Challenges as complementarities in genre-based writing instruction

Findings from a case study in genre-based writing instruction in lower-secondary history teaching

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Introduction – Research gap

- Genre pedagogy-informed approaches offer both constraints and creativity (e.g., Dewitt, 2004)

- Existing body of research (e.g., Bae, 2012; de Oliveira & Lan, 2014; Horverak, 2016; Ramos, 2015) mainly focussed on initial stages of genre implementation (interventions studies)

- During, and following, these initial initial stages:
  a) students develop a widely varying degree of genre proficiency;
  b) the genre repertoire increases;
  c) content area teachers will have to relate their conception of genre(s) to evolving curriculum goals and content-area-specific objectives

- In relation to a)-c), how do teachers handle genre constraint/creativity?

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Theoretical framework

- **Genre metastability** (Martin, 2015); *semogenesis* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999)
  - "Genre both empowers and subjects to power … Janus-like, genres inevatibly look both ways at once, encompassing convergence and divergence, similarity and difference, standardization and variation, constraint and creativity" (Devitt, 2004, p. 164)
  - "The tension between stability and flexibility, then, is a uniquely productive tension, which fuels the creativity genres enable" (Worden, 2018, p. 45)
  - "constraint and choice are necessary, positive components of the genre" (Moore, 2019, p. 435)

- **Historical literacy**: second order concepts vs first order (substantial) concepts
  - Van Boxtel & van Drie (2018)
  - " Grounded in the notion of history as a distinctive form of inquiry and thought, second-order (metahistorical) concepts of history are higher-order concepts that help define the structure of the discipline. They shape historical questions and are used to organize substantive knowledge when making sense of historical sources and constructing historical interpretations" (Van Boxtel & van Drie, 2018, p. 156

Method

- A case study of an instructional unit in history (The Age of Colonization 1400-1600) in which the teacher applied genre-pedagogical principles to the teaching of content

- Three grade-eight classes observed during five weeks

- Field notes, photo documentation, audio recordings of teacher presentations and teacher-student interactions relating to genre-based text production

- Analysis
    - Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
    - Categories as complementarities (Vithal, 2003)
    - Engagement framework/dialogic contraction and expansion (Martin & White, 2005)
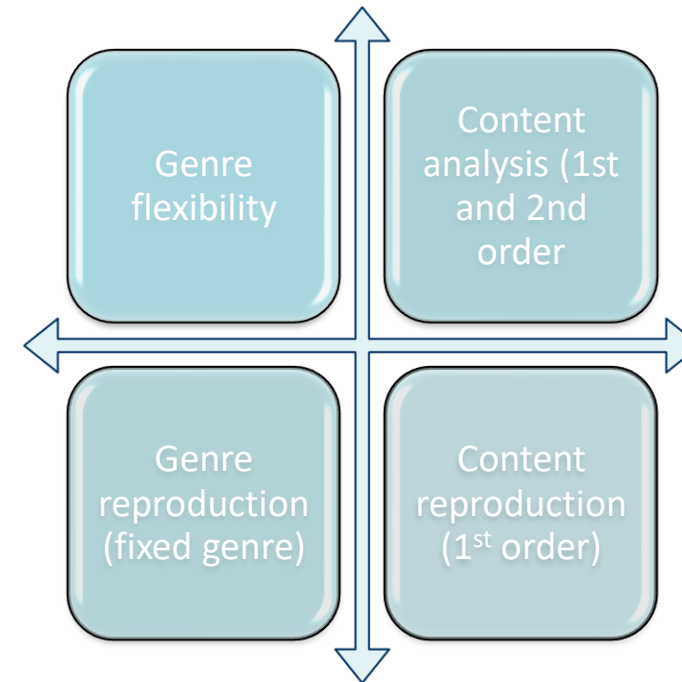   - Natural choice/natural constraint (Moore, 2019)

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Analytical question

How did the teacher approach (described and talked about) genres?

