TEACHER STUDENTS INVOLVED IN WRITING PARTS OF THEIR OWN TEXTBOOK

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Abstract

This study is about Teacher training students in Physical Education writing parts of their own curriculum. In writing and literacy research, there is a consensus that one can write oneself to better understanding. The 26 texts in this study come from the session in ball games. The task was to describe some technical skills, and to explain why the proper technique is important. How can the formulation of the assignment help the students involve and what do the texts tell about their subject knowledge? After a peer review the text would be admitted as a part of their curriculum.

Keywords: Writing, literacy, textbook, show understanding, physical education.

1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigates texts written by students in the fourth year of Teacher Education in Norway, during their block of ball games in physical education. The students wrote several texts in response to assignments related to different aspects of teaching in ball games. The texts that are included in this article describe some basic techniques in various ball games, like kicks and throws.

Within the writing research community that focuses on writing in an educational context, writing is regarded as an important tool for developing professional knowledge and understanding. The writing research field claims that one can write oneself to better understanding. There is strong belief that writing in all subjects leads to more students fulfilling the goals, learning more and have better achievements not only in writing, but also in the different subjects.

In the Physical Education program in teacher education - as in elementary school - we traditionally have unilateral focus on practical exercises, in ball games often just practical activity. Writing is not central in the Physical Education in primary school, nor should it be. In Teacher Education, on the other hand, writing is often required as a part of assessment in exams and obligatory coursework. Through this investigation, I want to find out if the students master some of the subject content in ball games, and to learn whether the assignments could have been given in a better way. To investigate whether the texts document content knowledge in PE, I have formulated the following question: What do PE teacher students written texts tell about the students' subject knowledge? Moreover, do the texts disclose good ways of formulating assignments?

I will start by presenting the theoretical foundation of the study, which is a writing research with a focus on learning and understanding, and sociocultural literacy thinking. Furthermore, I present the data and analyse the selected texts with focus on subject knowledge. Then, based on the theory and the findings from this analysis I will discuss the formulation of the task the students were given.

2 THEORETICAL BASIS

This article make use of literacy research and writing research to investigate Physical Education teacher students texts written as response to a task related to ball games. It is part of a text research culture where the product is the focal point. That is, I study the understanding that the students reveal in the text, and not what they could have been able to tell in an interview.

Writing is one of the basic skills in the Norwegian curriculum, because writing is understood as a tool for learning. "Writing in all subjects will not only enhance the key competencies of writing, but also lead students to a higher extent meet the goals, learn more and develop better in all subjects and subject areas" (Lorentzen 2008, my translation).

Texts are not isolated from the context in which they are written, and the scriptures surrounding us. They bring together other texts, and everything the author has read, heard and experience in writing: they are intertextual. All texts are characterized by the context in which they are written, and are influenced by preparation, questions, partners, time available on task etc. Writing a text means writing
in interaction with other texts, written or verbal with more or less consciously (Todorov 1984, Evensen & Hoel 1997). In our digital life, we might "carry" the texts less with us, and copy to a greater extent without having a close relationship with the text that we acquire knowledge from, and paste into the new text we are creating.

In order for the writer to learn more and to develop, the writing must be perceived as meaningful; it must have a purpose (Smidt 2008, Lorentzen 2008, Ongstad 2009, Dysthe). It is important that the writers take control of his/her own writing project, and frees him/herself from writing only as an answer to a task (Ongstad, 2009). Only when the writer takes charge of his writing project can the writing of texts give the writer better insight into subject content.

Writing in physical education will not be the same as writing in Norwegian or other subjects, because the different subjects represent different writing cultures (Shanahan & Shanahan 2008, Smidt 2008, 2009). The subjects have different requirements, assessment criteria and their own culture within the subject so that the writing cultures also differ, because different subjects represent different knowledge cultures (Evensen 2009, Haugaløkken, Evensen, Hertzberg, & Otnes 2009). The subjects also represent different text cultures. We meet different genres revealed through different manners of writing and different organization of texts in the various subjects (Maagerø & Tønnessen 2006). Neither the text culture nor the writing culture in physical education has been the subject of a lot of research. This may be due to the fact that writing is limited and not emphasized in the physical education, because the practical skills have been given most attention.

