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HIGHLIGHTING LOCAL COLOR IN SELECTED ESSAYS OF F. SIONIL JOSE: SPRINGBOARD FOR IMPROVED NARRATIVE WRITING

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Abstract

Local color in a literary selection refers to the use of vivid description of the setting, customs and traditions, peculiarities of inhabitants and other attributes that give the place its unique identity. The use of local color in a selection makes it more interesting and relatable to readers. Among Filipino writers in English, F. Sionil Jose enjoys a well-deserved reputation for his skillful use of local color in his works.

The present study sought to determine how exposure to works highlighting local color will help Grade 8 students acquire narrative writing skills. The so-called reading-writing connection holds that one's readings greatly influences his writing.

This study used pretest-posttest research design and interview. The difference in students' scores in pretest and posttest was determined using T-test, showing the effect of using local color in narrative writing skills of Grade 8 students of Balucuc High School, District of Apalit, Division of Pampanga.

The researcher administered a pretest in writing narrative essays before the students read essays of F. Sionil Jose, noted for local color. The posttest was administered after reading exposure. The respondents involved in this study consisted of two groups: the first group was composed of Grade 8- Affectionate students, and the other group was composed of 12 teachers in Grade 8 English of cluster VI. A questionnaire was used for the interview of both teachers and students while a scoring rubric adapted from *Criterion-Based Holistic Scoring: A Writing Handbook* in 2008 was utilized as reference in crafting the pretest and posttest.

The students' pretest and posttest used in the study were both created by the researcher. The pretest served to assess the narrative writing skills of the students prior to the reading intervention while the posttest assessed the effect of reading F. Sionil Jose's essays on narrative writing skills. The competencies targeted by the Department of Education under the English program were considered in crafting the modular reading instruction. The results were collected, tabulated, tallied and analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, and t-test.

Results of the study revealed a difference between the pretest and posttest average scores, providing evidence that the use of local color contributes to the acquisition of narrative skills of Grade 8 students.

The following recommendations are offered: The Division Office and school administrators must conduct seminars on teaching writing using local color for details. Teachers in English must be encouraged to highlight the reading- writing connections in addition, textbook writers and curriculum planners must use more local reading materials as the needs of students must be primarily considered in choosing essays and short stories to improve reading and writing skills of learners. Local color helps them understand the texts and gives them the feeling of satisfaction as they express their thoughts and feelings in their narrative.

Keywords: Local Color, Language Structure, Language Function, Narrative Writing Skills.

Introduction

Philippine literature is part and parcel of English instruction in high school. English teaching and learning has been intensively studied as the K-12 curriculum is implemented through DepEd Curriculum Guide “Understanding Culture” (2016), and Funneling of Domains Across the K-12 Basic Education Integrated Language Arts Curriculum.” It is only right because studying varied forms of literature intended for particular grade levels equips students with learnings and competencies needed for their growth and development. The curriculum guide in English 8 prescribes grade level standards that must be followed.

In Grade 8, for example, learners are expected to acquire communicative competence through understanding of Afro-Asian literature including Philippine literature. Francisco Sionil Jose (F. Sionil Jose) as one of the well-known Filipino writers in the English language. “The sheer volume of his work puts him on the forefront of Philippine writing in English,” National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA). His works describe the realities of class struggles, the pains brought about by colonialism in Philippine society. His works enable students to relate and spur them to explicitly stated what are their thoughts and feelings regarding some issues depicted not only in texts but also those happening in their everyday lives. According to Reyes, Legaspi, and Calandada (2012), each story of F. Sionil Jose reflects the socio-political and economic conditions when it was written, and learners are aided in analyzing and understanding the present condition in society, seeing the different facets of life and developing a balanced perspective.

Local color in Philippine literature started during the contemporary period encouraged by American colonial education as readers found reading experience more pleasurable. Filipino writers (Rizal and Arguilla and others) used this way of writing as their instrument to let readers understand Filipino culture or “Filipino soul.” Acuna (2017). Arguilla dreamt of more ambitious results in preserving local color culture by using local color in his stories that invites readers to experience something oriental or exotic. Acquisition of writing skills is another goal. Narrative essay writing, as with other essays, does require writers to organize their thoughts and ideas prior to giving them shape and form on paper. Even though the narrative essay looks like other essays, it challenges the writer to be a little more creative to present its story in style. And in telling the story, students need to focus on particular structure in much the same way that argumentation and comparison-contrast essays require a definite structure.

Writing enables learners to make and to create meaning to a community of readers (Burgos, 2017). As learners present their ideas in writing, they are called upon to follow the text flow through orderly sequence of sentences. This requirement is a big help to them because they learn discipline in expressing ideas. But writing can be disturbing and hard for many students in high school because they may experience difficulties organizing their thoughts in giving information, writing sentences into paragraphs, and essays. Errors include faulty paragraph development, misspelled words and grammar errors that hinder learners from expressing themselves clearly Cihak and Castle (2011).

