Silent Partners: Student Course Evaluations and the Construction of Pedagogical Worlds

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Abstract

This pilot study examines the student evaluation of courses as a situated discourse practice. It seeks to understand how the practice informs student and instructor attitudes, practices, and identities by examining a particular case - the course evaluation instrument used in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo. Rhetorical genre theory provides a theoretical framework to understand the practice in pragmatic, semiotic, and hegemonic terms. An interdiscursive approach (Bhatia, 2008) was used to examine the practice, including a textual analysis of the instrument itself to reveal the ideological perspectives about teaching and learning that inhere in it, as well as a qualitative study of the genre's users (students, course instructors, department chairs) to ascertain the genre's received meaning and how the genre informs and influences actions as a result of this meaning. Results indicate that the genre projects an institutionally dominant ideology about teaching and learning in the Faculty of Arts which is at odds with emerging practices. Qualitative analysis suggests that the instrument acts a silent partner for students, mediating pedagogical meaning for them, as well as for instructors, seeking to impose institutionally dominant pedagogies and to influence their pedagogical decisions.

Key words: course evaluations, rhetorical genre theory, teaching and learning paradigms, institutional pedagogies

Résumé

Cette étude pilote examine l'évaluation de cours par les étudiants en tant que pratique de discours situé. L'étude cherche à comprendre comment la pratique influence les attitudes, comportements et identités des étudiants et des enseignants en examinant un cas particulier, l'évaluation de cours effectuée dans la Faculté des Arts à l'Université de Waterloo. La théorie du genre rhétorique fournit un cadre pour comprendre la pratique d'un point de vue pragmatique, sémiotique et hégémonique. L'étude a eu recours à une approche interdiscursive (Bhatia, 2008) pour examiner la pratique, y compris l'analyse textuelle de l'instrument lui-même afin de révéler les perspectives idéologiques sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage qui en font partie, de même qu'une étude qualitative des utilisateurs du genre (étudiants, enseignants, chefs de département) afin de déterminer le sens le plus répandu du genre et la manière dont le genre influence les actions en conséquence de ce sens. Les résultats indiquent que le genre projette une idéologie institutionnellement dominante sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage dans la Faculté des Arts qui va à l'encontre de pratiques émergentes. Une analyse qualitative suggère que l'instrument agit comme associé passif pour les étudiants, communicant des sens pédagogiques pour ceux-ci ainsi que pour les enseignants et cherchant à

imposer des pédagogies institutionnelles dominantes et à influencer leurs décisions pédagogiques.

Mots clés : évaluations de cours, théorie rhétorique du genre, paradigmes d'enseignement et d'apprentissage, pédagogies institutionnelles

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Researcher: One of the things I want to try to understand is whether the course evaluation affects the way people teach, the choices they make as they design their courses. . . .

Prof C: It has power. It has tremendous power. I think some people may be underestimating that power. It has tremendous power. Way too much power. So, speaking for myself, . . . I have tenure, so I can survive it, but not without tremendous resentment and concern. It's not just resentment. It's the unhealthiness, the corrupting influence on me and others that is the bigger deal.

(Faculty Interview, Fall 2008)

1. Introduction

First introduced into North American universities in the mid-1920s (D'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997), the practice of student course evaluation has become so institutionally established that it is almost impossible to imagine a university classroom without them. Yet, despite this institutional status, the practice remains controversial, as evidenced in the above exchange, captured during a study of faculty and student perspectives of the Arts course evaluation at the University of Waterloo. This pilot study joins a chorus of existing studies on the practice of student course evaluation, a practice which has been the subject of intense research scrutiny over the past three decades. Marsh (1987) reports, for instance, that 1,055 published and unpublished studies on the student evaluation of instruction appeared on the ERIC system between 1976 and 1984. Nor has this kind of research interest abated in the past two decades: new studies on the topic are indexed in research databases such as ERIC almost every year. In a recent comprehensive review of the student course evaluation literature, Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) reported that "Even as we conducted our review, new publications emerged: raising new issues and rehashing old ones, presenting alternative approaches and conclusions and reporting new findings" (p. 8). Clearly, the practice remains contentious. This is hardly surprising, given the high stakes for faculty: these evaluations are often used to inform merit, tenure and promotion decisions (Richardson, 2005).

Most of the research attention of the past three decades has focused on faculty concerns related to the utility, validity, and reliability of the practice for the achievement of its stated goals: namely, the gathering of student feedback on instructional effectiveness to improve teaching and inform personnel decisions (Baldwin & Blattner, 2003; D'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997; Darby, 2007; Feldman, 1986; Gravestock & Gregor-

Greenleaf, 2008; Marsh, 1987; Timpson & Andrew, 1997, to name a few). Researchers have been mainly concerned, in other words, with determining whether student course evaluations are effective in accomplishing their stated purposes. Do they provide valid feedback on instructional effectiveness which can legitimately be used to improve teaching and inform personnel decisions? Opinion varies wildly on this front. Some believe that student evaluations are the best means to capture objective evidence of instructional effectiveness, or at least an important source for this information (D'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997; Feldman, 1996; Seldin, 1993). Others temper this slightly, suggesting that while the practice is useful and "reasonably valid," results are probably contaminated by "some sources of bias" (Marsh, 1987; Rossi et al., 2003), while still others question the neutrality and validity of the practice altogether (Darby, 2007; Kember & Wong, 2000; Kolitch & Dean, 1999). Concerns include the selection of criteria used to judge instructional effectiveness, the extent to which results are contaminated by biasing variables, and the validity of evaluating a multidimensional enterprise – teaching – in a uni-dimensional manner (Baldwin & Blattner, 2003; Elbow, 1992; Franklin, 2001; Kress, 2000; Lattuca & Domagal-Goldman, 2007; Nerger, 1996;). As Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) comment, issues that seem for a time to be resolved in the literature are often re-opened for examination, "raising new questions or reframing old questions in new contexts . . . seemingly with little hope of resolution" (p. 9).

What, then, can another study, added to this extensive and well-documented cacophony of voices, offer the research community? To start, it can address head-on some of the reasons for the seemingly endless recycling of concerns and debates that dominate the literature. It can do this by moving beyond questions concerning the utility and validity of student course evaluations, which speak to their intended meaning, and instead examine course evaluations as a *discourse practice*, situated within a particular context and community, with attendant implications for all members of that community. The scholarly concern in a study of this nature is not on the intended or stated meaning of the practice, but rather on its **content** and **praxis** meanings within its particular context (May, 2001). Content meaning is concerned with the course evaluation as a site of ideological action; praxis meaning is concerned with the course evaluation as a site of social and hegemonic action. Rhetorical genre theory speaks to all three of these concerns, and offers a valuable interpretive framework to illuminate the practice of student course evaluation.

Rhetorical genre theory offers insight into how genres such as student course evaluations work to mediate social action; how they construct meaning within their discourse communities; and, as a result, how they work to inform the socialization within that community (Frow, 2006; Schryer, 1993; Schryer et al., 2003). Schryer (1993) defines genres as "stabilized-for-now or stabilized-enough sites of social and ideological action" (p. 204) which "embody the unexamined or tacit way of performing some social action" (p. 209). Genres are therefore often a window to dominant practices, representing "the ways dominant elite do things" (Schryer, 1993, p. 209).

Schryer's (1993) definition provides a useful framework for the specific research questions posed in this study.   The pragmatic nature of genre as a site of social action is widely recognized in the genre theory literature (Bawarshi, 2003; Bazerman, 1988; Frow, 2006; Miller, 1984; Schryer, 1993). This paper will explore the kind of work that

student course evaluations accomplish by examining a particular case – the course evaluation instrument used in Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo.   This kind of analysis requires an "extra-textual" or contextual approach – a recognition, in other words, of what Bhatia (2008) identifies as "interdiscursivity." Bhatia suggests that in order to illuminate discourse practices, researchers must examine more than strictly the textual artifacts in a given research site – they must examine the practices and culture of the discourse communities that use and interact with these texts. Bhatia emphasizes, in other words, "the need to go from text to context in order to undertake a comprehensive and critical view of discursive practices" (p. 162).

