

To wake up a sleeping dragon with no armour

Reconnecting with myself through a Literary Competition

Teresa Leão

Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Portugal

teresagbleao@gmail.com

Cláudia Susana Nunes Martins

Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Portugal

claudiam@ipb.pt

Resumo

Com base na metáfora do dragão adormecido, pretendemos relatar a nossa participação no Concurso Literário da Escola de Educação. O objetivo é demonstrar como a literatura e o contar de histórias desenvolvidos durante a infância foram de importância primordial não só para a criação de mundos fantásticos pessoais, mas também para o aperfeiçoamento de competências de escrita. Paralelamente, a existência de atividades académicas, que não a habitual *praxe*, potencia o relacionamento entre alunos e professores e a ligação emocional com a instituição. Por fim, este relatório tenciona, também, refletir sobre a forma como a nossa participação em duas edições do Concurso Literário ao nível do 1.º ciclo do ensino superior permite consolidar competências potencialmente reforçadoras de um futuro de sucesso. Palavras-chave: *literatura; contar histórias; competências de escrita; atividades académicas; concurso literário.*

Abstract

Based on the metaphor of the sleeping dragon, we intend to report on our participation in the Literary Competition of the School of Education. We aim to show how literature and storytelling developed during childhood were of paramount importance not only for the creation of one's personal fantastic worlds, but also for the perfection of writing skills. Additionally, the existence of campus activities, besides the usual *praxe* (hazing freshmen and freshwomen), encourages the bonding between students and professors and the emotional connection with the institution. In the end, the report intends also to reflect on how participation in two editions of the Literary Competition at undergraduate level will exert a lasting effect on our future.

Keywords: *literature; storytelling; writing skills; campus activities; literary competition.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature and storytelling have always been present in my life, having had a childhood that was largely filled by the joy of the colourful, fantastic worlds that made up my favourite books and stories. Once I was confident enough with my writing skills, creating my own worlds and characters turned into one of my hobbies.

As time passed and responsibilities became bigger, my writing became less frequent, since I felt there wasn't much purpose to it anymore. Initially, the world of adults appeared to me to be less interesting or inspiring. However, at the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, I was lucky to meet several people that dared to keep their inner child alive, both students and professors. This article will provide an insight into how my sleeping dragon was awoken, through the Literary

Competition, without any need for armour, and how I believe it to be an incredible as well as motivational initiative.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LITERARY COMPETITION

First and foremost, I hold on to the belief that the academic experience can be greatly improved with the existence of campus clubs, activities and, in this particular case, competitions. It allows the students to partake in experiences that will most likely grant them with more knowledge, probably outside of their field of study. Furthermore, to create opportunities for oneself to explore new or old interests and to get involved in projects is to allow oneself to grow. An active participation in the school activities and participation in competitions is bound to make students feel more integrated, confident and helps them develop their personal and professional skills (cf. The College of St. Scholastica, 2017).

I first heard of the Literary Competition during my first year of studies, but it was not until the second year that I finally decided to participate. That same year I started having English classes with professor Cláudia Martins, who is very much involved in the organization of said competition, and is all about giving her students freedom to explore their creativity and push them out of their comfort zone. It was because of this freedom and enticement that my passion for writing was once again revived, thus waking up this sleeping dragon. Soon enough, when time for the Literary Competition came around, my professor promptly suggested that I took part in it. Seeing that someone took a liking to my writing was already enough to motivate me to participate, but here is another important reason and why there was no need for armour to handle this dragon: anyone, from any school and with their own writing style could participate. There was no need for extreme formalities or over the top, exquisite grammar. There was no requirement for established popularity or a particular genre. I felt that this was an amazing opportunity to restart putting the way I interpret feelings and situations into words without any manipulation to make it look better or protect it from outside opinions.

As a matter of fact, the competition is organized in a friendly and inviting way, given that anyone interested in it does not need to submit their *magnum opus* to be qualified. The submission options so far included short stories, micro tales and poetry, which is diverse and simple enough to catch the attention of many possible participants. Moreover, the pieces can be written in more than one language, from Portuguese to English, or French to Spanish, making it feasible for international students as well. Additionally, it can be a way of bringing people with at least one common interest together, creating an environment for sharing and creating new ideas that universities or any other higher education institution should be all about.

Despite all of this, you may be wondering: what are the benefits of participating in such competitions? Most people that write as a hobby have pondered publishing their work, in the future, and an increasing number of people take writing as a form of therapy and expressing themselves, as De Botton upholds (2018); however, not everyone accomplishes such a thing. Nevertheless, in the case of those who still want to give it a try, writing competitions is a confidence boost, as Amy Lord says in her article, and having a deadline makes one more

focused on their final goal, that will end up always receiving some kind of feedback (2014). For Morton S. Gray, “*writing is a constant learning process and is generally about persistence*” (cit. Lord, 2017), that requires you not only to keep improving, but also to put your work out there. Thus, for anyone that is considering entering the next editions, keep in mind that this is also a way to get plenty and varied opinions on your work, some that can even be surprising and far from anything you could have thought of.

In my experience participating in two editions, I realized that to pick up on writing once again propelled me into reconnecting with a part of me that I had forgotten. This part was then merged with whom I had become in the meantime, which resulted in a very characteristic and new writing style. Then, landing third place with my first submission and, most recently, first place, left me thinking that it was possible for me to create something that other people truly enjoy reading and hopefully getting my message across. This has motivated me immensely, for I now plan on continuing to develop and improve this skill. Additionally, it has originated my recent goal to plan and start a writing blog, so as to persist with my desire to share mine and other people’s tales with whomever appreciates reading them. It is fortunate that a simple opportunity like this one has left an impact big enough to make me consider something for the future related to it.

CONCLUSION

Taking everything into account, one can conclude that a Literary Competition is a wonderful initiative that creates a space for those who enjoy writing to share their work and see it be validated and appreciated. In fact, for some people, it might be the starting point, the tool to wake up their own sleeping dragon or lure them out of the cave. It welcomes everyone and all the professors involved are ready to give anyone the motivation to get started, if need be. As I have come to realize, the world of adults can also be full of colours and everyone has a little bit of a storyteller in them.

References

- De Botton, A. (2018). The Desire to Write. *The Book of Life*. Retrieved on 28/09/2019 at <https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/the-desire-to-write/>
- Jenkins, S. (2017). Benefits of Writing Competitions. *A writer on reading, writing and life*. Retrieved on 28/09/2019 at <https://sally-jenkins.com/2017/02/02/benefits-of-writing-competitions/>
- Lord, A. (2014). On benefits of writing competitions. *Ten Penny Dreams*. Retrieved on 28/09/2019 at <http://www.tenpennydreams.com/2014/11/15/benefits-writing-competitions/>
- The College of St. Scholastica. (2017). The importance of community participation: Why college clubs & organizations matter. *The College of St. Scholastica*. Retrieved on 28/09/2019 at <http://www.css.edu/the-sentinel-blog/the-importance-of-community-participation-why-college-clubs-and-organizations-matter.html>