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An exploration of grade 5 learners' writing development

Maluleke, Sydney Fetsie

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Abstract

This thesis examines the writing development of Grade 5 learners who participated in two writing interventions, The Mobile Literacies Project and The Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategies (GPLMS), which were conducted at the learners' school in 2013. The learners, attending school at Mayeke Primary in Orange Farm, a predominantly black township in the South of Johannesburg, composed texts in the two projects using different tools. In the Mobile Literacies Project, the texts were produced using a digital tool, an iPod Touch, and the writing was done collaboratively: in pairs; whereas in the GPLMS writing was print-based: using pen and paper, in which the learners worked individually. In addition, writing in the latter project was aligned with the curriculum of Grade 5 English as a First Additional Language. Using qualitative methods, different sets of data were collected to gain an in-depth understanding of learners' writing development in the two projects. Firstly, texts collected from the iPod Touch (for the Mobile Literacies Project) and the learners' Grade 5 English exercise books (for GPLMS) were analysed to gain an understanding of how the learners' writing development was enabled or constrained within the two projects. This analysis was done in conjunction with lesson observations, for the Mobile Literacies Project, and lesson plans for the GPLMS, which provided a picture of the pedagogy employed by the teachers to facilitate the learners' writing and their writing development. Secondly, interviews were conducted with different staff members and learners. An analysis of interviews conducted with two sets of teachers: The Mobile Literacies teacher, and a Grade 5 English teacher who taught in GPLMS, as well as an Intermediate Phase (Grade 4-6) Language HOD and a GPLMS coach, was done to find out how they conceptualise writing development and how the projects enabled or constrained the learners' writing development. Lastly, an analysis of interviews was conducted with 24 learners split into four focus groups of six learners. This was done to find out how the learners conceptualise writing development and how their own writing development was enabled or constrained by the projects. The analysis of the learners' writing development in the Mobile Literacies Project shows that the learners were allowed opportunities to write in relation to a context which helped them to develop a sense of ownership in their writing. Therefore, the writing done in this project was more learner-centred, encouraging the use of their voices for writing. In the GPLMS project the writing activities were curriculum and teacher-centred. This culminated in writing that focused on accuracy without reflecting any personal style to enhance a more meaningful

writing purpose. Within both projects the learners recognise spelling mastery as a sign of writing development.