This "going from text to context" involves, in the case of the Arts course evaluation at the University of Waterloo, collecting qualitative data from the genre's users (students, course instructors, department chairs) about the genre's received meaning (Scott, 1990; as cited in May, 2001), and about how the genre informs and influences actions as a result of this meaning. It raises the questions "What actions does the course evaluation make possible?" and, conversely, "What actions does it constrain?" This kind of analysis will help to move the conversation about student course evaluations beyond a consideration of their effectiveness into a more complex understanding of what they actually do within their institutional framework.

Secondly, building on Schryer's (1993) contention that genres "embody the unexamined or tacit way of performing some social action" (p. 209), this paper will examine how the genre of student course evaluation embodies the "unexamined or tacit way" teaching is performed in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo. It will seek, in other words, to make "rhetorically visible and accessible to inquiry" (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 158), the ideological perspectives regarding teaching and learning that inhere in the instrument. This will be done through a textual analysis of the instrument itself, with a view to revealing its content meaning.

Finally, as sites of ideological action, genres "can represent the ways dominant elite do things" (Schryer, 1993, p. 209) and, as a result, "shape much of the socialization within [discourse] communities" (p. 204). This is arguably the capstone achievement of a genre analysis of any discourse practice. By revealing how genre works to socialize members of particular social groups into dominant perspectives, genre analysis can work to effect social change. This is a powerful idea, one which can work, in the case of course evaluation instruments, to redress possible mismatches between the intended purposes or meanings of the genre (the improvement of teaching, and the rewarding of instructional effectiveness) and the realities of actual practice.

A genre analysis of the Arts course evaluation instrument at the University of Waterloo can offer, in short, a lens into the practice of student course evaluation that is typically not provided elsewhere in the literature.

2.   Literature review

As noted earlier, principal among the concerns raised in the literature is whether student course evaluations produce valid and reliable data – data which can legitimately be used to evaluate teaching effectiveness in order to inform personnel decisions and improve teaching. Research findings on these issues are briefly presented below.

2.1 Reliability

Reliability, as Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain, "has to do with the consistency of observations: Whether a research instrument . . . will yield the same results every time it is applied. If it does yield roughly the same results time after time, then it can be said that the instrument is dependable for the purpose at hand" (p. 238). The literature is fairly unanimous when it comes to the overall reliability of course evaluation instruments. As Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) report, course evaluation instruments have been shown to provide consistent and stable results over time, and are therefore generally considered to be reliable tools. This is particularly true, the researchers go on to explain, "when the tool has been carefully constructed and psychometrically tested before use" (p. 28). The case for validity, however, is less clear cut.

2.2 Validity

Validity is concerned with the question of whether, and to what extent, a research instrument actually measures what it was designed to measure (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In other words, do the results obtained from course evaluation instruments accurately reflect the degree of instructors' effectiveness? Or are there factors which threaten to interfere with this causal relationship? Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) have usefully taxonomized the reported threats to validity in terms of external and internal threats.

2.2.1 Threats to validity: External

In the case of student course evaluations, external validity refers to whether the selected criteria accurately capture instructional effectiveness; any mismatch between evaluation items and their relevance to teaching effectiveness constitutes an external threat to validity. Are the criteria used to evaluate teaching which are typically found on course evaluation forms a valid reflection of teaching effectiveness? The verdict is by no means certain. Hinton (1993; as cited in Kolitch & Dean, 1999) maintains that "ratings are poor measures of teaching effectiveness" and that "the construct validation approach is handicapped by the lack of a universally acceptable model of 'good teaching'"(p. 28). D'Apollonia and Abrami (1997) similarly report that "student rating forms, each purported to measure instructional effectiveness, were not consistent in their operational definitions of instructional effectiveness. Thus, no one rating form represents effective instruction across contexts" (p. 1199). In a similar vein, Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) suggest that "For course evaluations to be valid measures of teaching effectiveness, not only must the questions reflect those aspects of teaching identified as effective, but the very definition of effective teaching must be identified and agreed upon" (p. 30). This kind of global definition of effective teaching remains elusive for most institutions, which, for many researchers, represents a threat to external validity.

This threat is an overarching concern, for instance, for Kember and Wong (2000), who point to research that criticizes the selection of dimensions as being typically based upon "too narrow models and modes of teaching and learning" (p. 71). These models are generally teacher-centred (Centra, 1993; as cited in Kember & Wong, 2000) and

transmission-oriented (Kolitch & Dean, 1999). According to Kember and Wong, typical student evaluations omit

> references to learning through modes such as self-directed learning, role play, collaborative learning and project-based learning. . . . [They] focus almost exclusively upon the standard lecture. . . .[As a result,] evaluating innovative or student-centred teaching is problematic with most standard questionnaires which imply a teacher-centred model of the learning process. (p. 91)

Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) similarly acknowledge that

> Most evaluation forms were developed when lecture-based teaching was the norm. However, in recent years, teaching practices have shifted to include collaborative learning techniques, active and problem-based learning and increased use of academic technology. Existing evaluation instruments may no longer accurately or adequately assess these new teaching and learning contexts. (p. 44)

Kolitch and Dean (1999) have suggested that this kind of mismatch between the teaching strategies employed by instructors and the conceptions of teaching and learning portrayed on a typical evaluation instrument can have important consequences for instructors. Their analysis of a typical student evaluation instrument used in the US finds it not to be reflective of all conceptions of teaching but rather "interpretable within one particular paradigm of teaching" (p. 29) – a transmission-oriented one. As such, they contend that it in fact "implicitly militates against alternative models of teaching" (p. 27). This, of course, nullifies the validity of the instrument for instructors who choose to use different teaching methods and models.

The threat to external validity is further exacerbated by the use of standardized evaluation instruments, as these instruments fail to account for disciplinary differences in teaching (Gravestock & Gregor-Greeleaf, 2008, pp. 30-1). The "one size fits all" approach fails to take into account the discipline-specific pedagogies that have evolved within particular disciplines, which can jeopardize the validity of these instruments in specific contexts.

Researchers such as D'Apollonia and Abrami (1997) have responded to this threat by recommending the use of global ratings as being more reliable, valid and generalizable than specific factors: "because specific items have lower validity coefficients and may not generalize across different instructional contexts, we recommend that short rating forms with a few global items be used" (p. 1204). There is, however, no unanimity of opinion in this regard. Elbow (1992), for example, objects to the kind of global rating ("ranking") practice endorsed by D'Apollonia and Abrami, and calls instead for "more discriminating, multidimensional feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of particular features or practices" (p. 7). Some researchers have accommodated both strategies by suggesting that multidimensional evaluations be used as diagnostic tools to provide formative feedback to help instructors identify areas of strength and weakness (Marsh & Roche, 1997; as cited in Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008, p. 31), while global ratings be used for summative assessment of teaching (Algozinne et al., 2004; as cited in Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008, p.

31). Consensus remains elusive, however, and the issues continue to recycle through the literature.

