

Liz McCosh
Angela Sowa
Writing 2701
January 22, 2018
Literacy Narrative

My first interactions with literature were when my parent's would read children's books to me at bedtime. Since my parents were divorced, I had favorite books at each house. At my Dad's house my favorites were Max Lucado's *You Are Special*, *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn and anything written by Dr. Seuss, but especially *Oh, the Places You'll Go*. My all time favorite book that my mom would read me is *Guess How Much I Love You*, in which Little Nutbrown Hare and Big Nutbrown Hare go back and forth showing each other how much they love one another based on their arm width, ear length and so on. As with most children's books, these books each have a greater message behind them that help children form their morals and values; the primary values across my favorite children's books involved relationships and helped me form my ideas about what a good relationship should look like.

Reading these books were my earliest literary experiences, and as such, they were very formative for my creation of values, interactions with literature and relationships with people. I still occasionally reread those particular books, books that can so simply and beautifully remind me of truths and values that I still wish to uphold in my life and in my relationships; however, I also learned from these earliest experiences, that I didn't like actually enjoy reading books, but I relished in the quality time that I could have with my parents during their readings.

I still value interpersonal interaction and quality time above reading or writing; in my mind, these interactions and experiences are leading up to a great adventure story that

I may want to write about someday, but if I were to write about them today, more information and individuals' stories would be lost. What I really like to read is just short stories about humans simply being: how people do things differently in other areas of the world, stories of people doing stupid things, recollections of loved ones. I enjoy reading *The Humans of New York* and *The Darwin Awards*, but I feel like I can learn more and be more impactful if I walk up to someone, strike up a conversation and ask about their story. Here, unlike in a book, I can actively listen to someone so that they get can feel the satisfaction of being heard if ever they feel silent. One of my greatest strengths is my people skills; I understand and care about people, and I have a special talent for bringing out the best in others. Therefore, I feel the need to have that real-time interaction with a person to understand them, gage them, and be the empathetic person that they need.

Writing has a place for me too; writing allows people the space to think through different ideas that would get too messy and convoluted in conversation. Sometimes conversation can help, but the ability to look back at exactly what you've stated isn't there for you to reconsider or reflect upon. Writing also gives us space to let as much or little time pass as we'd like before we revisit ideas or memories. Working through these memories over time, and revisiting them in a journal or on a Word document can help with healing and reflecting. One thing that I have spent time reflecting on is my writing process.

Last quarter in my Writing 2000 class, we were asked to reflect on our writing processes; this was something I had never given thought before. I didn't consider myself as having a consistent writing process, but as I began to write and reflect I started noticing patterns in my process. After some research, I learned that other students follow

similar and extremely different processes. According to Torrance, et. al (1999), there are three primary writing processes that undergraduates use; this study was conducted by having students write reflectively about their process throughout their entire processes of writing two papers. This study didn't find a singular superior process; however, it characterized three subsets of writing strategies among undergraduate students. The strategy that most similarly reflects my writing process is referred to as Procedure 2 by the study. In Procedure 2, students spend the majority of their time collecting information about what they're going to write about, spend considerably less time planning, and if there was planning, it was during translation; there was also typically no final revision stage. Procedure 2 was found as the most frequently used strategy amongst undergraduates (Torrance, et. al, 1999).

The values that I had formed from my earliest literary experiences and my writing process finally collided when I was in my sophomore and junior year of high school, when I was applying to join two new communities. The communities I found myself most interested in were driven by my core values, including my love for supporting others, investing in community and community narratives, and belief in egalitarianism.

The first non profit that I wanted to be a part of was Be the Change Volunteers (BTCV), an organization that believes that education is a human right and sees that right through by assisting communities that have reached out to them in building schools in different areas of the world so that kids have a place to learn. When writing my essay to be considered as a volunteer for BTCV's Peru trip in 2015, I tied my reasons for wishing to be a volunteer to my core values and my personal mission statement/purpose in life and on the trip. I was ultimately accepted to join the trip that year, and I spent a week in

Peru working with locals to build the school that the community needed. I find volunteer work like this to be very rewarding, and after returning from Peru, I decided that I wanted to step up my volunteer game in my hometown, so I made a change from a member of the Interact community to the president of an Interact chapter at my school.

Interact is a subset of Rotary for teenagers, where teens can work with each other while being overseen by Rotary members of the community to make change in projects of the students' choice. When I decided to start a chapter of Interact at my school, we, the members of the former citywide chapter, were in the process of breaking down the citywide chapter to accommodate for individual chapters at each school in the city. Throughout this process, I had to write many emails to many different adults that I had never met before so that I could get the approval of a Rotary sponsor for a chapter at our school, and I also had to write members of my own school community to gain the support of a teacher sponsor as well. During this, I continually had to reiterate my motivations for starting a chapter of Interact at my school to both Rotarians and teachers, and how having a chapter at our high school was going to improve citywide and school wide community literacy.

Before reading Flower's "What is Community Literacy", I hadn't put a name to the type of writing I was doing, but through literacy, I realized how I was writing for nonprofits all this time, and using my core values and interest in improving community literacy as the driving force for each volunteer opportunity, idea and project. Flower's ideals discuss the importance of breaking down typical narratives and replacing them with dialogue, which allows a community to inquire about others' experiences and actively involve themselves in social justice and change, this is a key part of my

involvement with nonprofits, and my purpose to make this world better, and to continue to Be the Change in every community I interact with.

Works Cited:

Torrance, M., Thomas, G. V., & Robinson, E. J. (1999). Individual differences in the writing behavior of undergraduate students. *The British Psychological Society*, Vol. 69, pp. 189-199.

Flower (n.d.). What is Community Literacy?