Four (sub)themes

Genre flexibility	Content analysis (1st and 2nd order
Genre reproduction (fixed genre)	Content reproduction (1st order)

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Genre flexibility – words indicating room for adjustments

It <u>can</u> also be fictional elements, that is, made up elements. You'll remember when we wrote about the Roman Empire. Then it was really <u>in between</u> those [fact/fiction]

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Genre reproduction – indicating fixed features

[Explaining headings in factual reports] If you're to write about one thing, then you'll have to write about that. You can't have a heading about the circulatory system and then start writing about digestion, that'd be totally weird

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Content analysis

[This text] tells about events and persons and has a lot of facts, but it's a little so, so when it comes to cultural encounters

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Content reproduction – focus on substantial concepts

Should I write more about buildings. Is it enough or should I write some more?

STUDENT

Perhaps a little bit more about buildings, I think you should tell more about the royal palace.
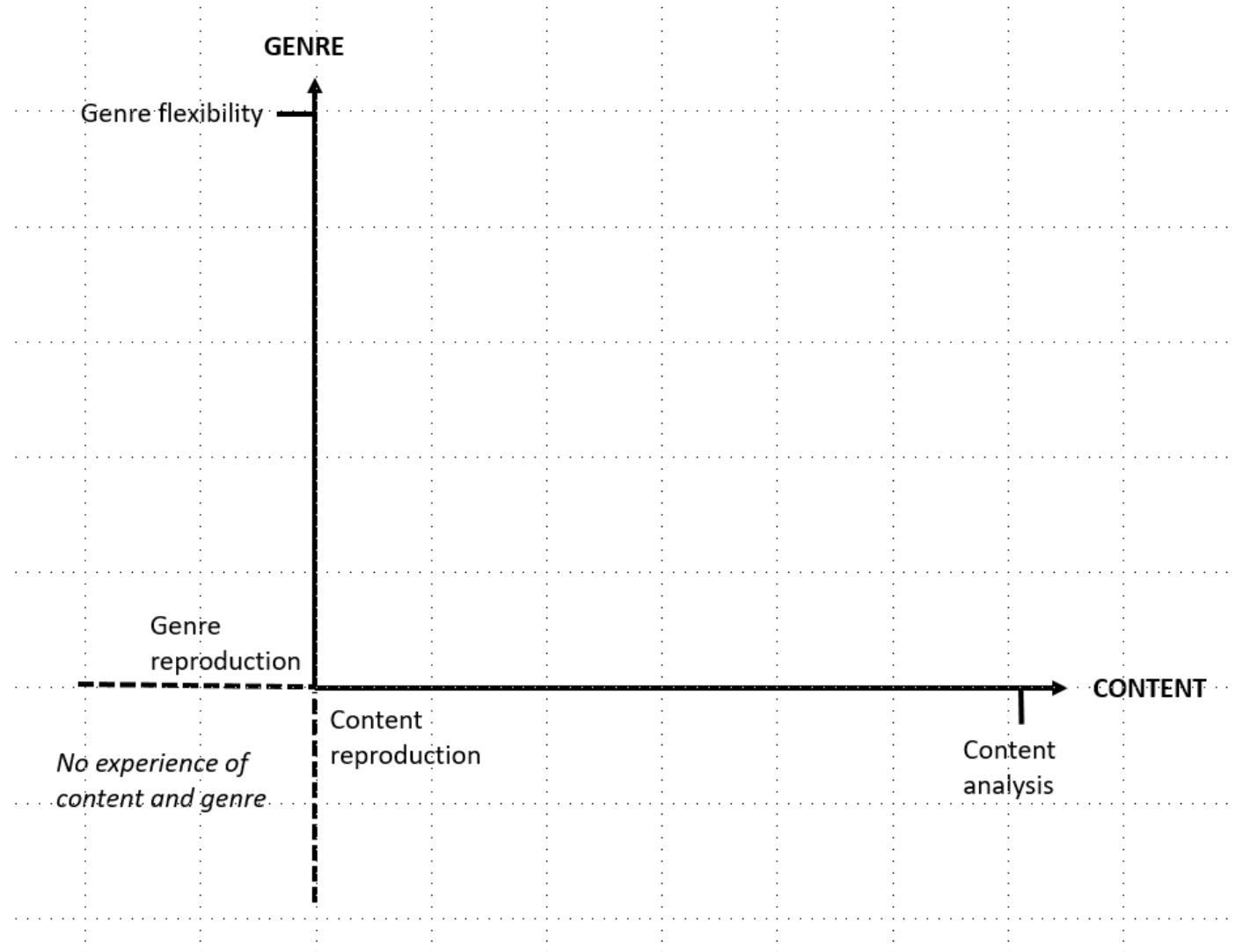
TEACHER