2.2.2 Threats to validity: Internal
By far the biggest threat to validity reported in the literature is internal. Internal validity refers to whether, and to what degree, variables outside the instructor's control influence evaluation results. Much of the literature generated on student course evaluations has been devoted to an examination of the biasing factors that may potentially contaminate evaluation results.   An overview of some of the potentially biasing variables reported in the literature is presented in Table 1, with an indication of source:

Table 1 – Bias Reported in Student Course Evaluation Literature

Variable	Citation source
Time of day course is taught	Baldwin & Blattner, 2003; Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Shapiro, 1990
Class level and size	Baldwin & Blattner, 2003; Elbow, 1992; Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Nerger et al., 1997; Rossi et al., 2003; Seldin, 1993; Shapiro, 1990; Timpson & Andrew, 1997
Elective/Required course (electives are ranked more highly)	Darby, 2007; Elbow, 1992; Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008
Discipline/Field of study	Elbow, 1992; Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Nerger et al., 1997; Seldin, 1993; Timpson & Andrew, 1997
Perceived workload /Method of assessment	Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Marsh, 1987; Shapiro, 1990; Timpson & Andrew, 1997
Innovation /Non-traditional teaching strategies	Franklin, 2001; Kember & Wong, 2000; Kolitch & Dean, 1999
Years of teaching experience	Elbow, 1992; Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Timpson & Andrew, 1997
Student perception of instructor traits/ Personality	Feldman, 1986; Freeman, 1988; Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Rossi et al., 2003; Timpson & Andrew, 1997

Variable	Citation source
Instructor expressivity	D'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997; Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Nerger et al., 1997
Perceived instructor warmth	Best & Addison, 2000; Nerger et al., 1997
Instructor age, race, gender	Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008
Grade expectation	Chavez, 2000; Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Marsh, 1987; Nerger et al., 1997; Rossi et al., 2003
Student interest in subject matter / Motivation	Baldwin & Blattner, 2003; Chavez, 2000; Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Marsh, 1987
Student preference	Darby, 2007
Student beliefs about teaching and learning	Kember & Wong, 2000
Student age, gender, year of study	Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008
Seating position	Nerger et al., 1997
Administrative conditions such as timing of evaluations, instructions to students, instructor presence, anonymity	Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008

D'Apollonia and Abrami (1997) report that multi-section validity design studies have shown that, for the most part, these kinds of variables have a minimal impact on student ratings of instruction. Feldman (1996) and Marsh (1987) agree with their conclusion, reporting relatively weak associations between reported variables and student ratings, and contending that despite claims to the contrary, such variables do not necessarily constitute a bias (as cited in Richardson, 2005). Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) report similar findings in their extensive review of the literature, with one important exception: "In general, no variables have been found to have a substantial effect (e.g., something that would alter the ratings beyond the second decimal place) on ratings, except for expected grades" (p. 39).

Other exceptions to the verdict of non-bias are, however, reported elsewhere in the literature. D'Apollonia and Abrami (1997), for example, caution that instructor expressivity "has a practically meaningful influence on student ratings" (p. 1204). Algozzine et al. (2004) have responded by arguing that factors such as these cannot be viewed as bias because expressivity could in fact be seen to play a role in teaching

effectiveness (as cited in Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2009, p. 39). Once again, consensus remains elusive.

2.2.3 Institutional best practices

This overview of the literature on student course evaluation underscores the fact that there are indeed legitimate validity concerns with respect to this practice. Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf (2008) have outlined a number of strategies that are available to institutions to overcome these concerns. These include designing instruments that reflect institutional instructional priorities (p. 45); ensuring that instruments are built on rigorous theoretical models and are properly validated (p. 45); avoiding questions which students are not well equipped to answer (namely, those related to course content and the disciplinary expertise of the instructor) (p. 29); the use of multiple sources of data to evaluate teaching, including different perspectives and methods (pp. 49-51); faculty consultation with peers and educational developers (p. 49); and training in using and interpreting course evaluation data, including understanding the statistical value of these data and possible biasing influences (pp. 50-1).

It remains likely, however, that the debate on the validity and utility of the practice of student course evaluations will continue, despite these well-researched recommendations and others like them.   Rhetorical genre theory offers a way to understand why this might be the case, by recognizing that genres like course evaluations have pragmatic, ideological, and hegemonic implications for discourse communities. Unravelling these implications provides a fresh perspective on the practice, one that can illuminate the complex issues and continued controversy that surrounds it.

3. Rhetorical genre theory

3.1 Genres as sites of social action

Rhetorical genre theory is built on Miller's (1984) seminal observation that "genre must be centred not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish" (p. 24). Genre, in other words, is more than a set of formal features; it is a mediating framework for getting "a certain kind of work done" (Frow, 2006, p. 14). Genre mediates between a recurring social situation and those texts that "realise certain features of this situation, or which respond strategically to its demands" (Frow, 2006, p. 14). Significantly, therefore, rhetorical genre theory defines genres in terms of its users rather than in terms of the scholars who study it. In Devitt's (2004) words, "Studying genre is studying how people use language to make their way in the world" (p. 9).

As a result, rhetorical genre theorists have been primarily interested not in describing the surface features of discourse, but in explicating 'what discourse does.' A central question in this enterprise is "What is the relationship between social action and genre knowledge?" Schryer's (2000) often-cited definition of genre as "constellations of regulated, improvisational strategies triggered by the interaction between individual socialization, or 'habitus' . . . and an organization or 'field'" (p. 450) provides a useful way to unravel this question. Schryer's definition highlights the tension, that is, between genre's ability to enable agency for its users and its tendency

to encourage conformity to the values of an 'organization or field.' Genre knowledge influences action, in other words, as much as it is influenced by it.

3.2 Genres as sites of ideological and hegemonic action

As "sites of discursive agency" (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 60), genres are neither value-neutral nor meaning-neutral. Rather, they are sites of ideological agency, actively constructing value and meaning for strategic purposes. They project, to use Frow's (2006) terminology, a generically specific "world," which he defines as "a relatively bounded and schematic domain of meanings, values, and affects, accompanied by a set of instructions for handling them" (pp. 85-6). Within this generic world, meanings, values, and truth-effects are generated and communicated about texts which are not explicitly articulated in the texts themselves. Genres therefore operate as metacommunications about texts, by which background knowledges associated with particular text types are brought into play on particular texts: "genre is a framework for processing information and for allowing us to move between knowledge given directly in a text and other sets of knowledge that are relevant to understanding it" (p. 80). Thus, genre acts as a sort of 'silent partner' in mediating meaning, actively contributing to the shaping of meaning, but doing so at an implicit, meta level. A text type's surface regularities are, therefore, of interest to genre researchers only insomuch as they are "reflections of an underlying regularity" (Artemeva, 2006, p. 18). It is uncovering this underlying regularity – the genre's ideological stance – that concerns most genre scholars. They adopt, to use Miller's term, an ethnomethodological approach, seeking to "explicate the knowledge that practice creates" (p. 27).

The work of rhetorical genre scholars has been instrumental in contributing to an understanding of the ideological nature of genre. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), for example, point to the inherent epistemological commitments of academic genres: "Genres are intimately linked to a discipline's methodology, and they package information in ways that conform to a discipline's norms, values, and ideology" (p. 1). Devitt (2004) makes the point that genre reflects "what a group believes and how it views the world" (p. 59). Frow (2006) too takes up this point:

> . . . what we learn, in 'doing' genre . . . is the values we share or don't share
> with others and the means with which to challenge or defend them. Through
> the use of genres we learn who we are, and encounter the limits of our world.
> (p. 144)

It is through this encounter with "the limits of our world," that we come to recognize the role genre plays in sustaining and encouraging conformity to the dominant values, beliefs or practices within particular discourse communities. As Devitt (2004) states, "the potential for genres to enforce ideology is always present" (p. 158). She is quick to point out, however, that "the potential for genres to encourage creativity is [also] always present" (p. 158). Devitt is concerned, in her work on genre, to acknowledge the fact that genre acts both as a constraint and as a resource to discourse communities. What she fails to acknowledge, however, is that the existence of genre's socializing tendency also suggests a tendency in the opposite direction – namely, that genres can alienate those who do not conform to the dominant discourse of a particular group or community. She tantalizingly alludes to this when she states that "If genres help writers see what is

expected, they may also disguise the legitimacy of what is not expected" (p. 159). Here, Devitt obviously acknowledges the legitimacy of deviations from generic norms, but she fails to turn her attention to the 'deviants' themselves, and to the potential alienation they may experience within their discourse communities.

