

Generous reading: discovering dialogic voices in writing

This paper describes an approach to the assessment of EAL written composition in the primary school. It draws upon related work in literacy as social practice and socio-linguistic approaches to language learning to develop an approach to writing assessment that builds upon students linguistic strengths and traces their written words to sources in the immediate context and wider world. Following Joseph Tobin this approach is described as generous reading. Generous references poststructuralist literary theory through a focus on close reading of texts using a multidisciplinary approach. Linguistic, social, and cultural diversity became an educational focus in the United States and United Kingdom when an increased number of immigrants entered both countries in the 1960s and 70s. In recent years, the number of students entering US and UK school who speak English as an additional language (EAL) has continued to grow. Given the shared challenge of meeting the needs of diverse student populations there is opportunity for developing and sharing promising educational practices for these learners in both countries. Generous reading is based on theories of literacy as social practice and sociolinguistics. Literacy as social practice perspectives view language varieties according to the context in which they are used.

In US schools, writing is often assessed using teacher-created, holistic or analytical rubrics. Teacher-created rubrics are based on the context of a particular writing assignment and features of writing highlighted by the teacher. These rubrics consequently take many different forms. Holistic rubrics are designed by groups, such as schools, districts or states and provide a single score based upon benchmark paper sorted into levels. Teachers and student focus on a narrow range of writing features which are then assessed.

Generous reading requires particular background knowledge and discourse theory in order to analyse for voices of others. It requires some knowledge of literary devices and ongoing study of the many rhetorical and linguistic practices used in English and other languages. Generous reading is based on theories of literacy as social practice and sociolinguistics. Literacy as social practice perspectives view language varieties according to the context in which they are used.