

Engaging learners with literacy through a creative writing programme in rural South Africa

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Abstract

Since 2008, the South African Department of Education has put greater emphasis on literacy as part of the 'Foundations for Learning' campaign, encouraging children to read authentic texts and engage in the writing process. This study interrogates the implementation of a creative writing programme in a rural South African primary school. Situated in the framework of action research, this project examines the work of Grade 5 and 6 students both quantitatively and qualitatively in order to determine the impact of the project on student writing. It was found that the programme improved student writing, especially in the areas of creativity, developing text, and writing a cohesive text, and fostered a culture of writing. The programme was not effective in improving grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation and did not meet the needs of struggling writers. It was found that when learners have the opportunity to write, they utilize their background knowledge from other texts and media as well as their experiences, to create texts that are expressive and follow the conventions of various genres.

Keywords: Literacy, creative writing programme, rural south African primary school.

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Introduction

As the Grade 6 learners at Bokamoso Primary School (a pseudonym) were finishing their post-assessments, one boy brought his to us with a smile and said “I think you’re really going to like reading my story.” Then, when two more made similar remarks, a pattern began to emerge. The next day, we found out that a student had written a story about Simba from *The Lion King* and left it open on one of the computers in the school’s computer lab.

Less than a year before, these same learners turned in their first articles for our Grade 5 magazine, the precursor to the creative writing programme. These articles were almost exclusively copied out of their textbooks or magazines. It took some of them three or four tries to submit original work. In order to address the challenges learners faced with writing, we developed Bokamoso’s Creative Writing Programme. As we developed this programme, we also decided to simultaneously engage in research that focused on teachers in order to find out the effects of the programme on literacy at the school. Our main research question was:

How does participation in the creative writing programme influence learners’ writing?

We also investigated the following secondary questions:

How does promoting writing impact the culture of the school?

How do the educators understand creative writing and their role in teaching writing?

Theoretical framework and literature review

Creative writing

We define creative writing as any writing in which the writer has the opportunity to express his or her thoughts about a subject in an original way. We do not limit the definition of creative writing to the writing of stories or poems, though we do include those forms of writing in the programme. In the context of this project, creative writing means that learners must submit their own work and that it is more important that it is original than perfect. As writing is a constructive and expressive process (Bertrand and Stice, 2002); we deemed this focus necessary in order to develop learners’ writing skills.

Literacy in South Africa

Though there has been an increase in research on literacy in South Africa in the past decade, this is still a young area of research, and the research has focused almost exclusively on reading rather than writing. The 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) found that South Africa had the lowest performance of all 45 education systems in 40 countries studied (Howie et al., 2008). Overall, South African learners in Grades 4 and 5 scored an average of 302 points compared with the international average of 500 points. Learners from rural schools in South Africa had the lowest achievement with an average score of 261 compared to an average of 350 for urban schools and 385 for suburban schools. In South Africa, girls also outperformed boys. Grade 5 girls averaged 319 while Grade 5 boys averaged 283. Grade 4 girls averaged 271 while Grade 4 boys averaged 235. The authors report that this gender difference was one of the greatest in the world. More recently, the 2011 Annual National Assessment results showed that Grade 3 learners achieved an average of 35% on nationwide tests in literacy, and Grade 6 learners achieved an average of 28% in languages (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

In their study of effective South African schools serving children from low-income communities, Sailors, Hoffman and Mathee (2007) found that these schools had a strong focus on literacy achievement, evidenced by a print-rich environment and the instructional strategies used by the teachers, as well as the teacher's attendance of literacy related professional development activities. These schools, though effective in providing reading instruction, struggled with writing instruction and did not provide learners with authentic opportunities to write. The authors write that "students in these schools have the capacity but not the opportunity to write" (Sailors, Hoffman and Mathee, 2007: 385).

The challenges of providing writing instruction may relate to lack of preparation and professional development of teachers in the teaching of writing. Condy, Chigona, Chetty and Thornhill (2010) found that pre-service teachers in their final year at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) felt prepared to teach reading, but not spelling or creative writing.