Whether and how genres contribute to the socialization or alienation of members of discourse communities are important questions for rhetorical genre research. Freedman and Medway (1994) list the kinds of critical questions genre researchers are increasingly becoming interested in:

How do some genres come to be valorized? In whose interest is such valorization? What kinds of social organization are put in place or kept in place by such valorization?
Who is excluded? What representations of the world are entailed? (p. 11)

This pilot study engages with some of the questions proposed by Freedman and Medway. It asks, for instance, "What representations of the world are projected by the Arts student course evaluation at the University of Waterloo?" And, "How does this representation relate to the received meaning of the instrument?" "How," in other words, "do the genre's users perceive the course evaluation, and how does this affect the way they behave as students, course instructors or chairs?" And finally, "Does the Arts course evaluation work to sustain institutional views and practices of teaching and learning?" "Does it socialize its users into these views and practices?" "Does it alienate some?"

4. Methods

As outlined earlier, what Bhatia (2008) terms "an interdiscursive approach" was taken to address the research questions outlined above. This involved a textual examination of the Arts course evaluation instrument itself, as well as a qualitative study of the genre's users.

A careful content analysis of the instrument was undertaken first, in order to make its content meaning "rhetorically visible and accessible to inquiry" (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 158). Specifically, this analysis sought to ascertain some of the ideological perspectives that inhere in the Arts course evaluation instrument, the view of teaching and learning it constructs and projects, and the expectations it sets up for both students and course instructors. A copy of the instrument is attached in Appendix I.

Turning from "text to context," the views of some of the students, course instructors and departmental chairs involved in this discourse practice in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo were sought next. Ethics clearance was obtained for this part of the study. Participants' views of the purposes and effectiveness of the Arts course evaluation, what it allows them to do as students and instructors, and how it intersects with their own views of teaching and learning were explored in order to tap into the received meaning of the Arts course evaluation form. These observations were tested through within-method and between-method triangulation, both of which are important validation strategies in qualitative research of this nature (Stake, 1995). Triangulation refers to the use of multiple approaches in qualitative research to increase confidence in research findings (Bryman, n.d.). Within-method triangulation involves

using a variety of techniques within a given method; between-method triangulation involves using different research methods, such as interviews and questionnaires, to investigate the research question.

Because the study was designed as pilot research, the student and faculty investigations were limited in scope. Data were collected from seven faculty members through interviews. Within-method triangulation was built into this part of the research design by ensuring that faculty participants at various stages of their careers represented a variety of disciplines. Four course instructors and three of their chairs from four different disciplines across Arts (two Humanities and two Social Sciences) participated in the study; five of these were tenured, one was newly tenured and one was a sessional instructor. The instructors were chosen partly because they were known to the researcher and partly because they had demonstrated some interest in their teaching.   The interviews were semi-structured and audio recorded. Transcripts of the audio were made and checked by participants.

For the student investigation, between-method triangulation was built into the research design by collecting data using questionnaires. Within-method triangulation was achieved by using multiple scales to mine particular research questions, and by recruiting students from a variety of disciplines across the institution.   Students from four different disciplines in five courses (representing approximately 200 students) were invited to participate in the study.   In total, thirty three students completed the questionnaire, which was delivered completely anonymously and online, using standardized questions.

Data collected from these sources were analyzed using grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory is an inductive methodology which, as Dick (2005) explains, is explicitly emergent:

> [Grounded theory] does not test a hypothesis. It sets out to find what theory accounts for the research situation as it is. In this respect it is like action research: the aim is to understand the research situation. The aim, as Glaser in particular states it, is to discover the theory implicit in the data.

Common themes and patterns across both sets of data were coded, resulting in the emergence of a number of conceptual categories. These categories were then mapped onto the specific research questions posed in the study in order to provide a theoretical explanation of the research situation. These themes and patterns are discussed in sections 5.2 – 5.5 below.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Textual analysis

The Arts course evaluation instrument opens by inviting students to "Rate the course." Strikingly, however, the majority of questions that follow pertain to the instructor, not to the course: seven of the ten listed Likert-scale factors are instructor-related, only three are course-related. The message here seems to be that a course's effectiveness is dependent in large measure on the instructor's effectiveness in certain identified areas. This in itself implies a strongly teacher-centred view of teaching and learning, a

message that is further reinforced by the particular instructor factors that appear in the instrument (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Instructor factors

Teaching Skills	Teaching Attitudes
• Presentation skills	• Attitude toward/interest in students
• Ability to maintain interest	• Objectivity and fairness in discussions and grading
• Organizational skills	• Availability outside class
• Global instructor rating ("Overall evaluation of instructor")	

Two main semantic categories emerged with respect to the instructor factors that form part of the Arts course evaluation instrument: those that deal with teaching skills, and those that deal with teaching attitudes. According to this instrument, therefore, instructor effectiveness is seen to be comprised of a mix of certain teaching skills and certain teaching attitudes. Of the seven listed factors, three of them pertained to teaching skills: presentation skills, ability to maintain interest, and organizational skills. These skills are clearly in keeping with a teacher-centred and, I would also argue, a transmission-oriented view of teaching and learning.

When doing content analysis of this sort, it is important, as May (2001) suggests, to consider not only what is present in the text, but also what is absent:

A critical-analytic stance would consider how the document represents the events which it describes and closes off potential contrary interpretations by the reader. This considers the ways in which a text attempts to stamp its authority upon the social world it describes. In so doing, the social world might be characterized by the exclusion of valuable information and the characterization of events and people in particular ways according to certain interests. (p. 195)

In fact, what is excluded or absent in this particular list of "teaching skills" is any recognition of an active role for students in the teaching and learning enterprise. So, for example, instead of "ability to engage students in course material," or "ability to help students learn," we have "presentation skills" and "ability to maintain student interest." In the Arts instrument, in other words, agency is attributed solely to the instructor, not to the student. What this posits is the expectation of a didactic role for the instructor and a passive one for the student.

This view of teaching and learning is somewhat reflected in the three teaching attitudes criteria as well, particularly with the "availability outside class" criterion. The wording of this particular factor assumes that student-instructor contact is strictly the instructor's responsibility, rather than one that is jointly held. Compare "availability

outside class" with a version that attributes agency to both instructor and student – for instance, "helpfulness to students seeking assistance." Contrasting these two versions of the same criterion emphasizes the teacher-centred assumptions inherent in the Arts course evaluation instrument.

In more general terms, however, the teaching attitude criteria speak to a certain demonstrable enthusiasm for teaching on the instructor's part. These criteria conjure an instructor who is demonstrably interested in students, concerned with being fair to them, and, of course, always available.

The final Likert-scale factor, the global instructor rating ("overall evaluation of the instructor") resists categorization, as it can pertain either to teaching skills or to teaching attitudes, to both, or to neither. Qualitative data from students are required to clarify what informs this rating. These data were captured from students who participated in the study, and are reported in section 5.4.1 below.

Based on this content analysis, therefore, what assertions can be made about the content meaning of the Arts course evaluation instrument? What "orienting frameworks, interpretive procedures, and sets of expectations" (Hanks, 1987; as cited in Artemeva, 2006, p. 15) are generated and communicated about teaching and learning through this instrument?

It seems fairly apparent that the orienting framework for good teaching projected by the instrument is very much in keeping with a teacher-centred and transmission-oriented view of teaching and learning. In this particular framework, the expectation for agency rests solely with the instructor – in other words, the instructor bears all of the responsibility for both teaching *and learning*, while the student adopts a passive role. Moreover, I would argue that the instrument projects a particular pedagogical persona as the 'norm' for good instructors. According to this instrument, 'good instructors' are good at presenting and organizing material, and are demonstrably enthusiastic about their teaching. This enthusiasm translates into a particular set of characteristics, including effectiveness at keeping students interested in the material; a demonstrable interest in students; a concern for objectivity and fairness; and, finally, the perception of being always available.

These "meanings, values, and truth-effects" (Frow, 2006, pp. 85-6) about teaching and learning represent, I argue, the dominant discourse about effective teaching and learning in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo. To use Schryer's (1993) terminology, this instrument captures "the set of commonsense values and practices embedded within the accepted way of doing things" (p. 210) in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo. If this instrument represents "the accepted way" or dominant discourse about teaching in the Faculty of Arts, how does this relate to the views of teaching and learning held by members of the discourse community? Can this genre be seen to be socializing its users into the pedagogical world projected by it? Or is there a mismatch between the dominant discourse and the views of members of the discourse community, including students, course instructors and chairs? We turn now "from text to context," in order to consider these questions and to examine specific institutional practice and culture as expressed by the students and faculty members who participated in the study.