As Burke, Poll and Fiene (2017) express with regret, the teaching of writing is not given much concentration in second language instruction. But with a change in standards, this is changing because of the observation that students find it very difficult to write, a pressing concern that must be addressed indeed.

The present researcher, who teaches English 8 in a public school, deems it appropriate to use the works of F. Sionil Jose in enhancing reading skill and developing writing skill following the theory on reading-writing connection.

The study focuses on the local color of F. Sionil Jose’s essays as springboard for improved narrative writing. It deals with how learners respond to the reading materials and use the input in writing a narrative essay. Specifically, this study pursued answers to the following questions:1. How may the English teacher present to students the concept of local color in selections?2. In what parts of the selection is local color employed?3. How may students appreciate and apply the concept of local color in their own narrative writing?

Materials and Methods

This study used mixed methods of sequential exploratory design. The students' scores in their pretest and posttest were obtained using T-test to determine the effect of using local color in narrative writing of students. This study focused on how exposure to local color aids acquisition of narrative writing skills of Grade 8 students. The written output scores provided information on how students apply the concept of local color in their narrative writing. This study utilized two instruments in gathering data needed for interpretation and analysis of this study. The first instrument was a questionnaire which had been validated by the researcher's thesis adviser. The first part sought information about the respondents' writing experience, how they apply the concept of local color in their own narrative writing. Another questionnaire consisted of teachers' information on how teachers introduced local color in each of the selections discussed in class.

The second instrument was a teacher- made pretest and posttest administered to the Grade 8 respondents. To measure the students' narrative writing skills, a scoring rubric adapted from *Criterion-Based Holistic Scoring: A Writing Handbook in New Jersey* (2008) was utilized. (see appendix E on page 99). After the questionnaires were accomplished and retrieved, the gathered data that answered the problems were tallied and tabulated. The researcher used average mean, frequency, and t- test to determine the performance of the participants during the pretest and posttest. The scores were analyzed using scoring rubrics. The post writing test was administered after the intervention. Microsoft Excel Program (data analysis) was used to present findings in tabular form. To test how exposure to local color contribute on acquisition of the narrative writing skills of Grade 8 students, t- test was used.

Results and Discussion

The study can be summarized as follows:

1. How may the English teacher present to students the concept of local color in a selection?

This study involved Grade 8 English teachers from Cluster VI of the Division of Pampanga for the interview and test. Twelve respondents took the assessment, and during the interview, gave their responses to the five questions prepared by the researcher.

Informant's Definition of Local Color. The participants gave their definition of local color based on their own understanding. Results from the interviews showed that teachers understand and spot local color when it is used but defining it varies depending on how they have been exposed to it. APH 1, SMHS 3, and SMN 1 defined local color as the features of localities peculiar to a community, and representations of a certain place. Teachers BAG 1, BAG 2, SHS 1, SHS 2, and SP

1 defined local color as beliefs, traditions, cultures, dialect, and custom of people living in a community, while SMHS 1 and SMHS 2 defined it as what makes a locality what it is and SMHS 4 explained that local color is a style of writing that particularly deals with the specific characteristics of a place.

Teacher's Presentation of Local Color in the Selections. Majority of the teachers introduce local color in the selections by using charts, pictures, and videos which they find effective since their learners enjoy seeing pictures particularly when related to their personal experiences. Some focus on unlocking difficult words to illustrate information in the selections and giving motivational statements before discussing the selection. Meanwhile teachers provide historical background of the author. All this means that learning is effective when the selection is presented appropriately.

Teacher's Techniques in Understanding Local Color in Selection. As respondents were asked about their techniques in understanding local color in the selections, 10 of the 12 teachers use multimedia presentation like PowerPoint presentation, visual aids like graphs, tables, charts and diagrams. Seven teachers facilitate interactive discussion while one teacher assigns home reading and six teachers point to context clues and symbols in understanding local color in the selections. Four teachers allow students to brainstorm on the topic. In general, most of the teachers prefer to use visual presentations rather than interactive discussion, home reading and brainstorming while a good number of use context clues and symbols to identify instances of local color.

Students' Activities after Discussion. Another way to find out if learning has taken place is to conduct postdiscussion activities. For the last question on what activities follow discussion, five participants cited group activities like skit, role playing, and interview. Four teachers assigned written or oral reflections, song composition and reporting, while two teachers give games where students work collaboratively and learn from one another. Nine teachers use visual presentation such as group presentation, PowerPoint presentation or traditional manila paper for reporting. Learning activities after discussion help teacher discover students' skills and abilities in showing creative and innovative presentations whether individually or in a group.

Level of Teachers' Familiarity with Local Color as Revealed in Assessment. After the interview with the 12 respondents, the researcher conducted an assessment where seven paragraphs from the 7 selections were used to gauge teachers' familiarity with local color. five teachers (42.67%) are extremely familiar with local color with 6-7 scores while 6 or 50% of them who got scores of 4-5, which means that they are moderately familiar with the technique. Only one teacher scored 3 out of 7 indicating she is somewhat familiar with the use of local color in the selections. From the results, most of the teachers are familiar with local color and understand its use in different selections.