To focus the investigation on content knowledge I have paired the writing theory with a sociocultural literacy definition. In a practical subject like PE the sociocultural approach seems natural, because of the strong influence of team and cooperation thinking. I ended up with a definition from the Australian Curriculum "Literacy is the ability to understand, analyse, critically respond to and produce appropriate spoken, written, visual and multimedia communication in different contexts."

Writing researchers will argue that it helps the thought and reflection to write, and that the writing itself creates new insights. Olson (1994): "Writing not only helps us remember what was thought and said but also invites us to see what was thought and said in a new way" (Olson 1994:15). Evensen expresses it even stronger: "In good moments, while writing, we think further, and in happy moments, this thinking leads to new thoughts, and perhaps even new insights (...) Through writing, we can actually learn" (Evensen 2010).

In order to gain new understanding and insight it is necessary that the students not only find the answers online, or in other ways copy the texts of others. (Otnes, 2009). Instead of pure copying the students need to alter the texts and make them fit the new context; also called recontextualisation. Recontextualization means that new texts are created on the basis of previous texts (Lykknes & Smidt, 2009). When Bernstein (1996) and Bezemer & Kress (2008) describe recontextualisation, it is primarily about taking a text from a context and applying it in another textual context to create new texts. Recontextualization also includes whether one is able to apply what one has acquired in new situations (Lykknes & Smidt 2009). In the context of other people's texts and the treatment of sources, there are certain guidelines that are expected to be followed. How one relates to copying and source criticism can say something about both professional knowledge and integrity (Otnes, 2009; Overrein & Smidt, 2009). Otnes (2009) talks about netiquette, which primarily deals with source criticism and copyright knowledge. In this article, I do not discuss in depth whether the students criticize the sources, but rather look at how they use the sources in their own text and to some extent consider whether they take into account copyright.

For students, the search for knowledge often begins online, and the information is largely retrieved from the web (Alexandersson & Limberg, 2004, 2007). The LÄSK-project examined how students searched for and used information in their school work: "When students search and use material (regardless of source), most of the time is spent on the search itself. Comparison presentation, reflection, etc. takes less time. Critical review of sources generally occurs sparsely[...] (Alexandersson & Limberg 2004, 2007).

3 MATERIAL AND METHOD

The texts in this article are from an assignment were the students were to describe different technique and technical skills. The assignments also explain asked the students to tell when to use the technique. The tasks were illustrated with pictures. The assignments were group assignments and each group should describe two or three different technical skills, and two and two groups answered
the same task. They would later read and give feedback on texts written by fellow students. After the peer review response the students’ texts were included in the ball compendium to become a part of their own textbook and curriculum. The feedback from fellow students is not a part of this article.

There were 40 students in 10 groups, and the collected material contains of 26 texts at a total of 13 different techniques, plus 23 responses. The ambition was that the students should write parts of their own textbook, and the reason for working with writing was to help the understanding of technique thought writing. The idea was that writing would "force" the students to process professional knowledge and hopefully gain more insight into the subject. Thus, a belief that writing contributes to knowledge development, and in the course of this work they would learn more than if the textbook had been completed by others.

Based on this material, I have chosen three texts to answer the questions of what the texts indicate about the assignment, and show of the students understanding of content knowledge. I have chosen two texts about short passes in football and a text about the "Triple-threat position" in basketball. In most of the technique assignments, pictures were included to make it easier to recognize what technical skill the students should describe. The three texts show different ways of working with the text and the extent to which students use their own formulations. The football texts are based on the same internet source, and indicate how different processing of the source can give the reader an insight into the understanding of the students.

4 ANALYTICAL TOOL

Since the submitted texts could be copied from the internet, it is clear that it is uncertain to what extent they show something about the students’ own understanding. To be able to say something about the students’ understanding it is therefore crucial to what extent they have used their own words, processed the text. How they have used, applied and treated their sources. On the other hand you can look into whether the descriptions of the technique or skill contain mistakes, misunderstandings, ambiguities, etc. This also reveals something about the student's competence and subject knowledge. Selections, inclusion to the original sources are often display the students understanding.

4.1 Professional understanding and content knowledge

There are different ways to show disciplinary literacy, but how the writer uses relevant subject terminology will often be decisive for the visibility of knowledge. The use of subject specific terminology provides in most cases a more precise language. When the genre is typical for the subject and the topics discussed, and the text has a style that is adapted to the content, it will be easier to prove professional insights. In Physical Education, the texts often will be multimodal texts. A professional would recognize subject texts that have different pictures, tables, and illustrations illustrating a sequence or a whole passage of technical skill. Another characteristic is that the texts are short and concise, often seen as exercise diaries, exercise schedules.

