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From silence to voice: exploring the affordances of a multimodal approach to creative writing and its assessment in a writing group of grade 8 English First Additional Language learners

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2018

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27174

Beneke, Liesel (2018) From silence to voice: exploring the affordances of a multimodal approach to creative writing and its assessment in a writing group of grade 8 English First Additional Language learners, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/27174>

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ABSTRACT

Considerable research evidence points to the teaching and learning of writing in South African English First Additional Language (FAL) classrooms being largely reproductive, perhaps partly as a result of creativity being insufficiently conceptualized in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Languages. For this study, Vygotsky's work on creativity and the work of numerous scholars in the field of multimodality were drawn on for devising an extracurricular writing intervention with a group of fifteen grade 8 FAL learners. For two school terms I met with the group for a weekly two- hour extra- curricular creative writing session during which texts in a range of genres were produced in response to a range of stimuli.

Vygotsky's theory of the imagination and Bakhtin's conceptualization of voice together with Canagarajah's heuristic for voice analysis were used to devise criteria for the analysis and assessment of creativity in these texts and to compare them with those in the learners' classroom writing portfolios. Central to these criteria are voice, versatility and language play. Analysis of the multimodal and sometimes bi- or multilingual texts that learners produced demonstrate that the criteria can be used productively to generate a descriptive overview of learners' imaginative work and that they can be used together with more traditional criteria such as those recommended by CAPS. The criteria were also used to develop a rubric that could be used to assess learn writing. Other findings from the analysis indicate that although some learners benefitted from this intervention more than others, the use of multimodal stimuli, especially visual images in digital form, and popular television shows, enabled all of them to establish links to their out-of-school identities and linguistic resources, and to produce writing with rich voice. Rich voice, in accordance with the theories of Bakhtin, is voice that shows evidence of dialogical overtones (1986, p.92).

I argue that an imaginative writing ecology fosters a sense of ownership, collaboration, as well as engagement in writing tasks, giving learners a safe space in which they can take risks in their writing and explore language playfully. I also argue that it is possible for teachers to

find ‘space’ within the CAPS curriculum to implement writing pedagogies that enable creativity.

Keywords

English FAL; Writing; Creativity; Multimodality; Voice; Out-of-School Identities; Writing Assessment; Imaginative Pedagogy