Frequency of Local Color Encountered by Teachers in the Selections. From the 7 selections of F. Sionil Jose, teachers very often encountered local color in three selections; they often found it in two selections, rarely found it in one and hardly found it in another. Majority of the feedback of the teachers regarding the selections used, indicate that local color is employed in the reading selections used in Grade 8 English. This means that these selections are useful in teaching students about local color and its contribution to effectiveness of the word.

2. In what parts of the selection is local color employed?

Discussion of Local Color Employed in Introductory Part of the Selection. Local color in selections 4,5 and 6 is presented in the introduction where the author wrote vivid descriptions of time and place. Even though these three selections dealt with different topics, their use of local color similarly make the works compelling. The author uses descriptive words up to small details of the selections to spur readers use their imagination as they read.

Discussion of Local Color Employed in Body of Selection. Selections 1, 3, 4 and 5 show that local color can be seen in the middle part of the selection. The author emphasizes details in the body as he discussed each topic using local color. From these four selections, it is observed that local color helps readers understand text as they relate it to their personal experiences.

Discussion of Local Color Employed in Concluding Part of the Selection. In four selections: "Travel Time" (selection 1), "*Balay Not Tulay*" (selection 2), "Don't Blame *Masa* If They Elected *Ampao*" (selection 5) and "Education as Salvation" (selection 7), local color is presented in the concluding part. All these selections wrap up the statements in the introductory part and summarize details in the body. The author uses local color not just to show what happened but also to stimulate readers' imagination.

Discussion of Local Color Employed in All Parts of the Selection. "Don't Blame the *Masa* If They Elect *Ampao*" is the only selection among seven selections that shows local color in all parts of the text. The author consistently uses local color in this selection from introduction, body and conclusion. It is clear that the author's purpose is achieved and local color is used effectively.

In general, F. Sionil Jose's essays use local color whether in introduction, body or conclusion. Local color is spotted in the introduction in three selections, as the author describes the setting and leads readers to a generalization and gives specific information on what the topic is about. In four out of seven selections, local color is used in the body where the texts are expounded, and details are explained using descriptive words. Local color is used in concluding part of four selections not just for wrap up but to add impact to readers.

Mandombo (2021) stated that there is no one part of an essay that is more important than the others because each part contributes to its appeal. Introduction, body and conclusion have their important function to make the essay complete and worth reading.

3. How may students apply the concept of local color in their own narrative writing?

Analysis of Students' Pretest Output. As 30 respondents wrote their pretest essays, the researcher chose 3 outputs for analysis and comparison:

Respondent 19 started her essay by asking a question and describing the place she's scared of. Respondents 2 and 13 described the settings of the events narrated. These 3 outputs showed the importance of introduction; that's why they came up with a strong introduction, through interesting details of what they had experienced. For the body of the essay, the respondents gave details on what they had experienced while for the conclusion, they stated what they had learned from the experience.

The results show that the topic stirred the students to write and share their personal experiences. When they are motivated, to share what is inside them, they are sure to express it in writing.

Analysis of Students' Posttest Output. After having 7 sessions featuring 7 selections with local color, students were expected to write more colorful narrative essay on the same topic given in the pretest.

The essays of the same students were analyzed in terms of introduction, body and conclusion. Respondents 2 and 13 described the setting and characters in details while respondent 19 wrote detailed illustration of the place and time so vividly that the readers could imagine it.

The essays show that the body is presented in great detail from the physical description of the time and place and even the actual emotions the writers had felt. They capped the essay by indicating their learnings from the experience. In general, most of the posttest essays showed a clear descriptive narration of their unusual experience.

Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Output. Pretest and posttest of Grade 8 students revealed the contribution of local color in their narrative writing. All parts of the essay were there. However, from the sentences they constructed in the pretest, it was noticeable that they were just giving information. There was not much emotion, excitement, and nervousness expected of a scare story.

In the posttest essay, however, the introduction, body and conclusion came alive. The writers described the settings and characters vividly presenting happening in interesting details.

Suspense could be felt throughout their essay as they made use of symbols and stirred the senses with the sentences.

As results show, the essays developed and moved, describing the setting specifically the place and time where the scary event took place. Students used figurative language and symbols, setting in motion the imagination of readers who felt affinity with the tale being told. In terms of sentence structure, fewer mistakes were noted in the posttest.

As additional proof of posttest gain, the pretest mean is 15.93 while posttest mean is 18.57. The increase of 2.63 is significantly greater than zero providing evidence that exposure to local color of F. Sionil Jose's essays contributed to acquisition of narrative writing skills of Grae 8 students.

Conclusion

The present study brought forth the following conclusions:

1. Local color in a selection may be presented in different ways; in any part of an essay—introduction, body or conclusion.
2. The use of local color in literary texts can inspire students to apply the concept in their own writing within the limit of their experiences as it hones their writing skills and enriches their narrative writing with details.

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