When students respond well to the purpose of the exercise, they have good insight and understanding of why exactly this technique is used. Expectations for the answers isn’t always stated Ognstad (2009) that is, do the text show what the author expects the task "actually" asks for.

5 ANALYSIS

All the answers to the assignment includes substantial amounts of text copied from internet/web sources. Web pages are also presented as sources in texts. Most groups answering the assignment also make use of printed sources and present them. Also workshops the students have taken part in are used and listed as sources.

Text in internet sources can be copied almost without any effort. The copying person “writing” may or may not understand the content of the text.

The reason why the three selected text are chosen for analyses is that they make use of internet sources in very different ways (Flybjerg 2011, Yin 2011)

Text 1 describes the technical skills in detail when it is best to use, and which technique they recommend for longer passes. The group continue with suggestions for exercises for learning the skill and tell about their own experiences with this skill. The text is relatively close to the source, but the text uses in several places their own formulations and some detailed explanations that show that they
have a skilful knowledge of the technique. They explain, among other things, technical genre and implicit terms like “planter foot” and to kick “through the ball”

The text explain what is the benefit of the technique, namely that the kick gives high precision

Understood terms: Explain what “through the ball” is, complete the kick and continue the movement through the ball.

Text 1 is held in a "Descriptive instructional language". An instructional language often is short, concise messages often in imperative form. An instructional language often contains subject terminology to provide precise and concise statements. In Text 1, the language is somewhat more elaborate and explanatory, but has distinctive features of the instructional genre. Like "The foot must hit the ball in the middle. After you hit the ball it is important to complete the kick, that is, to continue the movement "through" the ball. A more "pure" instructional language (on the pitch) will be: "Hit the center of the ball! Kick through the ball! Long movement!" In ball instruction, you are primarily concerned with communicating as short and concise as possible how the skill is performed to maintain the greatest possible flow in the play and avoid misunderstandings.

Text 1 writes the url address of the network source, and only provides online sources as sources of knowledge.

Text 2

Text 2 also covers the short pass in football. Below is the whole text included.

This text is shorter and briefer than the first one. The text look like "instructional language" with bullet points. Several of the sentences are in "imperative" as: "Turn the ankle joint ca. 90 degrees "and" hit the middle of the ball"
Digital Learning Area, it was easy to find the page both groups used. Below I have copied the website, The page looks like this (http://2010.arkiv.ndla.no/nb/fagstoff/5183):

Even if the two texts are in Norwegian we can see that the wording is identical. If we compare text 2 with the website, we clearly see that students’ texts have copied all the text right from the web without changing any words. Not even the somewhat unusual design of the quote marks is changed in the last bullet point. The students have changed layout to install the internet text with the pictures in the task layout.

**Text 3**

Text 3 deals with basketball and a basic attack technique called "Triple-threat position". This group have downloaded content from an American website where, among other things, a former NBA top player explains different techniques in basketball in several videos.

It is not removed or added anything in the text except that three spaces have been removed to ease an overview of the material.

Below I have put in the pictures that followed the text:
“Triple-threat position” in basketball

The picture to the left was published together with the task, while the picture on the right hand side has the students taken from an American instructional video. The picture that the students found is more illustrative of a "Triple-threat position" than the image that was posted along with the task. The students have specified two websites both English-speaking. Consequently, the students have translated the text from English. The translation is kept quite close to the webside text. The text shows a good understanding of the technical skills. "Do not catch the ball and then immediately start dribbling, or worse, bounce the ball once and lose your dribble. You go from being a "triple threat" to no threat at all! The group's translation: "It's stupid to start dribble right away without having an overview of the game, and it's even worse to dribble the ball once and then stop, especially if you're too far away from shooting. Here the group has translated the text in a way that show knowledge of what a triple threat is, how to lose the advantage to the opponent and why there is no threat anymore. The group shows professional knowledge of extracting the essence of the text and translating into a language that complies with Norwegian basket terminology. Only once the text show some uncertainty in transforming the text to Norwegian terminology. This is when they use the English "pivot foot" instead of the Norwegian "pivoteringsfot".

