



INTERACTIVE JOURNAL WRITING AS A TOOL FOR MENTORING AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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BACKGROUND

- Teacher professional development is a major concern for the DoE.
- The poorly trained teachers within the racially divided education provisioning during the apartheid regime
- Despite the fact that so many teachers upgraded their qualifications, there have not been significant changes to classroom practice (DoE, 2007).

VARIOUS STRATEGIES BY THE WCED

- 2002 - The establishment of The Cape Teaching and Leadership Institute for in-service teacher training
- In 2008 alone, 2000 teachers were trained at the Cape Teaching and leadership Institute. It has also been reported that about 6451 teachers have been trained at the Institute since 2004 (Atwell, 2009)
- The Literacy Half Hour in 2001, Literacy and Numeracy strategy in 2006, the Qids-Up programme 2007 and most recently, the Foundations for Learning Campaign adopted by the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor (2008)

Extensive development opportunities but poor academic results

- Grade 3 tests administered in 2002 showed that many learners could not perform at Grade 3 level.
- Grade 6 study of 34 596 learners in 1 077 schools showed that only 35% of learners passed the test (Media Release, 25th May 2004).
- South Africa was second last in comparison with 40 other countries in literacy performance (PIRLS, 2007) .

OUR INTERVENTION: PROJECT FOR CREATING LITERATE SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Small scale qualitative research sub projects between
Year 1 and 4 (2007-2010):

- a) Early Literacy Approaches and Methods (Initial approaches to literacy: gR-3),
- b) Family and Community Literacy.

AIMS...

The project aims to deepen knowledge and information about the critical aspects of early literacy which include pedagogy and classroom methods for biliteracy, resources for multilingual classrooms, environments for literacy and family and community involvement.

Our work in school entails

- creating print rich environments
- creating reading, writing, numeracy and lifeskills corners
- getting children to read for enjoyment, and to write for real reasons
- training teachers on, whole language, emergent literacy, including comprehension strategies and additional language learning
- establishing school libraries; planning the literacy half hour and the literacy focus time.

Sibulele Primary School

- Sibulele Primary School in Site B
- working class informal settlement with a poor community within one of the big teeming townships on the outskirts of Cape Town called Khayelitsha.
- Most of the residents in the area are Xhosa speakers who have migrated from the Eastern Cape, looking for better job opportunities.

Teachers

- Nelli- grade 1
- Buli- grade 2
- Lumka-Grade 4: science and maths
- Yoli-Grade 4: languages

Mentoring strategies

- demonstration lessons for modeling
- workshops to train teachers on the competences that they need
- reflecting on the strategies in debriefing sessions
- **using interactive journal as a reflective approach to mentoring.**
- visiting schools at least twice a week since October 2007 and journal writing.

INTERACTIVE JOURNAL WRITING

- Interactive journal writing/dialogue journal writing is well documented as a strategy for motivating teachers and students to write for real reasons (Hall & Robinson 1995, Peyton and Staton 1993 , Bloch & Nkence 2000, Bloch & Alexander 2003)
- PRAESA initiated a 6 year interactive Xhosa-English writing process with children in the Battswood Biliteracy Project (1998-2004)
- In 2007 the DoE recognised reflective practice as an important aspect of continuing Teacher Professional Development (see National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in S.A, 2007).

Learning from the children

- stimulate children's (or adults') initiative to write in one or more languages for themselves
- show children (and adults) the power and satisfaction of communicating through writing
- provide authentic samples of and reasons for reading and writing in any language
- provide opportunities for one to one interaction between adult and child.

Learning from the children

- help to counter the dearth of reading materials in African languages
- improve and expand the adult writer's writing and motivation to write and read
- provide opportunities for each child 's voice to be heard and responded to
- contribute to the nurturing and emotional well-being of children and thus help to motivate learning (Bloch, 2005).

The journal writing process

Three steps were involved:

- My own personal journal
- Mentor-teacher journal
- Children's interactive writing journals

Once weekly,(30-40 minutes responding)

Challenges

- Teachers not familiar with journal writing as a genre
- Nelli for example initially wrote down notes about my demonstration
- Sometimes they praised me on how well I taught a lesson
- They told me again what I did

Challenges

- Sometimes teachers did not write back for a long time
- Teachers could not reflect on lessons because of administrative duties they had to fulfil
- Teachers were not in the habit of writing.

Solutions

- After Nelli's third entry, we co-wrote an entry together
- I wrote down for each teacher the things I did in the demonstration and left a question mark, what do you think?
- I wrote more and teachers started following my style.

Benefits

- Mastering of journal writing as a genre
- Change in attitudes towards their children and own writing practice
- Improved writing in isiXhosa through having a reason to write
- Changes in classroom practice.

Mastering journal writing as a genre

- Teachers oral reflections were extended into written reflections
- Teacher's writing improving and is more focused
- Teachers are starting to be more reflective
- Acquiring the journal writing style
- Personal thinking coming through rather than imitation
- Write more than they would normally have.

Changing attitudes

- Teachers writing mostly in isiXhosa, although English is sometimes used
- It promotes and gives status to isiXhosa language which is often used orally
- Teachers developed trust and excitement about journals just as the children do
- Journals are being discussed in staff briefings.