5.2 Views of teaching and learning: Course instructors

As outlined in the Methods section, faculty members from four disciplines across Arts, involving tenured and non-tenured instructors and chairs, were interviewed in the study. A key objective of these interviews was to capture faculty members' views of teaching and learning. Interestingly, a recurring theme that emerged across all the interview data was the notion that "my courses don't work that way" (Transcript, Professor A, p. 4) when compared to the pedagogical world projected by the course evaluation instrument. So, for instance, according to the results of the content analysis undertaken in this study, the Arts course evaluation instrument projects a transmission-oriented view of teaching and learning, which I argue embodies the "accepted way of doing things" (Schryer, 1993, p. 210) in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo. In a transmission paradigm, disciplinary knowledge – content – is considered the primary teaching priority.

By contrast, however, all of the instructors interviewed co-referenced intellectual skills in addition to, and sometimes as a priority over disciplinary knowledge when they spoke about their teaching and learning priorities. Identified skills included critical thinking, as articulated by Professor B:

> If you're thinking of our goals, even the goals in the department or the university, we want critical thinking, we want students to engage and do their process of learning, learner-centred activities and all of this. It doesn't figure in here. (Transcript, Prof B, p. 5);

lifelong learning, as expressed by Professor A:

> I think that good teaching should impart students with "new knowledge," provoke them to question their assumptions, and inspire them to be lifelong learners. (Transcript, Prof A, p. 4);

and meta-learning (in other words, an awareness of what students do to understand something new), as suggested by Chair 2: "Part of teaching should be to get [students] to think about how they're learning; to think about how they learn" (Transcript, Chair 2, p. 20).

In addition to a transmission-orientation, the textual analysis of the Arts course evaluation instrument reveals a strongly teacher-centred view of teaching and learning. In this conception of teaching and learning, agency rests solely with the instructor, who bears all of the responsibility for teaching and learning, while the student adopts a passive role.

By contrast, there was a perception among the faculty participants in this study that, as Chair 2 expressed it, "This isn't a movie" (Transcript, Chair 2, p. 14). In other words, there was a shared understanding of teaching and learning as a "joint project," in which instructors actively create an environment for students to learn, and students actively participate in learning. In this conception of teaching and learning, agency is attributed both to the instructor and to the student. This notion of teaching and learning as a "joint project" is explicitly referenced by Professor D:

> Well I think that it's a joint project. That it's up to me to present an environment where students can learn and to be a resource for information, to give them some info but to stimulate their interest in actually finding the information

themselves, and applying the information, and synthesizing the information. If I apply it and synthesize it and just give it to them, it's not nearly as valuable. (Transcript, Prof D, p.8)

This is further captured in the comments of Chair 3, who reflected that "It [the Arts course evaluation] has nothing to do with students' responsibility at all. It doesn't reflect any participatory kinds of expectations" (Transcript, Chair 3, p.6). And, this is very colourfully captured in the comments of Professor C, who used the metaphor, "drink or not":

it's thought from some points of view, from some perspectives on teaching and learning, that it's the professor's job to motivate, through interest . . . that you're supposed to collect them along and bring them with you in terms of interest and energy and the enthusiasm and so on. So I don't think that I have a talent for that; maybe I even resist it philosophically. I'm not sure but I think I do resist it philosophically . . . that if it's not coming from them, I'm not really bought into the idea that it's up to me to go flat out and somehow . . . to be somebody I'm not so that they are motivated. My attitude is, ". . . I've lead you to water – drink or not." (Transcript, Prof C, pp. 10-11)

The incongruity between the pedagogical world constructed by the Arts course evaluation and the views expressed by members of its discourse community are clearly reflected in these excerpts. There is clear disparity in terms of the assumptions regarding student and instructor roles and the attribution of agency within these roles when compared to the meanings constructed by the Arts course evaluation. There is also, however, an interesting tension expressed in the final excerpt regarding the instructor's pedagogical identity when held up against the 'model' instructor pedagogical persona projected by the Arts instrument.

This tension expresses itself in the instructor's perception of having to be "somebody I'm not" in order to satisfy the criteria and expectations imposed by the Arts course evaluation. Clearly, Professor C's pedagogical persona does not align with the 'good instructor norm' projected by the Arts instrument. If this 'good instructor norm' is part of the "accepted way of doing things" in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo, is there evidence that this genre is working to "disguise the legitimacy" (Devitt, 2004, p. 159) of deviations from the ideological 'norm' it projects? Interview data collected from Professor C would suggest that it does. Professor C indicates, for instance, the he doesn't "have a talent for" the kind of demonstrable enthusiasm central to the 'good instructor norm' projected by the Arts instrument (Transcript, Prof C, pp. 10-11). Instead, his teaching strength lies in the careful design and construction of an environment in which students can learn, including creating all the support structures necessary to facilitate learning. To use his metaphor once again, "I've lead you to water; drink or not" (Transcript, Prof C, p. 11). His reflections on this metaphor are quite illuminating:

That's my philosophy of teaching. It's not very popular. I'm not supposed to say what I just said. I'm sitting here feeling a bit uncomfortable for saying what I just said to you. . . . I'm not completely unaware that other people have other

priorities in life. But at the same time if they have other priorities in life, they have other priorities in life. It's not my job. . . . Somehow I feel that I'm being very naughty saying these things. I'm being very naughty. (Transcript, Prof C, p. 11)

This excerpt reveals, on the one hand, Professor C's commitment to his own view of teaching and learning, which would suggest that this genre is not in fact working to socialize its users into the dominant discourse about teaching and learning projected by the Arts course evaluation. On the other hand, however, it also reveals a degree of alienation experienced by Professor C within his discourse community. He is not entirely "comfortable," that is, expressing a view that deviates from the dominant discourse about teaching and learning in his community and feels that somehow, despite an obvious commitment to teaching, he is being "naughty" in holding what could be described as an emergent 'other' view about teaching and learning in this community. This speaks to the hegemonic action of this discourse practice within this discourse community.

5.3 Hegemonic action: Course instructors

In other words, there is evidence that this genre is indeed working to enforce a particular institutionally-sanctioned ideology (Devitt, 2004, p. 158) about teaching and learning within its discourse community, which *can* work to "disguise the legitimacy" (Devitt, 2004, p. 159) of alternate views. Importantly, however, there is also substantial evidence, from the group of faculty members who participated in this study, of a rejection of the institutionally-sanctioned 'dominant view' of teaching and learning, in favour of an emergent 'other' view.   In the words of one faculty participant, "I'm not really bought into [that] idea" (Transcript, Prof C, p. 10). There is no assumption, for instance, of a strict transmission orientation and content focus in the way this group of instructors teach. As Chair 3 articulated, "You wouldn't in a class, or at least I wouldn't, present everything just in a lecture format" (Transcript, Chair 3, p. 9). Similarly, there is no expectation that students adopt a passive role in learning. Professor C, for instance, directed his efforts at course improvement towards increasing agency for students rather than decreasing it: "It's going to be [a] better [course] because it's going to have more practical, active kinds of learning" (Transcript, Prof C, p. 13).

This suggests that despite its tendency to "enforce [a particular] ideology" (Devitt, 2004, p. 158) about teaching and learning, this genre is not, in practice, working to stifle the adoption of alternate pedagogical approaches, although it may throw their legitimacy into question, as witnessed by Professor C's obvious discomfort with expressing an emergent 'other' view. As Devitt (2004) suggests, "the potential for genres to encourage creativity is always present" alongside their potential "to enforce ideology" (p. 158). It seems clear, therefore, that while this genre is not in practice working to stifle pedagogical creativity, it does, for some instructors who adopt what can be described as non-dominant pedagogies, contribute to a sense of alienation within their discourse communities.