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Findings

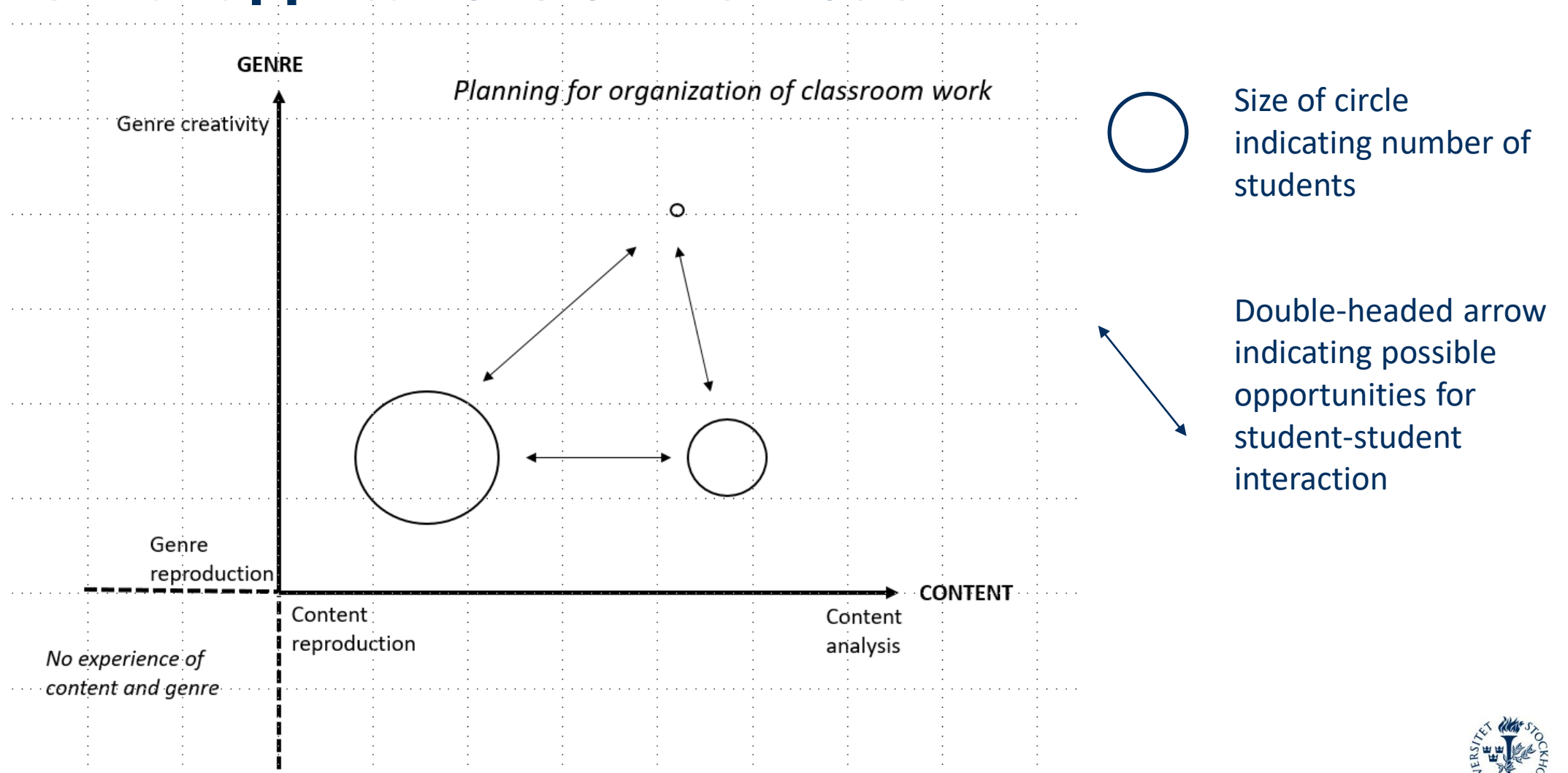| Themes	Subthemes	Instances
Genre complementarities	Genre flexibility	26
	Genre reproduction	53
Content (history) complementarities	Content analysis (2nd and 1st order concepts)	20
	Content reproduction (1st order concepts only)	17

