



My Reflection Stories

By: Katie Visaggio

~How literacy with its many stories has formed my vision of teaching.

I like to think of myself as a storyteller.
~Kate DiCamillo

Top 3 Reading Goals

1. Provide a variety of reading materials for independent reading.
2. Create assignments driven by higher order thinking for all learners regardless of their reading ability.
3. Model aloud comprehension strategies every lesson.

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Stories, Lots of Stories

Rudyard Kipling once said, "If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten." I am a storyteller. No, I have not published any books but I love to read and tell stories—my stories, others' stories, any stories.

From being read to by my grandmother to learning to read in Kindergarten, from finishing my older brother's spelling homework for him to tutoring a classmate with dyslexia in fourth grade, I cannot help but remember personal stories when I recall my past with literacy. I remember feeling truly proud of myself for learning my sight words in just a few days. I remember feeling nervous about the first poem I wrote in third grade when I was asked to share with my class. I recall the struggles my older brother went through as he fought his way through books in school.

Sadly, I think of the disappointment I felt when our reading class homework became all about worksheets and fact

questions. The drive to connect to the writer and the written word disappeared and left a hole for me. My days of writing, reading, and connecting to the words were replaced with loads of low-level, meaningless homework.

The joy that was evoked when Dr. Menk read to us in a Children's Literature course in college brings a smile to my friends' and my face when we think back to those days. Just a year later as I taught my third grade class during my internship in Wisconsin. Engaging them in the stories, their own as well as others' was the highlight of my intern experience and made for some hilarious and heartwarming stories for parents as well.

Learning to listen to my students' stories during my internship and first four years as an elementary level teacher was undoubtedly one of the most important lessons I have learned. Every child has stories, important stories that they wish

to share. Through their written words, created pictures, and acted out mini-dramas, they open their world to us.

My goal in this reflection is to revisit those stories, ponder them, and fuse them with new theories and practices so my students will have many stories to experience and treasure. By connecting reading and writing with publishing and new technology, I hope to provide ways for my students to make deep connections and share them in ways that are meaningful to them.



~Finley, and her favorite Franklin story in our Reading center.

My Story of Reading

As I sat for days dusting off cobwebs in my memory, trying to bring to mind my literacy experiences from early childhood to today, I remembered many joyful experiences and conversely realized areas I will change for my students. When I was little, books were truly my best friend. I had shelves of books and at least three diaries

that I guarded as my life. Sadly as most middle and high school students do, I abandoned reading in order to keep up with schoolwork.

Then a great change came about. Reading came back to life for me. Dr. Menk, my Children's Literature professor, read to us. He read children's

picture books, novels, short stories, newspapers, and even comic strips! It was so wonderful to get lost in stories again.

As college ended and teaching elementary grades started, I found myself overwhelmed and exhausted my first four years of teaching. Reading became a means to and end—

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My Story of Reading cont.

which I thought could not possibly happen since I was teaching reading to young ones! But sadly the pure joy of stories was set aside for the sake of work.

Yet again, reading has come back into my life—the combination of graduate school readings and preschool teaching has brought out the joy of finding the right children’s book for the moment. I love sitting in Barnes and Noble and reading book after book to match my plans for my energetic future readers. I treasure

being the first one to introduce them to a new story or author.

Not only has reading been rejuvenated in the teaching side of my life, but personal reading is once again a big part of my life. I love reading memoirs and connecting to real people’s life experiences. I find true joy in trying to view the world through someone else’s eyes by reading their words.

I desire more than anything to provide ample opportunities for my students to connect with literature on a personal level like I have been privileged

to do. I want to give them avenues to make their own stories out of what they read. Opposite from my school experience, I will strive to bring out the higher level thinking in my students. I want them to remember stories as part of their childhoods and become steady lifelong readers. I want them to hold fast to reading and not have the dips without it like I experienced. By helping them see the connections that can be made, I know I can help make avid readers out of my students.

A Few of My Favorite Children’s Books

- *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo
- *Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse
- *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson
- *Emma Kate* by Patricia Polacco
- *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis

My Story of Writing

My story of writing is truly a love story full of heartbreak and sheer joy. From the time I was in Kindergarten until five years ago, writing could either make me nervous with fear or relaxed with a joyful release.

