

https://dspace.org/

Writing pedagogies and practices in English and natural science classes at grade 8 level.

Piccolo, Adele

2009-02-11T09:46:27Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/6045

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Writing Pedagogies and Practices in English and Natural Science Classes at Grade 8 Level

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
in English Language Education

By
Adele Piccolo

October 2007

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com

Table of Contents

CHAPTER OUTLINE……..ii- v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS…… vi
DECLARATION……vii
ABSTRACT……viii-ix
LIST OF FIGURES……x-xi

1. RESEARCH AIMS AND RATIONALE

1.1 INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH AIMS…….....1
1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH……..2
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS……6
1.4 CHAPTER OUTLINES……7

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION……10
2.2 WRITING PEDAGOGY: DIFFERENT APPROCHES……10
2.2.1 The Process approach to writing…….....11
2.2.2 The Genre approach to writing……..14
2.2.3 A synthesis combining the Process and Genre approach……17
2.3 WRITING IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT……..18
2.3.1 The National Curriculum: English…….....18
2.3.2 The National Curriculum: Natural Science……..20
2.4 SOCIOCULTURAL THEORIES OF MEDIATION……..23
2.4.1 Human and cognitive activity is always and everywhere mediated……23
2.4.2 Mediation develops through internalisation of socially constructed activity……26
2.4.3 Instruction, development, and assessment are inseparable processes dialectically unified by the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)……27

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3. 1 A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION……30
3. 2 A CASE STUDY……..30
3.3 THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE……..31
3.4 A MULTI-METHOD DATA COLLECTION……..32
a. Classroom Observation……32
b. Collection of artefacts and documents……..33
c. Interviews with the teachers…….....33
3. 5 RESEARCH RELATIONSHIP……34
3.6 ANALYSING THE DATA……....35

4. WRITING IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION……38
4.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIFTEEN ENGLISH LESSONS OBSERVED: WRITING PURPOSES AND WRITING PEDAGOGIES……38
4.3 'THICK DESCRIPTIONS' OF FIVE ENGLISH CLASSES……..45
4. 3.1 A brief description of the classrooms……..45
4. 3.2 Lesson 1: Teacher A
Topic: Introduction to CD Review…….....46
4. 3.3 Lesson 2: Teacher A
Topic: Follow up of the CD review……52
4. 3.4 Lesson 3: Teacher A
Topic: Third lesson of the CD review……54
4.3.5 Lesson 4: Teacher A
Topic: Final lesson of the CD review……..54
4.3.6 Lesson 1: Teacher B
Topic: Introduction to writing a magazine feature article 59
4.4 DISCUSSION OF THE 'THICK DESCRIPTIONS'……..61
4. 4.1 Developing learners' understanding and attention to text as

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com

specific genres……..62
4.4.2 A focus on writing as a process……67
4. 5 Sociocultural theory of mind and mental development…..……..70
4.5.1 Writing pedagogy as a socially constructed mediated activity within an historical context……...70
4.5.2 Mediation develops through internalisation of socially constructed activities in the classroom ……..73
4.5.3 Instruction, development, and assessment are inseparable processes dialectically unified by the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)……...75

5. WRITING IN THE NATURAL SCIENCE CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION……77
5.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE NATURAL SCIENCE LESSONS OBSERVED: WRITING PURPOSES AND WRITING PEDAGOGIES……77
5.3 'THICK DESCRIPTION' OF TWO NATURAL SCIENCE LESSONS OBSERVED……..87
5.3.1 Lesson 1: Teacher A
Topic: The properties of sulphur and iron filings……89
5.3.2 Lesson 2 Teacher B
Topic: Preparation for making models of molecules……....94
5.4 DISCUSSION OF THE 'THICK DESCRIPTIONS' OF THE NATURAL SCIENCE LESSONS……..99
5.4.1 The process involved in developing the learners' understanding in the expected genres……100
5.4.2 Mediation in the Natural Science classes……..103
5.4.3 Mediation in an historical context……103
a) Artefacts/texts as forms of mediation which develop learners' cognition……104
b) Use of speech/talk……..106

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com

c) Peer collaboration……107
5.4.4 Mediation and Internalisation……108
5.4.5 Instruction, development, and assessment are inseparable processes dialectically unified by the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)……..108

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION……111
6.2 DIFFERENCES AND CONVERGENCES……111
6.3 WRITING PEDAGOGY IN ENGLISH AND NATURAL SCIENCE CLASSES…… ……..111
6.3.1 Writing pedagogy in the English classes……112
6.3.2 Writing pedagogy in the Natural Science classes……113
6.4 IMPROVING WRITING PEDAGOGY IN THE ENGLISH AND NATURAL SCIENCE CLASSES AT THE SCHOOL……113
6.4.1 The role of peer collaboration……..114
6.4.2 The need for explicit teaching of writing in the Natural Science classes……..116
6.4.3 Extension for brighter or bored pupils……116
6.5 THE WAY FORWARD……116
6.6 CONCLUSION……..117

7. REFERENCES……119

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com

Acknowledgements

I owe my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Professor Pippa Stein, who gave me the opportunity embark on this wonderful journey and provided me with untold support and guidance.