Methods of literacy instruction which focus on the use of authentic texts have been proven to be successful in the South African context (Elley and Cutting, 2001; Donald, Condy and Forrester, 2003; Pretorius and Mokhwesana, 2009). Elley and Cutting (2001) found

that students in schools that utilise shared reading and guided reading approaches with authentic texts showed significant improvement in their reading, listening and writing performance over peers at schools where teachers used a traditional text approach. A number of literacy studies (Pretorius and Mampuru, 2007; Pretorius and Currin, 2010; Pretorius and Mokhwesana, 2009) have focused on the University of South Africa's 'Reading is FUNdamental' project, a four year reading intervention programme at a township primary school. The intervention programme included building a functional school library, creating print and resource rich classroom environments, conducting fortnightly workshops for educators focusing on literacy and implementing weekend family literacy classes. These studies have shown some improvement in pupils' reading as a result of their participation in the project.

Studies of literacy in South Africa suggest that intervention is necessary in order to improve reading in the learners' home language (L1) and first additional language (L2). Though these intervention programmes have been somewhat successful, they have not focused on developing learners' writing, which is a relatively underexplored area in South Africa. As the actions of reading and writing involve both similar and different knowledge and practice (Fitzgerald and Shanahan, 2000), it is important to teach both elements of literacy.

Foundations for learning

In response to learners' low achievement in literacy and numeracy, the South African Department of Education (DOE) launched the Foundations for Learning campaign in 2008 (DOE, 2008). As part of Foundations for Learning, language and literacy teachers were advised to include shared writing as well as group and independent writing in their weekly plans. In 2010, lesson plans for literacy and languages (as well as numeracy and mathematics) were distributed to all primary schools. These lesson plans provide specific directions for activities in these and other required areas and have the potential to be a very effective resource, but as they were delivered to schools with no complementary training for teachers, they were often underutilized, or not utilised at all.

Teaching writing

'Foundations for Learning' provides the framework through which our writing instruction takes place. The suggested methods of writing instruction are based on theory and practice, and, as they originate from

the Department of Education (DOE), have the potential to be used across South Africa. The shared writing activities provide an opportunity for scaffolding and interaction between the teacher and students that fit within the Vygotskian (1978) social constructionist tradition. 'Foundations for Learning' emphasizes the use of the writing process (Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1994) repeatedly throughout the year. Additionally, Graves' idea that children tend to write more on unassigned topics which they are interested in than teacher directed assignments figures greatly in our research.

Research context

School and community context

Bokamoso Primary School is located in a rural village in the North West Province of South Africa. Though the village is less than 100 km from Pretoria and 40 km from the closest town of Brits, it suffers from high unemployment and intermittent delivery of services, especially of water. There are approximately 13 000 people living in the village, but as there are very few employment opportunities in the village, most of the employed people work in Pretoria, Brits or Johannesburg. The dominant language and culture of the village is Setswana, but almost all of the official South African languages are represented.

Bokamoso is the smallest of three primary schools in the village, with an enrolment of 257 learners in the reception year (known as Grades R) through 6. As a result of the enrolment, class sizes are smaller than in other schools in the village, ranging from 22 to 47 learners in a class. The school faculty consists of nine qualified educators hired by the DOE. As is typical in schools in the North West Province, all of the educators were trained in teacher training colleges that were part of the former Bophuthatswana homeland. They have between 15 and 30 years experience in teaching. A United States Peace Corps volunteer works part time at the school to support teacher development. The educators are challenged in performing their responsibilities as they must all take on responsibilities outside of the classroom as well, and assist in the management and administration of the school.

The medium of instruction in Grades R-3 is Setswana. English as an additional language begins in Grade 1, but learners do not receive a mark for English until Grade 3. In Grade 4 and above, English is the medium of instruction in all classes except the Setswana class, but teachers often use Setswana to explain the lesson. The administration

has been working to increase the school's resources and, since the completion of this project, has opened a small library resourced by donated books. In addition, the school has a working computer lab with twenty computers, but this resource is not frequently utilized as most of the teachers are still developing their own computer literacy and the administrative assistant who has been tasked with teaching computers is often called away for meetings.

Bokamoso's creative writing programme

In 2010, the Peace Corps volunteer, along with two educators, began an after-school magazine club for Grade 5 learners. The object of the club was for the learners to write their own magazine and sell it to raise funds for the school. We hoped that working on the magazine would improve the learners' literacy as they engaged in the writing process by preparing their articles and reading each other's articles for the magazine. Originally, many of the learners submitted stories that they had copied out of magazines or textbooks. When these submissions were turned down and they tried to write in their own words, most learners struggled as their writing was fraught with repetition, spelling, punctuation and structuring challenges.

