

Literacy Narratives – Reflection and Peer Review

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Peer reviews, including reflection and connections and how the self-awareness developed from the literacy narratives can be used in teaching:

Icha:

Hi Icha. Thanks so much for submitting your literacy narrative. I particularly liked the clear and structured story with many examples of books and specific experiences. This brought it to life and made it engaging to watch.

Our commonalities;

- Both of our literacy developments were impacted greatly by books we experienced through pleasure reading as opposed to school, at various points during our childhood and teenage years. We both developed, a passion for adventure type stories. The Famous Five and Harry Potter are two series that we both explicitly mentioned.
The memories we both hold here show just how impactful and important pleasure reading can be.
- It seems that for both of us, the exact way in which we learnt to read may have been natural and less structured. I describe early reader books my parent's bought me and the graded system at school, but actually, the exact way in which I learnt to read is not completely clear in memory. It certainly wasn't the systematic phonics that exists today. From memory, it was largely very top down, being exposed to words and sentence structures, learning much by sight, and having phonics incorporated in the form of noticing and being shown patterns and features once whole words had already been exposed to first. There are some connections here with the learning to read template that you mention (although I know that this was for your learning of a different language of Indonesian).
This does show that although systematic phonics is well shown to be effective, especially for ELL's who have less overall language awareness and background in English to support them, early exposure to whole words and sentences and how they can be read does have benefits. I have seen this in my own students.
- You mention that your dad loved reading, and this was instilled into you.
This wasn't a point I thought of when preparing for my literacy narrative, but reflecting on yours, I see the significance of it. Both of my parents always loved reading and would read themselves every day. Seeing their passion had an impact on me and was another factor that inspired my love of reading.
It shows the importance of an environment that models and enhances the beauty of reading.
- Although in slightly different contexts, both of us used personal writing projects to support our reading journeys. You developed a close relationship with a pen pal and wrote a diary. I began writing novels, and also kept diaries at various points.

Writing can definitely have an impact on enhancing all round literacy and specifically reading development.

Our differences;

As described, it seems that there were many similarities between the ways that we learnt to read and developed and became literate in general and in our first languages. The key difference is that your literacy journey has been in two languages – massive respect for this – and for English specifically, this began a little later.

- You used songs and TV shows in English to support with all round language development and literacy in turn. Although with English my home language and mother tongue, this was less necessary for me, I can see the benefits of it. Indeed, the TV show and music you mention, I can relate to.

This shows just how important (appropriately selected) use of music, videos and TV shows can be for supporting EAL learners.

- You have experiences translating stories between languages, which can be really enriching for literacy development in both languages. It was really insightful to hear about the challenges such a process involved, with regards to keeping the original writers voice, but making it appropriate for the new language and culture, as you describe very vividly. This connects with what I have heard before regarding how difficult it was to translate the Harry Potter books in particular. As I am continuing to develop my second language myself, I can begin to relate to the challenges that might exist here.

Massive respect to you for your work here.

Effective translation is definitely an important skill that could develop language awareness and literacy across languages. It is perhaps something we could explore with our students.

Further difference:

- You have made strong efforts to continue with all types of reading, including novels, even to the current day. While I continue to explore non-fiction, I need to re-find my routine for reading novels. It always supports you to continue to enhance and see new ways of using, even your first language, as well as developing an appreciation for literature and stories.

Echo:

Hi Echo. Thanks so much for sharing your literacy narrative. I really like the clear journey you take us on, and how you explain the powerful impact each stage of your journey had on you. It is easy to follow and you strike an effective balance between professional presentation, while maintaining a natural and conversational style so that the viewer feels they are in a real conversation with you.

Our similarities:

- We both found stories and works of fiction during our primary school years that had huge impacts on us and developed a close bond with stories and reading. Harry Potter books are those we share a love of.

The impacts of books we fall in love with on our literacy and hence all-round development cannot be understated. As teachers, we should work with our students to encourage exploring all types of books, especially those that might connect with our interests. We can guide them to find a love of literature in this way.

- As we grew older, later into our teenage years, university and early adulthood, we both began to diversify and broaden the types of books and material read, with a focus on non-fiction for example. You mention reading the work of great minds when you were at university. I also began reading books on science, professional development, business and later teaching by great minds. These really are important for learning in their own right, but can also continue to develop our literacy as we are able to both learn new vocabulary and new ways for expressing ideas.

To see these benefits also, we should consider encouraging our students to explore diversify literature as they grow up and grow older.

- I didn't include this in my own literacy narrative, but I can really resonate with your discussions on experiences with the books you now study with your students.

The National Geographic books are just some that I currently use. I find that, along with my students, I learn new knowledge and explore different methods of expressing ideas.