6 DISCUSSION

One can investigate understanding and literacy through dialogue, conversation, interview and possibly get a more nuanced picture of students' competence. In this study the written text is, only decisive factor for evaluation. In other words, it is the understanding that they have managed to express in the text that is being studied.

As a "teacher educator" you hope to lead the students into the subject's knowledge universe. One way of helping students into this universe is to provide tasks that require of the students to produce different texts. But it is not enough to have them write, you must find meaningful and "unique" writing situations that challenge the author of text to use own words and find the right terminology.

These tasks was intended to be meaningful in the sense that they easy to see the use of the gained knowledge in the work in Physical Education or as coaches in different ball games. To students the most important point is; Will they need it for the exams.

The group that provided Text 2 does not appear to be closely related to the text. It is uncertain what the reason may be. They might have had too little time to spend on the task, or the timing was bad. It’s likely that the task did not trigger them or that they did not have the content literacy to make the text better. This can also be the reason why the group did not captured the underlying purpose for processing the text.

That the authors take responsibility for their own text is quite clear in the first example. They explain the terms and expressions with their own words, and give examples of exercises to practice their
skills. Furthermore, they explain more complementary than the source in which contexts one uses this kick, which part of the foot one hits the ball with and the importance of completing the kick. Both in Text 1 and 3, it looks like that the author takes over their writing project (Ongstad 2009), thus writing physical exercise tasks can contribute to increased professional knowledge in physical education by showing understanding of the technical skills. It is not unreasonable to think that less knowledge is extracted when one copies than when the student actually has written a text. On the other hand we can not rule out that those who have copied the sources into their answer without processing it possess the knowledge that text presents. For various reasons, they may fail to process the text as a lack of professional knowledge or that they simply think that the text answers the question as it is.

In order for such texts not only to be copied from the web, the tasks should be linked to specific situations, contexts so that the writer can not just copy paste everything directly from the web, but requires a form of processing which increases students' opportunity for self-production. The design of the assignment is quite crucial if the students take the challenge of making the lyrics to their own, thus giving them the opportunity to engage in knowledge development.

It seems that the answers that go into the instructor role are best suited to describe the technique - they are also closest to the role of teacher in many cases. The answer to the assignment is aimed at a recipient as a pupil and therefore very relevant to future teachers.

Working in groups - writing and evaluating texts - can one achieve more when one works in groups to write these texts, or do you only risk one or two in the group "taking responsibility" and responding to the group?

The student texts are taken from one context to be inserted into a new one, but the contexts are not too different from the original text. We might still call it recontextualization (Bernstein, 1996), if the new text shows knowledge about the new context. Text 1 and 3 show that the authors have taken into consideration what was asked for, and be able to look beyond the question and answer the actual assignment. (Lykknes & Smidt, 2009).

Only when the students recontextualise theoretical knowledge and use their own experience to formulate something new own can one with reasonable certainty say that the person who has written the text has explored, reflected and thereby understood the theme. In other words, the texts reflect that the author has worked with the text and used the terminology and theoretical foundation of the subject in a way that shows that they have made the knowledge of their own. Or shown ability to understand, analyse, critically respond to and produce appropriate spoken, written, visual and multimedia communication (Literacy)

Knowing the terminology of terminology and the technical skills in question makes it easier for you to formulate and more accurately - To the point. "This knowledge often makes the answers more nuanced, as in Text 1, and to some extent in Text 3.

Does writing of assignment develop knowledge as the reasons for the task imply? One can ask if the students learns more from writing the text in the textbook themselves and the answer is yes, as long as they are actual authors of their texts.

I had posted pictures along with most of the assignments, but it might be a good idea to let the students find good illustrations themselves, as text 3 where the students found eminent pictures. An even a better tip could be to have the students make a video of the technical skill. This would make the students even more makes of their own texts (Ognstad). This provides solutions that and students need to work more with their text, the task will be more demanding, and possibly provide more learning. Students will be more challenged because more of the text will have to be produced by them. At least the video, and if you know the technique well enough to cast it on a video. Looking at Text 3 they have written a multimodal texts and they have found good illustrations along with the text, they have consider what are the best and translated the text into their own. Is translation of texts another way to force recontexualisation and gain ownership over the work?

There is a need to further examine much of the writing that takes place, not least in terms of academic learning through writing.

REFERENCES


[3] Dyste