Whenever I have written for the purpose of sharing with others, fear tended to override the joy that writing can bring. When I wrote anything personal like poems or journal responses in any level of school, I could never shake the fear of judgment from my peers. Putting a piece of myself out for others to critique made me despise that side of writing. When I was in elementary school I had a few teachers who would speak without thinking and could, and very often did, crush young spirits with their criticisms. Thus writing personally was not something I enjoyed from the time I was young through college.

Writing research papers was the opposite—my love story with writing started there. I remember my first paper on the country of Taiwan when I was in eighth grade. It was easy to write and I loved looking at the “A” on the top of the paper. I found research/report writing in high school to be my way of showing that school was easy for me and I believe I had a talent in writing about

subjects for research based papers.

During my fourth year of teaching, my dad was diagnosed with stage four cancer. I could have researched and written a beautiful, factual report on the effects of cancer on patients and their families but to write about how it affected me brought my heart right back to those fearful days with my elementary teachers. Fortunately for me I had a friend who lovingly encouraged me to start journal writing.

What an *amazing* difference I found with personal writing this time around! To allow myself the freedom to dig deep and let real, raw emotions come out in my journal writing helped me cope in a way that nothing could replace. I found myself and my own voice through writing. I let go of the expectation of judgment and writing became an outlet and a true joy for me.

Now sharing my personal journal with someone was something I felt compelled to do. A few close friends have read my writing about that sad time in my life. I have helped friends who are going through the same thing simply by sharing my words with them. The apprehension that I knew as a child is gone.

Now on a regular basis I write and have a deep personal connection to my words. I even write some poetry in my free time! I almost don’t “feel right” if I don’t write. I know that writing will be something I do for myself for the rest of my life.

My goal is teaching writing is seemingly easy to see now: to give students a safe place, free of judgment, to discover what writing can do for them. To help them hear their own voice and find the perfect words to share their stories. Had you asked me when I was in third grade if I loved writing, I would have probably burst into sad tears. I only hope that no student of mine ever feels that way.

My purpose is to gain their trust and provide them a way to share their voice, however that comes out, knowing how much true joy can be felt when a heart is opened, and this aspiration only possible because I have experienced it.



~My Journal

“Writing is making sense of life.”-Nadine Gordimer



~Greta working on her polar region diorama. After reading picture books about the polar regions, my preschoolers made dioramas using paint, Styrofoam, glue and modeling clay.

My Story of Visually Representing & Viewing

Acting out stories, creating eye-catching projects, connecting to supplemental videos in class—none of the above describe my past experience in the areas of viewing and visually representing. My school experience was limited to writing reports to provide information rather than more engaging tasks like charts, dioramas, and art projects. I vaguely remember watching videos for classroom rewards in elementary school not for learning purposes.

Thankfully my father loved taking pictures and I like to think I inherited his ability and interest. On my own I began incorporating visuals into projects and assignments late in high school and in college. My college professors encouraged me to continue to explore those areas as I planned more and more diverse lessons during my internship.

Teaching third and fourth grades gave me some practice in presenting material in more visual forms, which was out of

my auditory-learner element at first. Now teaching preschool, visuals are key and I am becoming more comfortable with my creative side each year.

The area I would love to improve is viewing. I crave resources and appropriate materials for PreK and elementary classrooms. I have limited experience with smart boards, webquests, and mimio boards and look forward to learning the abundant forms of technology and incorporating them into daily use in the classroom.

A Few of My Favorite Professional Development Books

- *7 Keys to Comprehension* by Susan Zimmerman & Chryse Hutchins
- *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* by Eric Jensen
- *Literature and the Child* by Lee Galda and Bernice E. Cullinan
- *When Kids Can't Read* by Kyleen Beers

My Preschoolers Favorite Book at the Moment:

Rainbow Fish and the Sea Monsters' Cave By Marcus Pfister



A Few of My Favorite Nonfiction Books

- *A Walk on the Beach* by Joan Anderson
- *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls
- *Educating Esme* by Esme Raji Codell
- *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert

My Story of Speaking

Speaking in front of large groups is something I enjoyed even at a young age. In elementary school I participated in our annual school play and spoke narrations in the Christmas program in church each year. I was oddly relaxed standing up in front of a crowd giving presentations in high school or leading campus tours for parents and future students. I felt comfortable with prewritten scripts as well as speaking without rehearsing.