As teachers, we should definitely model to students that we are still loving reading, embracing it and learning from it, and that we can learn it with them.

Our differences:

- In your earlier years during kindergarten age, you were exposed to literature in the form of Three Hundred Tang Poems and Students' Rules that had a beneficial impact on philosophy and way of thinking. This was different to many children's stories I was exposed to. While naturally many of the western stories did have morals, teach about life and relate to childhood and growing up, it was often very casual. This shows the beauty of Chinese culture.

Such great works of literature are things we can expose our students to from an early age.

- You had enriching experience with storytelling from different cultures, for example, 'One Thousand and One Nights'. I feel this is a great way to broaden cultural perspectives and different methods of storytelling as you say. While I did get some exposure to stories from different cultures, it was only a little and not until secondary school (high school) age.

As teachers, we can benefit our students in this way by exposing them to stories from different cultures.

Alex:

Hi Alex. Thanks so much for sharing your literacy narrative with us. I really like this format and style. The timeline makes it very clear and easy to follow, painting the story. Working with the text boxes and relevant visuals it is engaging to look at and use. The bolded introductions and visuals also help tell the summary of the overall story in a way that is quick to read, with the rest of the text box giving the detailed, but clear and relevant information. The reader can read through in chronological order, and also easily find the different sections as they wish. Great job!

Our similarities:

- We have similar early years experiences in our first languages. We were both exposed to books or materials that supported early reading before formal reading instruction in school. This helped both of us develop some early reading ability, for example, recognition of some words, alongside a general appreciation for simply listening to stories.
Although we don't want to start formal reading instruction before students are ready, we can still expose students to print rich environments from a younger age.
- We both developed an early appreciation of stories through having many classic stories read to us. Although I don't mention them in my own literacy narrative, nearly all the titles you mention, for example, the Hans Christian Anderson books, I was encountered and loved as a child also.
Formal reading instruction is definitely not the first stage of a literacy journey. We should expose our children and students to books or stories from a young age for all the language and literacy benefits.
- We both have experience being taught cursive writing in our first language at primary school. It was an interesting experience to learn to write like this as a routine, then to go to a slightly different secondary school (high school) and find I was one of the only students who wrote cursive.
It can definitely be beneficial for our students to be exposed to different styles of writing for all round literacy development, it should always be considered how time is best spent in supporting our students with skills development.
- We both found books we enjoyed during primary and middle school age, that would undoubtedly have engaged us in reading, stories and literature. We both read Harry Potter. Although again, I don't mention it in my own narrative, I also read the Artemis Fowl books.
As teachers, it is important for us to expose students to varied books and reading content, especially those that we know are related to their interests, to support them to find a love of reading.
- Although not in my literacy narrative, I also experienced writing a range of different types of writing, for example descriptive and persuasive during the equivalent of primary and middle school years. I definitely found writing to support reading and vice versa.
We should remember the importance of writing for our students for supporting reading and all round literacy and language, as well as being a skill in its own right.
- Again, I didn't cover this in my own literacy narrative, focusing more on what I had done personally and for pleasure, I studied many similar works during high school equivalent years, including Shakespeare and George Orwell for example. While it is my own personally chosen books and pleasure reading that I remember more dearly, these works studied more academically also gave me an appreciation of deep writing and storytelling, as well as broadening my understanding of culture and history.
We should remember to expose our students to a broad range of books.
I saw that you noted in your feedback to me that during these years that reading can feel like something of a chore, with so much study done on the books we read. I can relate to this also.
Especially as we get to higher levels, during teaching, we do want to allow students to developing the skills and deeper understanding that can be obtained from studying works of literature, but want

to make sure we are never losing focus on building a love and appreciation of the works, which a big purpose of studying literature.

Our differences:

We share many similarities in our overall literacy journey, including in the languages that were our key languages of study at the relevant times. The big difference is of course that you began your literacy journey in Russian, with English taking the priority later on, after you moved to Canada. Moving to a new country and with a different language is not easy at all. Never undervalue the strength you showed and size of achievement in coping so well. I have the utmost respect for you.

Some further differences:

- In addition to Russian and English, you also studied further languages in French and Spanish that had an impact on your literacy development and journey and life more generally.

While I did study foreign languages, in the form of French for five years and German for a short time, and did indeed study reading and writing in them, there was always a very big focus on learning academically and for exams, rather than for communication or general literacy skills and so they had very little impact on my literacy journey.

For our students who are emerging bilinguals or multilinguals, it is important that we support them to develop literacy in all languages as necessary, for the literacy skills in the different languages to support each other and for them all to be meaningful and a part of the overall literacy journey.