We developed the creative writing programme in order to begin to address these challenges. In the Foundation Phase, we trained each educator to do a two-week story writing unit in which they read learners a story in their home language and discuss the elements of a story (beginning, middle and end), brainstorm ideas for their own stories, draft their stories and revise them with help from the educator, and finally write and illustrate their stories in books specially made for this project. We followed the writing process as described by Calkins (1994) as involving rehearsal, drafting, revising, conferencing, editing, and publishing. In Grades R and 1, we drew from the language experience approach (Stauffer, 1970) as the children told their stories orally, and the educators recorded these stories and read them back to the learners. The learners then illustrated the stories.

In the Intermediate Phase, the focus on writing was more varied. In Grade 4, learners were encouraged to write creatively through multiple assignments in their English classes, where they wrote about themselves and created personal dictionaries in which they wrote paragraphs describing pictures of things starting with different letters. In Grade 5, the learners participated in the magazine club. In Grade 6,

the learners completed a number of journal responses as part of their participation in an after-school community service club and wrote, revised and published creative writing pieces relating to crime, which was the topic that they chose to focus their community service project on.

Research methods

Data collection

In designing the structure of the research, we used primarily qualitative methods in order to develop a deep understanding of the impact of writing at the school (Creswell, 2008) with one quantitative component. We also situated ourselves in the context of teacher/action research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999) as we conducted research on our own teaching practice with the intention of using what we learned from this research to inform future practice.

We collected data from February to June 2011. We collected the following kinds of data:

Artefacts: We collected learners' work done as part of the project. This work included story books, personal dictionaries, magazines, journal entries, and the collection of writing about crime.

Questionnaires: We distributed questionnaires to each teacher focusing on their opinions about their role in the teaching of writing, the definition of creative writing, and the impact of the project.

Observations: We took informal field notes of our observations of the learners while engaging in activities related to the project and met regularly to discuss our notes in the course of the project.

Pre- and Post-Assessments: We designed pre- and post-assessments for the Grade 5 and 6 learners for which they were given one hour to write. The pre-assessment was administered in late February (Grade 6) and early March (Grade 5) 2011, and the post-assessment was administered in June 2011. The pre-assessment required the learners to write a letter to a friend in America, and the post-assessment required the learners to write a story based on a sequence of pictures. Ideally, both assessments would have followed the format of the post-assessment as the topic of the pre-assessment was too familiar to the learners and did not provide enough opportunity for creativity.

The pre- and post-assessments were marked using a rubric of the DOE Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards addressing the following components:

- Creativity
- Developing Text
- Using Vocabulary
- Constructing Sentences
- Writing a Cohesive Text

Data analysis

Though we collected artefacts of students' work from all grades and administered questionnaires to all teachers, we limited our analysis to the Grade 5 and 6 learners as we had collected more data from this sample of learners and could form a complete picture of how their writing had changed through their participation in the project.

In order to analyze our data, we looked both quantitatively and qualitatively at samples of the learners' writing. We used the quantitative data gained from the pre- and post-assessments to look for changes. We used a one-tailed *t* test with a p-value of 0.05 to determine the statistical significance of our data (Creswell, 2008). To answer our primary research question we used both quantitative and qualitative methods, and we used qualitative analysis for our sub-questions. By analyzing multiple types of data, using both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis, we were applying the principle of triangulation (Creswell, 2008) in order to verify that the patterns we picked out were valid. We coded the qualitative data to identify themes in our data in relation to the attitudes expressed towards the writings of teachers and students and the culture of writing in the school.

We asked parents to sign a consent form and explained the project to the parents and the students in both English and Setswana. In order to protect the research participants, we made an effort to keep all learners anonymous; we did not base learner marks on participation in the research and we made participation in the research completely optional. We gave parents and learners the option to withdraw their participation at any time if they so wished.

Findings

In our analysis of the data, three themes became evident: changes in

learners' writing, educators' perceptions of writing, and developing a culture of writing. Under the theme of changes in learners' writing, we identified five subthemes: quantitative changes, creativity, structuring and developing texts, common mechanical errors, and struggling writers.