Having established that this group of the genre's users resist, in large measure, the dominant discourse about teaching and learning in the Faculty of Arts, we now turn our attention to another group of the genre's users – students. What effect can this

genre be seen to have on students' views of teaching and learning? Do they subscribe to what I'm calling the 'dominant discourse' or is there an emergent sense here too of other legitimate ways of understanding teaching and learning?

5.4 Views of teaching and learning: Students

Two hundred students from five 300- and 400-level courses representing four disciplines across the Faculty of Arts were invited to participate in the study by completing an anonymous, online questionnaire. Third and fourth year students were selected because of their familiarity with the course evaluation instrument. Thirty three students completed the questionnaire in total.   (A copy of the questionnaire is attached in Appendix 2.) Themes which spoke to whether or not students subscribe to the dominant discourse about teaching and learning as sedimentized in the Arts course evaluation emerged from two questions in particular: firstly, from a question that asked students what factors they consider when they assign an "Overall evaluation of the instructor" rating; and secondly, from a question that asked them to describe effective teaching and learning. My primary concern in examining these data was to try to determine whether students are being "cued" by the Arts instrument to adopt the dominant discourse about teaching and learning, as suggested by one course instructor:

> respondents are being cued to take other things into account that aren't learning things . . . there's a bit of a definitional effect, so that the definition of effective teaching partly becomes what these ratings are about. (Transcript, Prof C, p. 12)

Do students, in other words, subscribe to the definition of 'good teaching' constructed by the Arts course evaluation, as suggested by this very interesting comment made by one student:

> I agree with this view [of teaching and learning]. The only courses that managed to bring me on campus at 8:30 on Monday had interest-inducing instructors. (Anonymous student questionnaire response)

Or do they have a sense of other legitimate ways of understanding teaching and learning as articulated by the course instructors I spoke to? We'll explore these questions in the sections below.

5.4.1   Q: What factors do you consider when you assign an "Overall evaluation of the instructor" score?

Interestingly, fifteen of the thirty three respondents (45%) saw this rating as an aggregation of previous instructor factors, which clearly suggests adherence to the dominant discourse about teaching and learning in the Faculty of Arts. Eight students (24%) cited factors such as "ability to create interest," "enjoyment," and "rhetorical skills" which, I would suggest, invokes the 'good instructor norm' projected by the Arts instrument. Almost 70% of respondents, therefore, can be seen to be aligned with the dominant teaching and learning paradigm in the Faculty of Arts (see Table 3).

Table 3 – Overall evaluation of the instructor
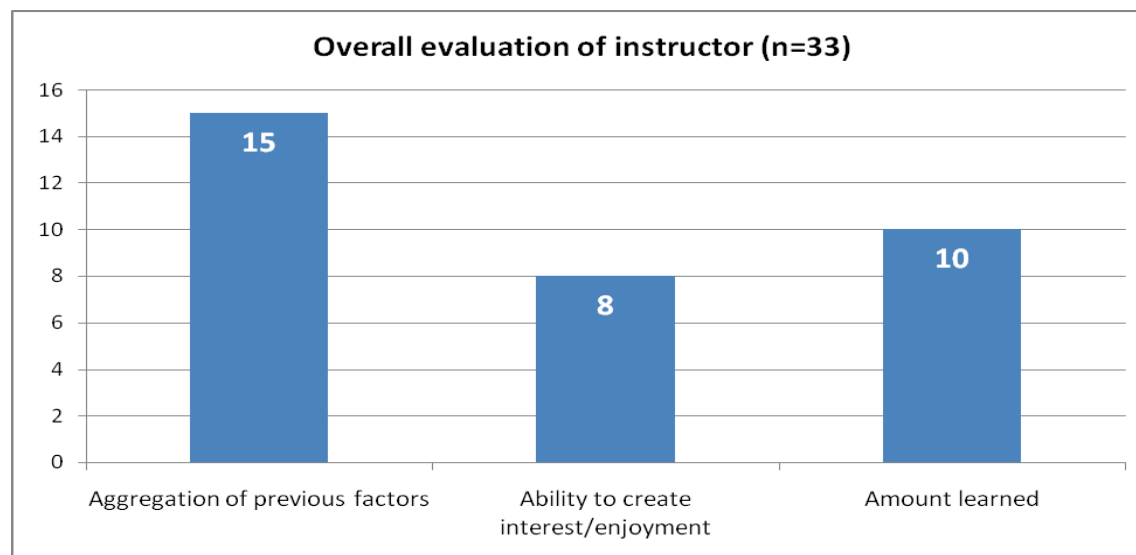
However, 10 of the thirty three students (30%) explicitly stated that they consider the amount they've learned when they assign a global instructor score. In the words of one student, "I consider how much I think *I learned* [italics mine] and can take away from [the course]" (Anonymous student questionnaire response). This group of students recognize, in other words, the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning, wherein the expectation for agency rests both with the instructor (to create an environment for students to learn) *and* with the student (to learn).

5.4.2   Q: How would you describe effective teaching and learning?
Only twenty-nine students answered this question, and the quality of the responses were the most uneven in the questionnaire – students seemed to have a lot of difficulty articulating a coherent conception of teaching and learning. Several useful data did, however, emerge for the purposes of this study (see Table 4).

Table 4 – Effective Teaching and Learning (Students)
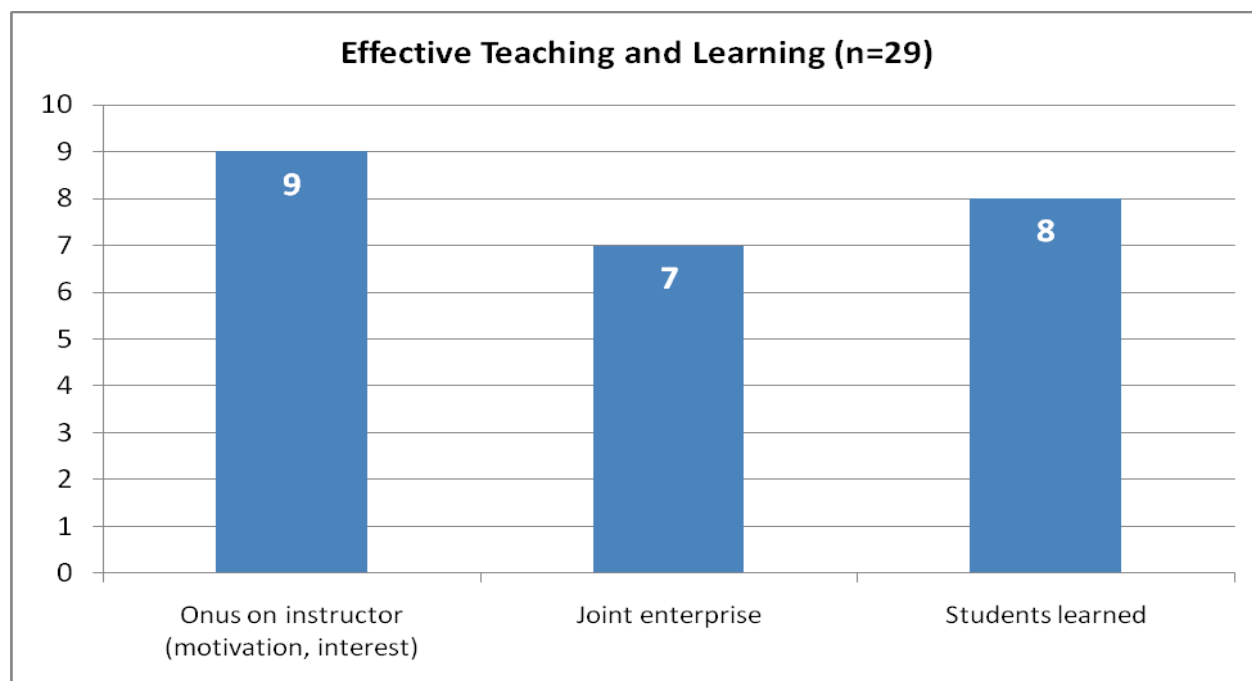
Of the twenty-nine respondents, nine (31%) felt that effective teaching required the instructor to engage students' motivation, interest and enjoyment. As one student expressed it, "if professors are capable of keeping lectures interesting, students attend class more often. If students attend more class, they are more likely to retain more information" (Anonymous student questionnaire response). This comment indicates adherence to the dominant teaching and learning paradigm in Arts on two fronts: first, there is an acceptance of the student/instructor roles assumed by the Arts instrument; and secondly, there is an acceptance of the 'good instructor norm' projected by the instrument. This student, in other words, feels that instructors are responsible for student attendance and that effective instructors are able to create, in their students, interest in the material being studied. The agency in both cases belongs all to the instructor.

