

## **Tracing our Relationship Between Reading and Writing**

Reading and writing - two topics that often go hand in hand. One is not typically spoken about without bringing up the other. Additionally, most writing comes after some form of reading, and many readings can be better understood with writing experience. These two activities being so intertwined might lead one to believe that your skill level of both reading and writing would also be connected, and you may derive that you cannot be that good at one without a proficiency in the other. This is the question that we set out to explore - *How might your reading experience influence your quality of writing and vice versa?*

However, the more we learned about our unique and contrasting experiences, we began to recognize just how drastically different one person's skill level in reading and writing could be. Stacey and Ayana both consider themselves to be great writers but were always weaker than their peers when it came to reading. Stacey was able to further research this through resources that explore the interrelationship between reading and writing, while Ayana questioned exactly why reading is so hard for some people. Contrastingly, Britney identifies as a passionate reader, but struggles with writing, and she reiterates this through class readings. Interestingly, Victoria, being an English major, has passion and proficiency in both reading and writing, and she aims to explore how one may aid in proficiency in the other. All of these differing experiences revealed to us that a distaste for either reading or writing did not discourage one from creating a fondness for the other. Despite their shortcomings, each individual was able to recognize their strengths,

foster their development, and still do well in their courses. We were able to recognize that literacy strengths and weaknesses do not define your overall success.

Ayana's literacy journey is curious because she is an above-average writer but a below-average reader. During elementary school, she rarely met the reading requirements for her class. Feeling defeated, she began to believe that she generally was not very smart. However, years later, she was able to put her dislike for reading aside and recognize her strength in writing. One college professor, in particular, Professor Rogers, created a very supportive environment that allowed her to greatly develop her writing skills, leading to her becoming the confident writer she is today. Ayana loves writing because it allows her to uncover new and unique ideas that she otherwise would never have thought about. However, she understands that before you can do the writing, there is often assigned reading required, so she developed a reading strategy that allowed her to most effectively write the paper later. It consists of annotating, jotting down ideas for a paper later, and highlighting interesting ideas that sparked her interest. She acknowledges that the only time she is able to properly read is when she has writing in mind.

This perplexing idea that one can love writing and hate reading so much can be understood through this article that refutes the idea that learning to read is a "natural process"(Lyon, 1998) like some educators believe. Lyon further explains that preliminary exposure to reading is crucial when entering school for the first time, and "children raised in poverty, those with limited proficiency in English, those from homes where the parents' reading levels and practices are low, and those with speech, language, and hearing handicaps are at increased risk of reading failure"(1998). Ayana relates to this in that her housing uncertainty in early life, as mentioned in her literacy collage, led to disinterest in school. However, Lyon also explains that some children in none of these circumstances still struggle to read, and "more

research in reading comprehension is crucial”(1998) to understand why. Ayana was lucky because she happened to meet the professor that would allow her to grow immensely as a writer, but many kids do not get that opportunity. A better understanding of why kids struggle with reading would allow educators to not only create a more efficient teaching environment when it comes to reading but help them to not feel discouraged when something does not come naturally to them. It also might allow students to better understand how to use their strengths to improve on their weaknesses, much like Ayana did when she used her passion for writing to get through her readings.

To be a good writer doesn't mean you have to excel in reading. Although these two go well together, you can excel in one but not the other. Growing up when participating in state testing Stacey failed the comprehension portion but passed the writing section. When assigned a writing prompt she somehow always understood it or at least had the capability to figure it out. This isn't unique to her, there are others who are just like her, including Ayana. A factor is her literacy background, she grew up in a bilingual household. There wasn't a demand to read books since her parents never saw the importance of it. Her being the oldest of three, prevented her from having an older sibling to guide her differently. Due to the lack of enforcement reading has always been a challenge for her, Stacey never wanted to sit there and read a book. A factor to this was her not understanding books or finding the storyline interesting. If she tries hard enough to understand a reading she can. It takes a lot of rereading and annotating on her part, requiring a lot of patience. This is challenging because if you can't comprehend while reading it makes one feel incapable. No one wants to continue doing activities they can't comprehend. Many people need to read a lot more in their daily lives than they're required to write. This usually means they get less practice in writing than reading (Goodman, 1983). More often than not people are better

readers than writers, this applies to Britney. In Stacey's case writing was what she had more practice doing thus making her a better writer.

When it comes to writing Stacey enjoys trying to piece together the different parts of an essay. Depending on the requirements given it can take her a while to complete the assignment. Unfortunately, school-assigned readings aren't interesting enough for her to commit in the same way. English courses are too technical with the topics being learned. This takes the creativity out of reading and writing. Schools are known to focus more on reading than writing causing insecurity amongst those who don't fit the ideal. "The primacy of reading in the reading/writing dichotomy is an act of locating authority away from the student and keeping it entirely in the teacher or institution or great figure" (Elbow, 1993). Taking the authority away from the student takes the passion away from their literacy and prevents them from persevering in their strengths or weaknesses.

Growing up she'd see her peers excited to read books, she viewed it more as a chore. Reading is something controlled, writing is more freeing. She, unfortunately, didn't connect herself with having positive sponsors in high school. In high school, her literacy practices decreased but in community college, she had a different experience. She recalls having a few college professors who had an impact on her literacy. The professor with the largest impact was the department chair of La Raza Studies at her community college. The assigned essays were challenging because in-class readings had to be cited. It wasn't easy for her but pushed her to improve her weaknesses. This improved her comprehension and ability to write technical essays. This was her first time succeeding in college thus making her believe in herself. What helped her succeed in this class was the focus on writing rather than her comprehension. A successful writing curriculum will be one that builds on personal writing, builds the functions of

interpersonal writing, and helps pupils to find frequent real purposes for such writing with real audience (Goodman, 1983). She had to learn to cite in-class readings but had the opportunity to be creative with her approach, keeping her engaged. The professor focused more on her ability to write rather than her comprehension. If more professors focused on writing more than reading or at least gave it the same value more students would persevere.