Changes in learners' writing

Quantitative changes

Both the Grade 5 and 6 learners showed an improvement from the pre- to the post-assessments. For Grade 5 learners, the average pre-assessment score was 10.07, and the average post-assessment score was 12.23 resulting in an increase of 2.16. This difference was statistically significant, $t=5.83$, $df=29$, $p<.05$. For Grade 6 learners, the average pre-assessment score was 11.42, and the average post-assessment score was 13.36 resulting in an increase of 1.94. This difference was statistically significant, $t=6.36$, $df=35$, $p<.05$. The overall increase was also interesting as the pre-assessment task was more familiar to the learners than the post-assessment task which required more explanation.

Table 1: Breakdown of pre- and post-assessment results by gender

Group	Pre-assessment average	Post-assessment average	Difference
Grade 5 boys	10	12.5	2.5
Grade 5 girls	10.125	12	1.875
Grade 6 boys	11.14	13.48	2.34
Grade 6 girls	11.8	13.2	1.4

As highlighted in Table 1 above, in both Grade 5 and 6, girls outperformed boys on the pre-assessment while boys outperformed girls on the post-assessment, increasing their scores by a greater margin. As girls generally outperform boys at Bokamoso, the improvement seen in boys' scores is encouraging as it points to the fact that programmes such as this one can motivate boys to become more engaged in literacy projects. Some of the possible motivators may have been writing about issues that were important (or interesting) to them and typing writing assignments on the computer.

Finally, the quantitative data show that certain areas were more affected by participation in the creative writing programme than others. Tables 2 and 3 below show the breakdown of the data by each component of the rubric.

Table 2: Grade 5 breakdown by rubric component

Grade 5	Pre-assessment average	Post-assessment average	Difference
Creativity	2.5	2.93	0.43
Developing text	1.93	2.53	0.6
Using vocabulary	2	2.3	0.3
Constructing sentences	1.8	1.97	0.17
Writing a cohesive text	1.83	2.5	0.67

Table 3: Grade 6 breakdown by rubric component

Grade 6	Pre-assessment average	Post-assessment average	Difference
Creativity	2.44	3.17	0.73
Developing text	2.19	2.83	0.64
Using vocabulary	2.06	2.17	0.11
Constructing sentences	2.03	2.17	0.14
Writing a cohesive text	2.69	3.03	0.34

The quantitative data show that there was an improvement in Grade 5 and 6 learners' writing through the 6 months that they participated in the creative writing programme. The data also show that boys improved more than girls, and that there was greater improvement in the areas of creativity, developing text, and writing a cohesive text than in using vocabulary and constructing sentences. This difference is not surprising as the creative writing programme did not focus on mechanics but on composition and encouraging learners to write.

Creativity

In the post-assessment students' collection of writings about crime, the Grade 6 learners showed that they could express themselves creatively through writing, and this represented a very significant change from their pre-assessments. The following story included in the collection demonstrates that the learners were thinking creatively and not just expressing themselves through their writing; they were crafting stories using their experience, background knowledge, and the knowledge of the conventions of writing.

“There was once a family of three. They lived in Johannesburg. They lived in a three room house. Their life was bliss. The husband was a mine worker. His wife was a house wife. Their child was a boy his name was Josh. One day the wife’s husband said to the wife, “I will come home at 10’o clock because I will be working late”, but he never came. They waited and waited until 1’o clock. They went to sleep and woke up, and he wasn’t there. They called the police. They did a search warrant for 2 weeks, but never found him. The family prayed and prayed for his arrival. At last it came through came that they found him in the bushes bruised and bleeding but still alive. The police also found the people who hurt him. They sent them to jail for 80 years each, and the family lived happily ever after. The End”

The learner draws on her experiences and knowledge gained from television and books in order to create her own story. The story uses dialogue as well as descriptive language such as “bruised and bleeding” and “their life was bliss” that are common to the kinds of stories that she was reading. The subject matter is original and drawn from her background knowledge about Johannesburg, working in the mines, and police protocols.

Not all of the learners’ descriptions went beyond what they saw in front of them or provided as much detail. For example, one learner wrote in his post-assessment:

“The People see the toliet. Beacuse that toliet is not nice the door was open and that people the looked the toliet. Beacuse The toilet is smelled. The People was laugh about the toliet. The community was Help the toliet. They cut it and they buld the toliet. They pinting the toliet want to use water if They don’t want to use water the toliet because They don’t want to toliet.”

Though this story provides some background about the motivation to fix the toilet, it does not utilize dialogue, description of the characters, or other narrative devices. Still, the learner is looking at the pictures and thinking creatively to explain what is visible in the pictures.