Changing attitudes

- Teachers have recently covered their journals to show pride and write more than when they began (now three A4 pages full)
- Lumka and Yoli volunteered to write journals
- Yoli writes two journals, a Xhosa one and an English one to two different people
- There's more detail, including feelings
- Dissemination of the work they do to other colleagues and in workshops

Changing Practices

Teachers are developing meta-cognitive skills (thinking about their learning process)

“That helps us to understand each other and to share ideas and to review what we have done with children. Then we know the step the next day. (...) I know, if I do interactive journal, I am learning a lot. (...) Like if we have been doing an activity with the learners then I notice some progress, some challenges. Then when I write to Xoli I talk about that. And then we sit down and plan what is the next step for the things that we pick up in the class. (...) It helps to reflect on the practice. In the journal we also talk about the things that happened in the school and outside.” (Interview with Buli, 25 November 2009)

Children's writing develops at different stages when they are given opportunities to write

Translation: *“I told them that there are children who develop later and we have a way of helping them because we found out that literacy develops so the children need to be shown and be given opportunities to write. I don't want to pressurize them as Brigitta has shown us that it takes a long time for some children to develop their reading and writing skill”*
(Buli's journal entry 22.10.2009)

Children develop language awareness when they correct their own errors

“Xa besisenza iicomprehension strategies, ndiqaphele ukuba bayancedisana xa kubhalwa nokulungisa upelo lwamagama...Uyayazi ukuba bebebhalele uprincipal? Babhale iifirst draft bazilungisa”

Trans“When we were doing comprehension strategies, I noticed that children help each other when they write and correct their spelling...Do you know they have written letters to her (Principal)? Sive is doing wonders. They wrote first draft and corrected themselves. (Buli’s journal entry 17.11.2009)

It is important to know children's literature for effective literacy teaching

“Ndifumanise ukuba kubalulekile ukuba ndifunde iincwadi ezininzi zamabali abantwana khon'ukuze ndikwazi ukubalisa iintsomi namabali ngalo lonke ixesha.”

“I found out that it is important for me to read a lot children's literature so that I can tell stories and folktales all the time.” (Buli's journal, 26.05.2009)

Struggling readers need more reading time

- “uSive noRebecca bayaphucuka indlela yokubhala nokufunda, ndiyabulela kwakhona ngokucebisa ukuba mabanikwe ithuba baboniswe nendlela yokwenza izinto.
- *“Sive and Rebecca are improving in the way they read and write. Thank you again for suggesting that they must be given time and be shown how to do things.”* (Buli’s journal, 13.Oct.2009)

Teachers initiate things and pass their ideas on

Translation: *Xoli I would like to initiate a teacher's reading corner in the staffroom. We spend a lot of time there as teachers. I wish all of them can see for real what we wish for together with you. Especially teachers from the senior phase because there are very few of them who see the importance of reading... I think that the teacher's reading corner will lead to reading teachers. When teachers love to read, this will rub off to their children. Teachers become role models and read to the children..."*

(Lumka's Journal 22.10.2009)

Changing practices

- Children love doing collaborative work
- Knowing your work and thinking constantly about it makes you confident
- It is important to defend what you believe in
- Teachers talk about their dreams and wishes for the school

Teachers also commented on classroom practice in the journals, for example, Buli wrote:

Translation: “Thank you very much for working with me in my class really. The children enjoy your stories and everything you share with them. Thank you again for modeling letter writing. I don’t believe what I see when I read some of the letters that the grade twos write....Paired reading is doing wonders and I also enjoy it because it helps me to listen to different stories from different readers. I noticed Pheliswa’s reading is improving and when she reads for me and when I read for her she was very excited. The next day, she borrowed a book to read at home and then told me she read ‘uMilly noMolly noJingi wokuthamba’, Umilly noMolly nendlu yomthi. I recorded these findings and I used them for assessment.” (Buli’s journal entry, 18.09 2009)

Sustainable Development

- Interactive journal writing has proven to be a very important tool for mentoring teacher development.
- It corresponds to the criteria of the norms and standards for educators, as is stated that continued professional teacher development succeeds best when teachers themselves are integrally involved, reflecting on their own experience, where there is strong school based component... (DoE, 2007).

Sustainable Development

- It is one of the best tools that has proven to be a bridge between input from training and implementation. It provides a bottom up process that has guided us in coming up with tailor made solutions in the workshops and demonstrations we have carried out.
- Therefore, it has helped us to deal with the real needs of the teachers rather than coming up with a pre-conceived plans.

Sustainable Development

- Although it is time consuming to respond in the journals, the teachers and I find it a very worthwhile process.
- As a recommendation for future training I suggest that in between teacher workshops, a process of online journal writing needs to be embarked upon as a monitoring and support process between teacher trainers or mentors, even if it is for a few months.

Sustainable Development

- Because this is a tedious process, it could then be followed up with group discussions within a cluster of educators who have participated in the training per district.
- It is so easy for teachers to get caught up in a lot of things when they come back from training. Thus it is very important to find ways of supporting and encouraging teachers to implement what they have learned in their training.