Throughout Britney's years in middle school and high school, her older sister would recommend young adult books to pass along. Britney liked some of the books her sister would pass on to her. At times she felt the books her sister passed on to her were more advanced for her age range. This made Britney feel overwhelmed due to the unknown words being used and the pages the books had. As a result, Britney could not finish some books her sister would recommend to her. What was helpful for her to start and finish a book that her sister would recommend would be to read them aloud in her room. This would help Britney in order to follow along and to say and pronounce words that she may not understand. In Goody & Watt's (1963) "The Consequences of Literacy," the authors talk about oral communication and how it has a "considerable effect upon both the content and the transmission of the cultural repertoire." In Britney's personal literacy experience, she believes this is true. Through oral communication, there is a clear effect in regard to the content and flow of the book she is choosing to read.

Britney's writing experience is more complicated. She tends to get stuck while reading an essay template and before starting, automatically believing her work will not meet the standards. This pushes her to get behind on her work and results in an ongoing cycle of doubt and procrastination. However, Britney always surprises herself. Once she pushes back her fears of self-doubt, she does not stop writing. This may not be healthy at times but working under pressure and close to deadlines has helped Britney complete essays. The essays turn out pretty

well also. She tends to think a lot when she writes and is very thoughtful when it comes to writing analysis portions of an essay. When reading Ong's (1986), "Writing is a Technology that Restructures Thought," the author mentions, "Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form." Britney believes this also ties back to her literate experience. Writing has helped her extend her own horizons when it comes to thinking and applying this to her own reading experience. She thinks more about the context and the words that are provided in a text or in a piece of writing.

When analyzing Britney's literacy experiences with her group members: Victoria, Ayana, Stacey, she learned that she has some things in common when it comes to each other's literacy practices. Victoria's exposure growing up around older sisters has helped her strengthen her reading and writing skills by reading to them at a young age. For Britney, it was helpful to have an older sister because she was exposed to reading more young adult books at a very young age. Moving on, Ayana mentions how she has slowly drifted from writing. Britney also feels like she has drifted from writing. If it were not for the UWP writing class, she would not write often or at all. For Britney, it takes an English or research class in order to have the desire to write. Lastly, Stacey mentioned that she would like to get back into reading novels that she finds interesting. Britney relates to Stacey's experience also because she would like to get back into reading a novel of her choice and read from start to finish.

Overall, while looking back at Britney's own literacy and writing experience, she learned that it may have been hard at times but she has pushed through writing and reading. She never let her hardships get the best of her which has made her successful in her journey to reading and

writing. It is also helped to learn that she was not alone and individuals like her group members had similar experiences in regard to their relationship with reading and writing.

It was a natural thought that reading and writing go hand in hand. Especially while growing up it seemed in order to be a good reader you had to be a good writer and vice versa. Young readers are exposed to different genres of literature which ultimately helps them as a writer. Being exposed to these genres allows young reader's imaginations to run wild and helps them understand what writing in each specific genre looks like. There are a lot of skills that can be learned from being a good reader and writer. Such as being able to learn new words from books that would end up enhancing the dictation in writing along with helping vocabulary grow. Victoria believes that when young writers realize they enjoy writing they start looking at themselves as a writer which causes a major positive development in their reading skills. Because they see themselves as a writer when they read someone else's work it causes them to think deeper and allows them to usually get a better understanding of the reading. Along with that, it helps them recognize specific styles of writing and which well-known authors are recognized for that style which helps them when they want to write something in a specific style. When discussing how reading and writing are connected and benefit each other, Fitzgerald brings up an important point of how "Readers, to read words, must learn to deal with letters and phonemes and how they combine. Writers, likewise, must learn about letters and sounds if they are to spell accurately. To know graphophonics, readers and writers must develop both phonological awareness (the ability to perceive and manipulate separate words, word parts, and individual phonemes or sounds within words)"(Fitzgerald 2010) This proves in a more developmental way how connecting reading and writing can be beneficial. As Victoria got older and decided to major in English her opinion on reading and writing going hand in hand only

grew stronger because essentially these two cannot exist without each other. Usually, her assignments consist of requiring her to do a reading and then writing something based on that reading. When she starts reading she's already thinking about what she's going to write because as a writer it is the reading that is giving her that inspiration when it comes to those types of assignments. She finds a lot of inspiration in the writing she does in her free time from pieces of literature she read out of enjoyment. Since her opinions on reading and writing are based on her own experiences she's never had the opportunity to learn that you don't have to be good at both reading and writing to be successful in literacy. As she dove deep into Ayana, Stacey, and Britney's experiences she can see how different their relationship with reading and writing is from hers but how successful they are in literacy. Ayana isn't a fan of reading and considers it a major chore but is an amazing writer who has even presented some of her writing at a conference. Stacey, much like Ayana, isn't a fan of reading. She finds it to be controlling but she enjoys writing due to the freedom there is within writing. Britney is an excellent reader who enjoys exploring different genres but finds writing to be difficult. From this, they can see that they all have a different relationship with reading and writing that is unique to their own success despite any shortcomings they had. Seeing that they all had a different relationship with reading and writing but ended up being academically successful it's apparent that they do not have to be good at both to thrive in literacy.



## References

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