways? Do we care to deal with these new relationships?
- 6) How will the practice require we use organizational time and space? Are these arrangements familiar? Manageable? Desirable?
- 7) What cognitive and discourse practices will be utilized in using the texts? Are these cognitive and discourse practices familiar? Manageable? Desirable?
- 8) Who will be involved in the use of the texts? What social roles will they occupy? Will this new practice ask people to relate to each other in unfamiliar ways? If so, do we care to (or need to) deal with these new relationships?
- 9) How will the use of the texts require we use organizational time and space? Are these arrangements familiar? Manageable? Desirable?
- 10) Do we have the energy, resources, and drive to deal with all of the changes that have emerged in this inventory? Should we hire or reallocate people to help us meet these challenges?

Figure 4. Pre-inventory questions to ask prior to a pilot effort with a new textual practice.

Download tool as Word doc: [14_Dush_inventory_Word.doc](#)

Download tool as rich-text format doc: [14_Dush_inventory_RTF.rtf](#)



Organizational members should brainstorm widely to answer question one in the pre-inventory, explore the answer to question two for each of the possible new utilities, and then do more detailed inventories using questions 3–10 for those utilities they see as most promising. Doing a pre-inventory of a textual innovation may even lead an organization to decide to cancel their implementation plans, if the new textual practice does not seem like it will offer enough rewards for the difficulties it will likely cause.

The greatest advantage of a genre-informed implementation analysis is that it encourages sustained engagement with an innovation, engagement with the sort of depth that helps implementers learn about the needs of both the organization and the people within it. Time spent on implementation—even if it ultimately results in a decision not to adopt the new textual practice—thus becomes time well spent, rather than time wasted. The process also both depends on and facilitates communication between different people within an organization. By giving organizational members the chance not only to express their desires about an innovation, but to also reflect on why those desires were or were not put into practice and to then modify these desires, the tool provides many opportunities for people within the organization to be involved in meaningful planning.

A new textual practice has the potential to alter organizational norms in impressive and expansive ways. As Brenton Faber (2002) noted, “when people transgress genres, violate boundaries, and break with routine practices, change becomes possible” (p. 172). In other words, new textual practices, although they face considerable obstacles to long-term sustainability, also bring with them the possibility of altering the range of individual action and large-scale activities in an organization. It is the possibility for change that Faber described that motivates implementers like Madeline Davis and her colleagues at Tech Year. With a reflective and analytical tool such as the genre inventory, these potential changes have a much better chance of becoming a sustainable reality.



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Appendix. Genre inventory for the Empowerment pilot at Tech Year.

Empowerment pilot	Intended (centripetal)	Actual (centrifugal)	Desired
1. Textual substance and form	<p>Empowerment-themed digital story with a shapely narrative arc</p> <p>Capstone quality</p> <p>Photos primarily from personal collection</p> <p>Copyright-free music</p>	<p>Most stories related to empowerment</p> <p>Many 'tribute' stories</p> <p>Some stories with no narrative arc</p> <p>Highly polished to very rough</p> <p>Digital stories with all stock photos</p> <p>Digital story with personal illustrations</p> <p>Several stories with copyrighted music (one student wrote for and was granted use rights)</p>	
2. Production practices	<p>Stories developed in 3-week reading/writing unit</p> <p>Script selected via portfolio assessment process</p> <p>3 weeks in lab, with production process proportioned the same way Madeline's 4-day digital storytelling training was</p> <p>Two classes, with total of 38 students</p> <p>Work done in 80-minute classes, 4x/wk</p>	<p>Many texts produced, but few with a narrative arc</p> <p>Very few students find story script in their portfolio</p> <p>Story circle takes six days instead of one</p> <p>Almost all production done outside of class</p>	



	<p>Extra time provided during last two weeks</p> <p>Keyanna, apprentice teacher, is primary teacher, Madeline backup</p> <p>Writing teacher handles both technical and writing teaching</p> <p>Student technical committee assists with audio recording/CD burning</p>	<p>Madeline takes over primary teaching role, particularly in production process</p> <p>Steve, technical teacher, teaches audio and video editing</p>	
<p>3. Use practices</p>	<p>Students' stories burned to CDs for archival and sharing purposes</p> <p>Premiere event to happen several weeks after completion of unit: "Celebration of Empowerment"</p> <p>Stories shown at Premiere to be selected by a staff/student vote</p>	<p>Not all stories made it onto CDs (student Tech committee not sufficient when problems arose)</p> <p>Students share stories by posting them on YouTube/MySpace where many receive lots of viewer comments</p> <p>Premiere pushed back 2 months—needed to use an elective course during apprenticeship to plan it; able, this way, to spend more time reaching out and inviting attendees</p> <p>Not all students' stories were voted upon</p>	



		<p>Students showed stories to family/friends, opening up discussions about personal issues</p> <p>Students showed stories to mentors and apprenticeship staff</p> <p>Steve creates archival system and files stories according to what level of sharing permission students have consented to</p>	
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