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Outlets in Developing Literacy

There have been plenty of events in my life that have shaped my literacy. While I find it difficult to remember each particular event or experience very well, I remember the key experiences most clearly. Some meaningful events in my life that have impacted my literacy would be reading the *Harry Potter* book series, playing my first video game, and discovering music. My literacy experiences have also given me a voice in the past where I felt that I had none.

I believe that one of the first books I was really interested in was *Harry Potter*. While I’m fairly certain it wasn’t the first book I read, it was the first book that really captivated/interested me and made me want to read all of the books. Unfortunately, there have only been a handful of books that have had that same effect on me; to name a few, the *Harry Potter* series as previously mentioned, the *Artemis Fowl* series, and the *Percy Jackson* series. I would say that the experience of reading those books for the first time stimulated my interest in reading a variety of books and made me more enthusiastic towards reading assigned books for school, which typically were very good books themselves like *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *Dracula*.

When I was in elementary school, I was first drawn to the mystery genre of books. In particular, the *Clue* series fascinated me, partially due to the game which I also enjoyed. For some reason, I was even at that point desensitized to violence, which the books had as a murder mystery series. The twists and turns of the book kept me reading each book that the school library had. It was just unfortunate that at some point there were no more of those *Clue* books to read and there were none when I went into middle school. However, I was introduced later on to other murder mystery books, such as *And Then There Were None* by Agatha Christie. Despite being somewhat afraid of a book that explores such dark topics as murder and death, the writing of the book fascinated me. These books must have had an impact on my writing skills, particularly my writing style.

I would like to think that the reason I try to write in a clear, methodical way is due to those books I read as a child and teenager. It is clear that I do not write the same way I talk. The reason for this is most likely that while writing, I can take more time to organize my thoughts correctly and appropriately; similarly as one would when writing a murder mystery book, leaving twists and revelations in the perfect places of the book.

Another impact on my literacy development has got to be from playing my first video game. When I was just five years old, my dad bought me a Nintendo Game Boy with Pokémon Blue as my first game. I remember playing it all of the time, bringing it everywhere I went. While most people would view that as a negative, and I can easily see the negatives of that, there are still some less noticeable benefits. Typically, most kindergarteners are learning their ABC’s at this point. I do not remember if I already had a good enough understanding of the English language but even if I didn’t, I still understood the game, which was entirely in English. I was able to understand most of the puzzles and challenges presented in the game despite my age. If I had not grasped the English language before playing the game, the game itself could have helped improve my understanding. Perhaps my way of thinking also affected me when playing this game.

A key fact about many of these types of games is that they had two options while playing; you could pause the game as well as save your progress. I figure that the tool was put in so that anyone could play the game at their own pace. In the future, I would use this tool to set up the perfect outcomes in the game, basically to ensure winning. There was a satisfaction in winning almost all of the time; particularly more satisfaction was involved when defeating another person at the same game. These early experiences also opened me up to technology in general.

I do consider myself to be a digital native but with limits. The generation I belong in was born right before the surge in media and technology. So, plenty of us have memories of times before such growth in technology. Some people go so far as to show constant nostalgia towards those times on social media. However, due to the increasingly expanding media and technology mediums, we have become accustomed to all of these new things very quickly, welcoming their benefits and drawbacks, somewhat blindly. I’m thankful that I have not become too absorbed in media and popular culture.

As a teenager, and more strongly as a young adult, I have listened to many different types of music and have determined my tastes in music, a lot of which I share with my dad due to my upbringing. I remember most of the time when we would be traveling or in a car, my parents would have classic rock on the radio, obviously something they enjoyed. This would strongly affect me in the future although it took me a while to become more interested in music. Before high school, I was mostly uninterested in music, with few exceptions such as Linkin Park. I’m not quite sure what caused my interest in music to grow but soon I was filling my IPod with many songs, typically hard rock or metal at first. However, after taking the course Music of the Beatles at the University of Cincinnati, I remembered listening to the Beatles on the radio with my parents and was reintroduced to them through the class. The course in particular analyzed the songs of the Beatles and the writing involved with them. It also taught me the importance of lyrics, melody, and depth a song needs/provides.

Books, video games, and music; each an outlet for myself, depending on my mood or interest. The most enduring of these outlets is music, which is unfortunate considering my background of reading. However, while books are a great outlet for personal reflection and can provide a great deal of intrigue, typically they could not be used to provide a voice unless they were your own words. That is why music is the enduring outlet of the three. With so many varying types of music, you can much more easily find a band or artist that can resonate within you, or that says things that you felt you cannot say. My opinion is that it is much harder to find that same kind of catalyst in books or in video games, typically because it requires a much greater deal of effort. While video games majorly provided me with enjoyment and happiness earlier in my life, they became more of a temporary type of enjoyment. I still enjoy them to this day but for some reason, not to the same degree as I used to; exactly opposite to my music experiences. Books and reading in general still have a chance to be brought back as a major creative outlet as something as engaging as *Harry Potter* or *And Then There Were None* can be found/made.

Unlike Sherman Alexie and Kilgour Dowdy, my peers did not judge me by my race or ethnicity. Instead, I was judged by my peers on certain qualities, for example, my habit of not always thinking before speaking. I can recall times in my childhood when I have talked without thinking first, which was either met with confusion or laughter. It still takes me some time to form my thoughts for a paper and for speaking. The issue is that I can redo my writing mistakes or word choices; the same can’t be said of those decisions when talking to other people. I can relate to Dowdy’s experiences in simply pronouncing over there. Peers of that age would tend to be overly critical of anything outside the norm, which I clearly was when I spoke without thinking. That is when I thought I did not have a voice most of the time. That is why I retreated to other outlets to vent my feelings about my peers. And that is why I write so much differently than I talk. There is a great power in making something written as best as you can describe because in speaking, you will typically not get all of the words exactly right.

When it comes to literacy, I have known that there is a great advantage in just being able to read and write; it allows you to gain more knowledge and absorb more material. While I do not consider my previously mentioned outlets as a form of literacy themselves, they did shape my views on it and its importance. If I had never learned how to read and write, I most likely could still speak English but I would not be able to advance my awareness of the world as easily as I can now. In this information age, we have so much information readily available, but without being literate and educated, you are stuck. Stuck in the endless cycle like that of the Native American children towards the end of Alexie’s narrative. Stuck and wallowing in self-defeat, which is exactly the opposite of what you should do. Alexie is trying to save not only their lives but of all children who have felt inferior from a perceived defect. To ignore learning and literacy is to ignore advancement. Being set in the ways of the past only will lead others to do the same, which means that the doors will remain shut. However with even a single outlet, literacy can be formed, nurtured, and thus save our lives.