My lecturers during my Masters course: Yvonne Reed, Pippa Stein, Hillary Janks, Patricia Watson-Shariff, Leila Kajee and Carolyn Mc Kinney, who have broadened my understanding of teaching literacy to children. I too would like to thank the readers of my Masters proposal, Dr. Stacey and Ms. Belinda Mendelowitz.

It is with great thanks to all at Sacred Heart College who inspired me and supported me throughout my studies, particularly to Colin who gave me the time and space to explore literacy. I am indebted to Flick, who has been a wonderful mentor and who has taught me so much about teaching. My Junior High colleagues who partook in my study, those who gave me technical support and those who were there for me every step of the way, I thank you. I could not have done this task without the learners who inspired me, I thank the learners who I taught and those I observed for teaching me so much about how we learn. A special thanks to Brenda who gave me advice and helped me throughout my studies.

I owe my deepest thanks to my family; Rob, Stef, Fay, Gabi, Thea, Vic, Claudia, Len and Fabio for their understanding and encouragement throughout my studies.

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com

Declaration

I declare that this research paper is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters in English Language Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Adele Piccolo

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com

Abstract

The development of learner's writing skills is a central aim of education. Writing is the core modality through which school success is measured. To gain an insight into this essential skill and mode of communication, I chose to explore the current practices and pedagogies around writing at the school where I teach. Through this research, I hoped to raise awareness of writing pedagogy and improve the learners' the writing experiences.

This research investigates, at the macro and micro level, the pedagogical practices around writing in two learning areas: English and Natural Science, at grade 8 level. It explores the various genres of written text learners are expected to produce, the processes involved in producing written texts and how these processes engage with the National Curriculum and policy documents. At a more micro level, it examines the institutional culture of the school, the school subject departments, and the actual classroom practices in which writing plays a central role. The research adopts a qualitative approach, drawing on ethnographic style methods including classroom observation, the collection of artefacts and field notes, and interviews with the teachers concerned.

The findings of this study reveal that writing cannot be analysed as separate or discrete from the many influences, both macro and micro, which shape it. Writing needs to be understood as part of a complex interwoven system an 'eco-system' which is dependent on the broader policy framework, the individual school's and subject department's teaching and learning policies and practices, and individual teacher's role in mediating writing. The findings show that the purposes and practices around writing differ in English and Natural Science, as the discourses, modes and genres required are different. The English classes focus on teaching writing as a skill, through a synthesis of Process and Genre approaches. The focus in the Natural Science classes is on 'content' – experiments and activities which teach 'scientific content' – and not primarily on teaching writing skills. In both classes, teacher and peer mediation is central to the success of writing

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com

pedagogy. However, these forms of mediation could be improved in my school to enable better writing production from learners.

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com

List of Figures

Figure 1: Model article to unpack the generic features of feature article writing……..40
Figure 2: Model article used by the teacher……..41
Figure 3: Oswald Mtshali's 'Portrait of a loaf of bread'……..43
Figure 4: A wall display of articles the learners brought to class……46
Figure 5: The front area of the classroom……..46
Figure 6: Model CD reviews provided by the teacher……47
Figure 7: Notes on the blackboard describing the generic layout of a CD Review……49
Figure 8: Notes on the blackboard……50
Figure 9: Notes on the blackboard……50
Figure 10: Notes on the board concerning layout of the review……51
Figure 11: Blackboard notes: A check list of features to include……55
Figure 12: A learner's CD review……56
Figure 13: A CD review produced by a learner……57
Figure 14: A third CD review produced by a learner……58
Figure 15: A feature article designed and written by one of the learners……..61
Figure 16: The requirements needed to produce a table, written up on the blackboard by the teacher……78
Figure 17: An example of a learner's table with corrections……79
Figure 18: Blackboard notes written up by the teacher using signs and symbols……79- 80
Figure 19: Blackboard notes written up by the teacher……80
Figure 20: A page from the workbook……82
Figure 21: Answers written in the workbook……..84
Figure 22: An example of a learner's notes showing multimodal communication……86
Figure 23: Basic layout of the Science classes……88
Figure 24: Task requirements in workbook……91

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com

Figure 25: The method the learners had to follow to conduct the experiment and the table in the workbook which the learners had to fill in…….92
Figure 26: Blackboard writing - a mixture of language symbols and formulae….95
Figure 27: Blackboard writing - a list of choices to make molecules……..95
Figure 28: A model written up on the board by the teachers on the board……...96
Figure 29: Blackboard writing with list of criteria for the presentation……97
Figure 30: Blackboard writing of formula……98
Figure 31: A learner's notes……..99

PDF Creator - PDF4Free v2.0 http://www.pdf4free.com