



Voice and Narrative in L1 Writing

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Embedment in larger project

- *Writing to learn, learning to write. Literacy and disciplinarity in upper secondary education/ Faglighed og skriftlighed 2009-2015*
- Funded by The Danish Research Council of the Humanities
- Cross disciplinary research group (10 researchers, 3 universities).
- Ethnographic, longitudinal research, adopting the student perspective.
- Overall research question: How do students learn subjects through writing and writing through subjects?

Publications

PhD theses:

- Anke Piekut (2012). *Genreskrivning i de fire gymnasiers danskfag – en undersøgelse af genrekompetence i elevbesvarelser fra de fire ungdomsuddannelser*. Det humanistiske fakultet, Syddansk Universitet.
- Steffen Møllegaard Iversen. *Skrivning og skriveudvikling i de gymnasiale matematikfag*. Det humanistiske Fakultet, Syddansk Universitet.

Books:

- Christensen, Elf, Krogh (2014). *Skrivekulturer i folkeskolens niende klasse*. Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag
- Krogh, Christensen & Jakobsen (red.) (2015). *Elevskrivere i gymnasiefag*. Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag
- Journal articles and book chapters, see www.sdu.dk/fos

Background of present study

- General educational focus on literacy and writing skills (PISA, PIRLS)
- Curricular reforms: all subject teachers must teach writing.
- The specific role of L1 writing:
 - ‘generic’ functional skills and/or
 - Bildung aims tied to L1 didactics and content?
- The contested value of personal narratives in L1 writing
 - Lower secondary students prefer narrative to argument (Berge et al. 2005)
 - DK: Narratives not invited in upper secondary education.

Aim and claim

- Aim: investigating processes of ‘voicing’ viewed as agentive endeavours in writing, through which students struggle to manifest discoursal authority and ownership.
- Claim: this issue is particularly important with regard to L1 writing, as the metaphor of ‘voice’ or ‘voicing’ may capture fundamental Bildung aims of L1 subjects.

Presentation outline

- Theoretical framework: narrative, voice, identity, Bildung.
- Empirical investigation:
 - Exam genres and curricular regulations with regard to writing in lower and upper secondary school in Denmark
 - Longitudinal study of one student's trajectory as an L1 writer, based on extensive interview data.
 - Textual analysis of one student's upper secondary exam assignment.
- Concluding remarks

Theoretical investigation I

Point of departure:

Bakhtin's theory of language as dialogic and heterogeneous:

Utterances are double-voiced/multi-voiced,

- interacting with former and future utterances
- resonating with discourses and ideologies.

Research on personal narratives:

- Narrative a basic tool for negotiating meaning (Bruner).
- Linguistic anthropology: negotiating the self through narrativization of life stories.
- Wortham and Bamberg: Small stories viewed as enactments of identity and voice constructions. Interactional positioning.

Theoretical investigation II

Research on voice and identity in writing (Ivanič 1998, 2012).

- Owning voices through identifying with discourses - rather than an essential 'own voice'.
- Conceptualization of writer identities:
 - Socially available possibilities of selfhood available to writers
 - Autobiographical selves changing and developing with writing
 - Discoursal and authorial selves inscribed in writers' texts.

Theoretical framework III

Voice and Bildung in L1 writing

- Bildung in the Northwestern European Didaktik tradition: the idea that school and teachers should contribute to more than content knowledge and skills: personal and social development.
- Voice (Krogh, cp Smidt):
 - Perspective viewed as an integral disciplinary approach to text consumption and text production in L1.
 - Voice and voicing viewed as a metaphor for the individual writer's struggling with establishing perspectives and developing these in texts.

Exam genres and curricular regulations

Lower secondary school leaving exam (4 hrs)

- Literary fiction, journalism and essay
 - Text material is intended to provide productive inspiration
 - Resources for writing are personal experiences and stances

Upper secondary school leaving exam (5 hrs)

- Literary analysis, journalistic commentary, essay
 - Text analysis is required in all assignments
 - Resources for writing: provided by the exam booklet texts; further student writers are expected to draw on disciplinary knowledge and concepts

Sofia's trajectory of L1 writing

Grade 9: discourses on writing (indicating autobiographical self):

- Strategic performance discourse:
being ambitious and in control of '*facts*'. Lower secondary school getting '*boring*', no challenges and few opportunities to perform.
- Personal expression discourse:
assignments *boring* if only asking for *facts* and if they don't provide opportunities for expressing stances and personal experience.
- Potentials of selfhood available in lower secondary writing:
allow Sofia to mediate between the two discourses.

Transition experience

- Shift of perspective in lower secondary writing, tied to personal narrative – ascribed Bildung quality in later interview.
- Dramatic transition experience as Sofia attempts the strategy of combining self expression with strategic performance - rejected in upper secondary Danish.: "I thought that Danish was more creative"
- In retrospect, Sofia "retells" the story, establishing coherence in her life story: an eye-opener, forcing her to invest strategically in gaining control of the new assignment genres: "It is simply so easy. [...] you need to include all the points, and then when you have written them all down and found some quotations, you just piece it together – and I like that."

Sofia's trajectory

- "Sometimes I miss the writing-along kind of writing in secondary school [...] but I realise that it is not much use just writing anything."
- Although Sofia prefers writing in Danish to writing in content disciplines, she still finds it generally boring and "schoolish". Glimpses of the personal expression discourse: cases of personally relevant topics, talk about entering "cool phrases".
- In grade 12, however, a change can be detected: epistemic experiences and personal relevance when writing analytically about literary texts.
- Change in personal expression discourse: 'facts' /knowledge no longer boring. A disciplinary expression discourse.

Unwanted narrative voices

- The commentary: "Account for and discuss the main points in 'What do we eat – and why?' (text 1)...."
- Opening paragraph: provides introduction including a small narrativization, positioning this in the larger discussion of texts and topic: "Often, when feeling depressed or sad, we will slip to the refrigerator, looking for something which will cheer us up. Eating for comfort is also the reason for overweight for many people today."
- Including the reader as a "we", extending the topic to include mental issues concerning all of us.

The personal narrative

- Reacting to quotation by Feuerbach "Man is what he eats":
- "Isn't it quite a generalisation saying that "Those who don't eat like us, aren't human beings"? Well, one thing I have learned through the ages is that people are different, cultures are different, countries are different.[...] So, food is an important part of our culture, and I should say that we do serve some really strange dishes which I haven't found in other countries, but does this mean that we are less human just because we don't eat the same as the Danes? No I wouldn't say so. When I invite my Danish girlfriends to my home, they get really shocked that I have prepared so much food, but again, that is just a tradition we have. Rather too much food than being short of it."

Bildung process

- A small story incorporating the essence of a whole life distilled to the writer's experience of cultural practices of food and eating.
- A private voice which is, however, not integrated with the academic voice and the overall argument in the text.
- In conveying the strong personal presence, linking food issues to issues of identity and culture, this voice reaches communicatively beyond the student project of writing an exam paper.
- Enacting Bildung process, interacting with knowledge, developing new dimensions of understanding – through the personal narrative.

Concluding remarks

- A prerequisite of Bildung processes in writing is the opportunity to bridge or mediate individual experience and societal reality.
- Narrative and voicing are resources for writers for identity work with Bildung potential.
- Ambitious and engaged student writers need to be able to operationalise these as tools for their writing.
- A need to acknowledge and teach narrative and voicing as academic resources rather than construe them as childish textual strategies.

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