- In terms of developing new literacy skills, while also affecting other activities in literacy, your university time was perhaps more impactful than mine. My undergraduate degree was in maths, and so apart from final year projects, there was little practice of literacy skills. It seems yours may have included more writing. The academic writing would have allowed time to develop a new type literacy skill which you conscientiously embraced the benefits of.

Reflection and Connections – Conclusion

I have made the connections with other literacy narrative and my related reflections above. I conclude here.

Looking at Icha, Echo and Alex's narratives, along with my own, a key way in which each of their journeys are different to mine, but similar to each other's was that each of theirs began with their own mother tongue, which is a different language to English. Their journeys very much involved two (or more languages), with English being introduced later and coming alongside the first language or taking eventually taking the bigger. I have the utmost respect for all three of them for their journey's here.

Looking at each of their experiences, being able to experience the second language naturally for example, still learning normal academic content, as well as focuses on natural content, including music and TV had huge impacts. These are ideas we could incorporate with our students.

Looking at all of us together, we all found books and stories at different ages which we loved and which helped develop a love of books. There are many similarities between the types of books. We all mention Harry Potter for example. As teachers, again we should support our students to find such books and reading content.

Many of us note also, that types of writing we practiced, either through out studies, or through our free choice, in turn impacted our reading and overall literacy development. With our students we should remember the importance of writing also.

We all mention how the types of books we read, both as a result of our studies and sometimes free choice changed naturally as we grew up. This is something we should allow for our students, to support them to develop their literacy naturally and find age-appropriate content.

Interestingly, none of us mention systematic phonics as we are used to teaching today. Although lots of us cannot remember our early experiences very clearly, it seems we all may have had more top down type approaches, with focuses on exposure, for example, through sight words and regular sentence patterns. Such environments could be combined with systematic phonics.

Despite these similarities, there were some differences that stood out.

There were some differences in the types of content we were exposed to. For example, Echo was exposed to much work of literature from different cultures, as well as powerful works for moral learning at a young age. This represents the beauty of Chinese culture, which she grew up in. Diverse and meaningful works, we should all consider incorporating for our students.

Alex's narrative stood out in that in addition to the English and his mother tongue, further studied languages also had an impact on his continued literacy journey and development. Where our students are emerging bilinguals or multilinguals, we should again, embrace this, allow their literacies in all languages to develop and support each other as necessary, and be part of their literacy journeys.

As we progressed into our adult years, our literacy journeys have all taken different paths, with the types of content or skill we have focused on for example. This is based on our own situations, career, personal life, and personal life journeys. We should all respect and appreciate each other and learn from each other as we can.

How I Will Use This Self-Awareness in Teaching Reading to Multilingual Learners – Conclusion

I have discussed my own experiences and those of my peers throughout this reflection and a little in my literacy narrative itself.

I conclude here, with a focus specifically on early years learners, which is my current context.

We all saw the benefits of being exposed to many stories and finding stories we love. I will continue to provide many books in the classroom and read many stories to students to support a love of books and reading. Based on my knowledge of students, I will provide opportunities for them to experience books that will be of interest to them, and can work with parents on this, providing recommendations for books at home also.

As my peers found, for multilingual learners, it is important to nurture literacy development in all languages, to develop all languages together, and so that they can support each other. Working with my teaching team, I can ensure that students have ample opportunity to have stories read to them and experience stories in both Chinese and English, to develop a love of literature in both. Stories can be discussed in both languages and using translanguaging.

With regards to formal reading instruction, students will be exploring this in English and Chinese at the same time. In early Chinese reading they will study Pinyin, the Romanised form of Chinese writing which will use blending and phonics in the same way as English and is the step towards learning Chinese characters. There will hence be much similarity at this stage. Students can be supported to see the connections and how the skills they are learning can transfer and support each other.

My peers and I saw the benefits of being exposed to word and sentence forms for developing some reading skills naturally. While I will continue to teach early systematic phonics, which is important, I will balance this with a print rich environment in the classroom, exposure to reading series including Reading A-Z and Oxford Phonics, which use common patterns and words to support reading, not phonics specifically. I will incorporate much exposure to word and sentence forms, for example, pointing to these when teaching and reading books to students.

I will ensure to model a passion for reading at all times. As well as an environment of books and stories in the classroom, I will talk about books and stories I like to students, join students in looking at books during free reading time and show my genuine interest and curiosity as we read books together as a whole class.

As per the benefits, some of my peers found when learning English, I will provide opportunities where possible to be exposed to English through media including TV shows and music where possible, and share resources for this at home. This can support all round language development and in turn, reading.

Finally, I will put a bigger focus on finding books from different cultures, including those that carry powerful messages, while still being age appropriate. I can provide such stories from my own background and culture and work with my Chinese teachers to provide those from the student's own culture. We can also work together to find books from further cultures.