Through learners’ work, it is evident that they are thinking and writing creatively while drawing from their experiences as well as from stories that they have read and television shows and movies that they

have seen. They do not stick only to words that they know how to spell or familiar sentence structures, but they write what they want to say.

Structuring and developing texts

At the beginning of the creative writing programme, the learners often repeated themselves throughout their writing. The Intermediate Phase English teacher pointed out that this was a problem that she had often faced in working with the learners. The Grade 5 learners' magazine articles show this repetition. In the following article, the learner described the rapper, 50 Cent:

“50 Cent is a rapper and actor. 50 Cent loves music. He raps in America. He learned how to rap. He raps in South Africa. 50 Cent goes to America. 50 Cent is an actor in South Africa. 50 Cent raps a lot of music on TV. He learned how to rap. 50 Cent is a rapper in America and he is an actor in America and this is how 50 Cent raps. 50 Cent is one of the artists and 50 Cent's songs are great. 50 Cent is a rapper in America and he comes back to South Africa. 50 Cent's songs are wonderful. 50 Cent lives in America. So now you know all about 50 Cent's career.”

As these Grade 5 learners are just learning to express themselves in their own words in English, it is important for them to have the opportunity to experiment with writing.

The crime writing and post-assessments above show the Grade 6 learners writing narratives. Those Grade 6 learners who chose to write essays about crime showed that they could write a non-fiction text around an issue in a non-repetitive and well developed style. These learners build upon their own ideas and providing examples to support themselves.

“Crime is not good because people who do crime they end in jail. Many people who do crime are not working. They need money to buy food. Some of people who do crime need money to buy drugs especially the children of South Africa. Most of children who do crime are not attending school. If they attend school or do activities to keep them busy, crime will be less.

The government must do something about this. They must make same parks and create some jobs for those who are

not working and park for the children so that crime will be less. We do not want our children to go to jail. We want them to be educated and get jobs to look after themselves and their parents.”

This essay explores the issue of crime in South Africa and suggests some possible steps that the government could take in order to prevent crime. The learner develops his ideas and focuses on the topic, and demonstrates that he is aware of issues that affect his community and what can be done about them.

Those Grade 6 learners who were still struggling to express themselves in writing wrote shorter essays but did not repeat themselves as they had done in their first attempt at writing. For example, one learner wrote:

“A crime is like raping someone and stealing. People are not happy about crime. People said they don’t like it. A crime is not good because you are going to jail.”

Though he did not develop his ideas, the learner did not repeat himself as the Grade 5 learners had done.

Common mechanical errors

As is evident in the above samples from the post-assessments, all the learners struggled with spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization. The learners’ spelling skills varied greatly from one or two spelling errors to texts of almost entirely invented spelling like the following:

“One the was the dog and the setore a baole helpeng people jek was in twalet Temse can and the twalet cel aol and Jek halp Jems the thendap his twalt his theking so and hama to help Jems Jems thek renhe and rang to Jek. And help Tums tho tlo usno top Jon Jems Jems Jems the top is wolg and Jems setop the wota”

The numerous spelling errors in this story make it difficult to follow, but the learner was able to read his own work. He just did not know how to spell the words he wanted to use including some very basic words like ‘water’, which he spelt as ‘wota’.

The learners also struggled with punctuation and capitalization. They often forgot punctuation at the end of a sentence, but they capitalized

the first word of the next sentence. Sometimes they remembered punctuation but did not capitalize. Grammatically, there are a number of issues that come up repeatedly in learners' writing. Common errors included double subjects ("His wife she went"), confusion of gender ("his husband"), and the formation of verb tenses ("was look" and "took"). Some of these errors can be attributed to transference of structures from Setswana as, for example, the concord does not inflect for gender in Setswana. All of these common mechanical errors could be addressed through instruction, writing practice and appropriate reading materials.

Struggling writers

The final point that became evident in reading learners' writing samples is that while participation in the creative writing programme helped most learners to improve their writing, it did not help those learners who struggled with literacy so much that they did not understand how to complete the activities. For example, one struggling writer wrote in his post-assessment:

"Write a story describing what is happening in the picture'
Be as creative and descriptive as possible and feel free to
add to what you see happening in the pictures: Look at
the sequence of pictures on the other pictures what did we
experience What were our challenges our Success rate Model
refrigerator Dying. Biltong. Cook pasteurization canning
vaquainig. Hogo of the comrang thgrulent addtares. Bring
twa orato the fod."