However, a not dissimilar number of students – seven of the twenty-nine respondents (24%) – regarded teaching and learning to be a joint enterprise; in the words of one student, "The professor and student must work together to create an effective teaching and learning environment, [*sic*] it cannot be all placed on one or the other" (Anonymous student questionnaire response). Moreover, eight of the twenty-nine respondents (28%) explicitly referenced student learning in their response to this question. As one student suggested, effective teaching and learning "should engage the students and provide them with tools that they are able to use to learn effectively" (Anonymous student questionnaire response). These data suggest an emerging understanding of the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning among this group of the genre's users.

5.5 Hegemonic action: Students

Although care must be taken in generalizing these data due to sample size, the results suggest that while this genre may in fact be cueing some students to adopt the dominant discourse about teaching and learning, this kind of socialization is by no means global. There clearly also exists, among some students, an emergent notion of another legitimate way of understanding teaching and learning. According to these data, however, this latter group remains in the minority.   There seems to be considerable acceptance by students of the underlying assumptions regarding student and instructor roles and the attribution of agency within these roles inherent in the Arts instrument, as indicated in section 5.4.1. These assumptions are, of course, at odds with those held by the instructors who participated in this study, as the following instructor comment illustrates:

> I know that I'm not very interesting. But to some degree I'm not going to do that much to increase the interestingness. I'm going to make it a better course, and that's going to be more interesting. How else can I put that? It's going to be better because it's going to have more practical, active kinds of learning. . . (Transcript, Prof C, p. 13)

What this disparity between student and instructor views of their respective pedagogical roles suggests, is the presence of this genre as a 'silent partner' in the classroom, actively shaping the pedagogical "meanings, values, and truth-effects" (Frow, 2006, pp. 85-6) received by some members of its discourse community *and not others*. I argue that the disparity observed between the pedagogical world constructed by the Arts course evaluation (and adopted by some students) and the pedagogical views expressed by the instructors who participated in this study is a reflection of the fact that some instructors have adopted a new paradigm of teaching and learning, which posits *the student*, *not the teacher*, as the centre of teaching and learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). This would account for the discrepancy between the Arts course evaluation's view of teaching and learning, which reflects an older, teacher-centred paradigm, and the view expressed by the instructors I spoke to, who were operating under the assumptions of a newer paradigm. Student data collected in this study suggest that many students are still operating under the assumptions of the older paradigm.

5.6 Effects: Hegemonic power

What, then, are the effects of these two paradigms, very much at odds with one another, co-existing in this discourse community? I would suggest that the disparity in "meanings, values, and truth-effects" (Frow, 2006, pp. 85-6) about teaching and learning conjured on the one hand by the Arts course evaluation (and adopted by some students), and practiced on the other by some course instructors, may in fact invite poor evaluations. The threat of poor evaluations remained an undercurrent in most of the faculty interviews conducted. Two responses to this threat were observed – some instructors responded by 'digging in their heels' and remaining committed to their pedagogy despite the threat of poor evaluations, as articulated by Professor A:

> If I feel that I am delivering the course in a proper manner and the students are to my mind succeeding – grasping the material and mastering it, I don't care what

>they think of me – it's not my job to be popular and I tell them that.
>(Transcript, Prof A, p. 3)

Some however, perceived the course evaluation to be a threat to instructor pedagogical autonomy:

>So I have to make a judgment about how far are we going to take [a particular technical topic in the course]. . . . Now it is extremely pertinent to course evaluation because I'm pretty convinced the more technical I get, the lower my course ratings go. So at the same time I'm making a judgment about what they really should know, the course evaluation and its consequences threaten to corrupt me, and that's the source of my anger – that my organization has placed me in this position of perhaps selling out. (Transcript, Prof C, p. 2)

This sense of the course evaluation potentially acting as a threat to instructor pedagogical autonomy is also expressed by Professor A:

>For instance, in one of my classes, one of my objectives is to make students miserable – I want them to question; I want them to be uncomfortable. I don't want them to feel comfortable; I don't want them to feel good about the way they think about things. I want them to question those things, and in the process you might upset some students. That might cause them to be unsatisfied with the product they're getting out of the course, if you're going to have them question their assumptions. I wouldn't want some form of student censorship in place that controls what gets taught and doesn't get taught or how it gets taught. (Transcript, Prof A, p. 4)

The hegemonic language used in these excerpts is quite revealing. "Selling out" refers to the sacrificing of personal integrity in order to gain acceptability in the mainstream, or for other personal gain. In the case of Professor C, it refers to the sacrificing of pedagogical integrity in order to court student favour, which is perceived to be a primary institutional objective: "I think we're supposed to entertain students to get high ratings on *Macleans*" (Transcript, Prof C, p. 11). Here, the Arts instrument is perceived to be acting hegemonically to enforce a particular pedagogy (and a particular pedagogical persona) in order to obtain a particular institutional objective: high ratings in *Macleans*. Not only, therefore, can this genre be seen to be acting as a 'silent partner' in mediating pedagogical meaning for students (as outlined in 5.5 above), but it can also be seen here to be acting as a 'silent partner' for instructors, seeking to impose institutionally-sanctioned pedagogies on them and ultimately to influence their pedagogical decisions. This, of course, threatens the pedagogical autonomy of the instructor.

In a similar vein, the language of "student censorship" in the second excerpt carries hegemonic implications too. "Censorship" suggests the enforcing of limitations by one group on another, and the suppression of freedom by the group being censored. In this case, the instructor expresses a concern about his pedagogical autonomy being curtailed by student dissatisfaction with his legitimate pedagogical objectives. The fear here is that student satisfaction becomes the primary institutional objective, trumping his legitimate pedagogical objectives. The genre can be seen in this case too as potentially

possessing agency – a sort of surrogate institutional agency – which seeks to influence the instructor's pedagogical decisions and acts as a 'silent partner' to the instructor.

The Arts course evaluation can be seen, therefore, to have considerable hegemonic power within its discourse community, as expressed by the faculty participant quoted at the outset of this paper:

> It has power. It has tremendous power. I think some people may be underestimating that power. It has tremendous power. Way too much power. So, speaking for myself, . . . I have tenure, so I can survive it, but not without tremendous resentment and concern. It's not just resentment. It's the unhealthyness, the corrupting influence on me and others that is the bigger deal. (Transcript, Prof C, p. 3)

This power seems to be most acutely felt by two distinct groups: those whose pedagogical commitments and persona, like Professor C, are at odds with the dominant paradigm; and the institutionally powerless. In the above excerpt, Professor C refers to "having tenure" and therefore being able to "survive" the threat of poor evaluations. He is able, in other words, to hold onto his pedagogical integrity because of the protection of tenure. The stakes are slightly higher for untenured instructors, however, who, according to the perceptions of one instructor, "have a lot more to lose" (Transcript, Prof D, p. 14) from poor evaluations, and therefore remain more exposed to the hegemonic action of the instrument:

> The sessional and untenured profs – of which I am one – may be working harder to make their course better so that they get better evaluations; or they may be doing whatever it takes to get good evaluations, which might include arbitrarily enhancing grades, or something like that. I don't know what they're doing; I just know what I'm doing which is just working harder and harder to make the course better. (Transcript, Prof D, p. 14).