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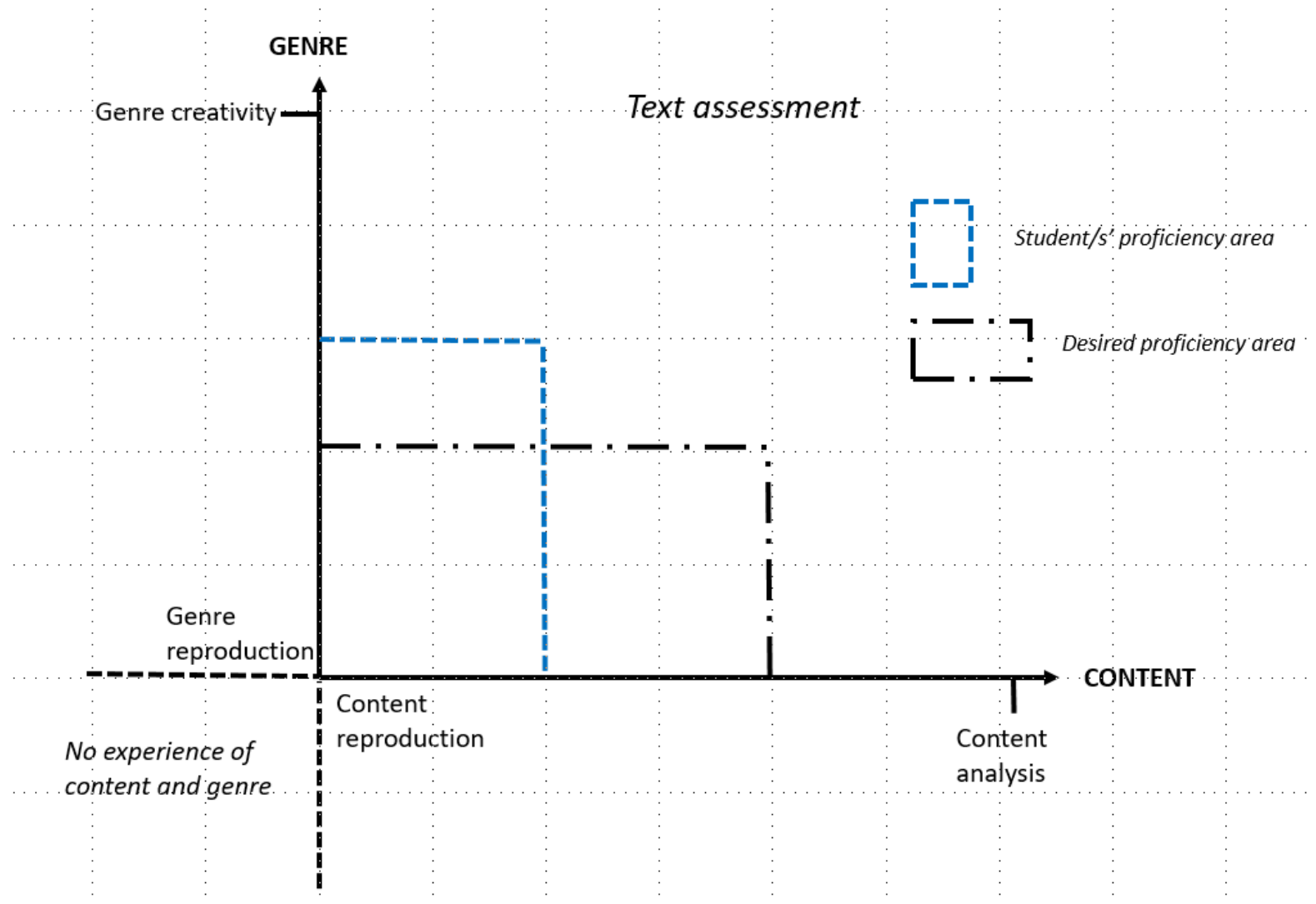
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A model for the genre-content complementarities

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Potential applications of the model

Planning for organization of classroom work

GENRE

Genre creativity

Genre reproduction

No experience of content and genre

Content reproduction

Content analysis

CONTENT

Size of circle indicating number of students

Double-headed arrow indicating possible opportunities for student-student interaction

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Potential applications of the model

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