The learner copied some of the words from the directions as well as words off the chalkboard. This learner and others need more than just the creative writing programme in order to improve as writers. They need high levels of learning support before they can complete assignments such as the ones that were given as part of this programme.

Educators' perceptions of writing

We distributed questionnaires to all of the nine educators at Bokamoso Primary School and 6 educators returned their completed questionnaires to us. Of the Intermediate Phase educators, the English teacher explained that she spent a lot of time on spelling and capitalization as learners struggled with these issues throughout all the grades. The other educators saw their role in developing literacy as correcting spelling,

punctuation, and grammatical errors in learners' written work.

Of all the educators who submitted their questionnaires, five of the six defined creative writing as having to do with the learner expressing him or herself. For example, one educator wrote:

“It is writing in which the learner is able to express himself/herself through explaining, defining, discussing and retelling his/her ideas.”

Though the educators all defined creative writing in a similar fashion, none of them saw teaching creative writing as part of their role as educators. The English teacher wrote that she focused on the writing forms highlighted in the students' textbooks such as writing friendly letters and poems. In these types of writing activities, the learners followed the format provided, and substituted information about themselves, where appropriate. None of the other Intermediate Phase educators reported that they taught any form of writing explicitly.

Developing a culture of writing

The publication of the first magazine marked a transition in terms of internal and external perceptions of Bokamoso as a school with a culture of writing. One alumnus who was now volunteering at the Youth Centre said she was so happy to read the magazine because she had never felt proud of having attended Bokamoso before, and that she felt proud of the school for the first time. The learners who were involved in the magazine wrote in reflective journal entries that they were proud of their work on the magazine. One learner wrote “I like go to the magazine club because I can write,” while another wrote “Koko [grandmother] was happy to read the magazine.” The educators also expressed enthusiasm that the school was gaining a reputation as an academically focused school.

Recently, the changes in the learners' attitudes towards writing have become evident. When the Grade 6 learners were given their final assignment to write a story, a poem, or an essay about crime which they would then type on the computer, 3 or 4 learners responded with an excited “Yes!” about the assignment, and others turned in their assignments early. As already mentioned, we noted in our field notes that when two of the learners submitted their post-assessments, they told us how much we would enjoy their stories. Among the Grade 6 learners who were involved in the creative writing programme for the

longest time, writing has become not only an accomplishment they can be proud of, but something that they enjoy doing as is evidenced by the fact that many of them have started writing poems and stories outside of school and sharing them with both educators and their classmates.

Discussion and conclusion

As a result of participation in Bokamoso Primary School's creative writing programme, learners improved their writing across the five areas scored in the pre- and post-assessment rubrics especially in creativity, development of text, and writing a cohesive text. Learners demonstrated that they could write creatively, describe characters, use dialogue as a literary device, and write both narrative stories and argumentative essays. The programme did not address issues of spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization, and learners still struggled with these. But they were more willing to experiment with writing even when they were unsure of the proper spelling of a word. Learners drew from their own experiences, literary forms, and media (such as television) they had been exposed to when crafting their texts. This finding was very interesting as it goes against the notion that children who do not grow up in print-rich environments do not draw on their knowledge about texts when crafting their own texts. Teachers can work with learners to translate the learner's knowledge of visual media into print media in the classroom context.

A holistic literacy programme should focus on both reading and writing because the two are interrelated. Though many programmes already do this, they do not do so in a structured way. One of the strongest elements of the Bokamoso Creative Writing Programme is that it gave learners the opportunity to write freely about topics that they were interested in. Though they engaged in revision, the learners were willing to submit writing that they may not have been willing to submit for their normal graded assessment. Providing scaffolded and structured writing instruction is valuable, but providing opportunities to write freely is even more valuable. These opportunities, and the positive feedback from the teachers, encourage learners to write more. Even without much structured writing instruction, the learners participating in the Creative Writing Programme stopped repeating themselves and began to structure their texts like others in the genre they were writing on. The opportunity to write freely, structured writing instruction, and explicit lexical and syntactic elements have the potential to produce motivated and effective writers in the South African context. Writing

freely and writing about things that learners are passionate about should not be discounted or seen as too difficult for learners in South African primary schools as they provide very valuable opportunities to increase learners' motivation to write and develop a culture of writing in schools.

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