Here again, this genre can be seen to be acting as a 'silent partner' to the instructor, influencing her pedagogical decisions both positively (as in making course improvements), and potentially also negatively (as in the arbitrary enhancement of grades).

This genre clearly has real hegemonic tendencies for members of its discourse community. And, because it "represents the values of certain groups within the . . . community and not others" (Schryer, 1993, p. 230), it contributes to a sense of alienation for those whose values and commitments are not represented and who are placed in the position of having to resist those tendencies.

6.0 Implications

Before the implications of this research can be discussed, the issue of its scope and generalizability must be addressed. This study was conducted as pilot case study research, with a relatively small group of participants. Care must therefore be taken in generalizing the results. However, some interesting implications have emerged from the study, which would need to be verified by a larger-scale study.

First of all, it should be made clear that I am not suggesting that the practice of student course evaluation be abandoned because of its hegemonic tendencies.

Rather, by making both the inherent ideology and the hegemonic action of the Arts course evaluation "rhetorically visible and accessible to inquiry" (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 158), it is my hope that administrators will be able to make more informed decisions in designing such instruments in the future. A central question arising out of this study concerns whether the "meanings, values, and truth-effects" (Frow, 2006, pp. 85-6) about teaching and learning projected by the Arts course evaluation are aligned with institutional teaching and learning priorities at the University of Waterloo. Is the University committed to a teaching-centred and transmission-oriented pedagogy? Is disciplinary knowledge the only instructional priority? If not, senior administrators need to be aware that they are potentially exposing their instructors to the risk of poor evaluations.

More broadly, however, it is hoped that this study will help senior administrators first of all become aware of their own institutional pedagogical priorities, and secondly ensure that these priorities are appropriately reflected in their own course evaluation instruments.

In the case of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo, the research undertaken in this study indicates that there is a paradigm shift happening within this community, where the emerging ideas of a new paradigm – teaching and learning as a joint enterprise – are being forced into the textual infrastructure of the dominant teacher-centred paradigm. As a result of this 'new wine in old wineskins' situation, instructors whose pedagogical commitments and persona are not aligned with the dominant paradigm are threatened by the hegemonic tendencies of the discourse practices of that paradigm, and are at greater risk for receiving poor evaluations. For these people, as well as for the institutionally powerless, the course evaluation can become a 'silent partner' with real agency, seeking to inform the instructor's pedagogy, both positively and negatively. This obviously threatens instructor autonomy, and potentially explains why questions concerning the legitimacy of this practice are "continually recycled through the literature," with apparently "little hope for resolution" (Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008, p. 9).

7.0 Future research opportunities

As this was a pilot study, the above implications must remain tentative. There is scope, however, for a more in-depth and targeted study of the effect of course evaluations on instructors who receive poor ratings, and on the institutionally powerless, across several institutions. It would also be useful to study other academic genres more broadly, to determine whether they too contribute to the dominant teaching and learning paradigm observed in the course evaluation instrument. Teaching Award nominations would be an ideal candidate for a follow-up study of this nature.

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Bio

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Appendix I

Arts Course Questionnaire
University of Waterloo

Do not MARK here

- USE NO. 2 PENCIL ONLY.
- DO NOT USE PEN.
- FILL CIRCLE COMPLETELY WITH DARK MARK.

- ERASE CLEANLY.
- MAKE NO STRAY MARKS.
- DO NOT FOLD FORM.
- MARKING EXAMPLES:

CORRECT ●
INCORRECT ⊙⊗⊙⊙

Results of this Questionnaire will be available to the course instructor only after final marks have been reported to the Office of the Registrar.

DATE:	INSTRUCTOR:	COURSE:	SECTION:

	Rate the COURSE with respect to...	Excellent	Good	Satis-factory	Fair	Poor
1.	the presentation of course material	O	O	O	O	O
2.	ability to maintain student interest	O	O	O	O	O
3.	course organization and planning	O	O	O	O	O
4.	instructor's attitude toward and interest in students	O	O	O	O	O
5.	objectivity and fairness in discussions and grading	O	O	O	O	O
6.	value of readings and assigned work	O	O	O	O	O
7.	instructor's availability outside of class	O	O	O	O	O
8.	overall evaluation of the instructor	O	O	O	O	O
9.	overall evaluation of the course	O	O	O	O	O
		Too High		About Right		Too Low
10.	workload demands upon the student	O	O	O	O	O
	Department or Instructor Supplied Questions:					
11.		O	O	O	O	O
12.		O	O	O	O	O
13.		O	O	O	O	O
14.		O	O	O	O	O
15.		O	O	O	O	O
16.		O	O	O	O	O
17.		O	O	O	O	O
18.		O	O	O	O	O
19.		O	O	O	O	O
20.		O	O	O	O	O

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Written Comments on Opposite Side

Appendix 2: Student Questionnaire

Student perceptions about the Arts course evaluation at UW

This questionnaire seeks your opinion about the course evaluation form used in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo. Before you answer the questions, please take a moment to review the Arts course evaluation form available here. (Insert link to pdf version of evaluation form.)

Part one – Background Information
1) Please list your majors and minors.
 (Free text)

2) How many years of university education have you had? (Include study at another university, but not at a college or trade school.)
Multiple choice:
- Less than 1 year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5+ years

3) Approximately how many Faculty of Arts course evaluation forms have you completed?
(Multiple choice)
- None
- 1 – 5
- 5 -10
- 10 – 15
- Over 15

Part two –Purposes of the Arts course evaluation
1. What, in your opinion, are the purposes of the Arts course evaluation?
(free text)

    a. Is it effective in achieving these purposes?
       ○Yes   ○No

    b. What purposes does it achieve? What purposes does it not achieve?

    c. Do you feel that the Arts course evaluation serves student needs?
       ○Yes   ○No
       Why or why not?

---

    d. How do you believe the data from the Arts course evaluation is used?

    e. What factors do you consider when you assign an "overall evaluation of the instructor" score? (See question no. 8 in the Arts course evaluation form.)

2. In your experience, is the Arts course evaluation effective for all types of courses in Arts? (You may want to think about this course in particular when answering this question)
    ○Yes   ○No

    a. If you answered "yes" above, please explain why.

    b. If you answered "no" above, what types of courses does it evaluate inadequately? Why do you think it is ineffective for these types of courses?

3. Look over the course evaluation questionnaire again. Does it reflect a particular view of teaching and learning? Please explain. (free text)

    a. If you answered "yes" above, please explain whether you agree with this view.

4. How would *you* describe effective teaching and learning?

Part three – Use of the Arts course evaluation

    1. How often do you complete the Arts course evaluation at the end of a course? Always ... Usually...Sometimes....Never

        a. If you answered in the affirmative...why do you complete it? What does it enable you to do?

        b. If you answered in the negative ... why do you choose NOT to fill it in?

    2. Could the course evaluation questionnaire be improved in your opinion?
        a. If so, how?

Appendix 3: Faculty Interview Questions

1. Are you tenured/non-tenured?

2. How many years have you been teaching in higher education?

3. What, in your opinion, are the purposes of the Arts course evaluation?

4. Is it effective in achieving these purposes? What purposes does it achieve? What purposes does it not achieve?

5. Is the Arts course evaluation effective for all types of courses in Arts?
   Why or why not? (If not: what types of courses/teaching and learning contexts does it evaluate inadequately? Why do you think it is ineffective for these types of courses?)

6. In your view, what do you think students are assessing when they answer the instructor global rating question in the course evaluation instrument (i.e., "Overall evaluation of the instructor")?

7. Look over the course evaluation questionnaire. Do you think it reflects a particular view of teaching and learning? If so, please explain.

   • Do you agree with this view?

8. How would you describe effective teaching and learning?

9. Does the questionnaire have any impact on teaching effectiveness? On student learning?

10. Does the questionnaire have any effect on how you teach? If so how?

11. Could the course evaluation questionnaire be improved in your opinion?

- If so, how?