While speaking publicly comes easily for me, now I have realized how some can struggle with this area of communication. My husband feels a great deal of anxiety when he needs to speak in public and his job requires him to do this often. I have witnessed how much preparation time goes into his speeches and how the nerves can debilitate him.

Much like my husband in public speaking settings when I am meeting new people and engaging in conversation with new acquaintances, I become extremely nervous. He thrives in small conversation and getting people to feel comfortable talking with him. I find myself clamming up and impatiently waiting for the “meet and greet” to end.

As a teacher I am relying on my experience with speaking and my husband’s experience to create safe places for my students to practice both public and conversational speaking. During our “All About Me” time on Fridays, each of my preschoolers has an opportunity to stand in front of our class and tell all about themselves. I remember that some are shy and so I teach the audience to be encouraging and I strive to give specific praise for their willingness to be

up in front of their classmates.

Preschoolers need a good amount of practice speaking to one another appropriately. “Use your words” is a phrase I repeat many times in a given day. I recall my own hesitancy to speak to new friends when I have preschoolers who shy away from looking up and speaking their feelings. I believe patience and practice at the early childhood level are key to future comfort in speaking situations. I view teaching these skills to my young students as one of my most important responsibilities.

~Katalina, age 4, sharing her “All About Me” in front of the class! She was so excited to share!



My Story of Listening

A wooden stool and a book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis signaled to me that the best part of my third grade day was about to begin. My teacher, Ms. MacFarland, diligently read to us every day. From the time I was a baby, I'm told, I always loved being read to. My dad would read bedtime stories and my mom would sing to me. I loved listening. My brother loved 80's rock ballads and I would sneakily sit outside his bedroom door listening closely. *Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse moved me to tears when my college professor read the ending to us. I love listening to stories, anyone's stories, whether in musical form or written words.

Because of my deep love of listening I incorporate read alouds and music into most of my teaching day. I have made a

promise to my preschoolers that I will read to them and sing with them every day. Even the most active four year old calms down during our story time. To help my students stay engaged we "tremble" when Rainbow Fish trembles and "swing" when Curious George swings. The infusion of movements with read aloud helps hone my preschoolers listening skills and makes the books come alive for them.

My students utilize a listening center in our tent where students can hear again and again their favorite stories like *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.

Remembering how even my third and fourth grade boys cried during parts of my read aloud of *The Miraculous of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo, I have made it my goal to in-

spire parents, grandparents, and siblings to read aloud to my students. I send home read aloud log pages and when a child returns one, they get to share their favorite parts of the stories with a classmate and me.

Knowing how listening to someone read benefitted me in so many ways makes me search for any way to help my students experience the same relaxation, excitement and joy.



United Through Reading

An excellent online resource for family read alouds:

www.unitedthroughreading.org



~Read aloud of *Rainbow Fish and the Sea Monsters' Cave* by Marcus Pfister.

Storytellers, by the very act of telling, communicate a radical learning that changes lives and the world: telling stories is a universally accessible means through which people make meaning.
~Chris Cavanaugh



~Eli, Finley, and Tyler relaxing and reading in during center time.

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How My Stories End...

As a teacher my story of literacy won't end until I put the lesson plan book down for good. Now that I am in graduate classes I am reminded of the importance of continuing my literacy education. My students deserve a teacher who can incorporate the most recent language arts components and strategies that work. While my college did an excellent job preparing me for my labor of love in teaching, it could not ever teach me everything I need to know in the classroom. How else can I improve without continually reading professional journal articles and books and attending professional development classes?

My literacy story continues with learning by listening to other teachers present at conferences. As a teacher I value

little more than time to talk with other teachers. Willingness to learn from their experiences and gain countless resources is vital to my work in the classroom. Creating a solid coalition of respected teachers at my grade level will allow for a community of professionals to engage in these types of encouraging and enlightening conversations.

I would love to take the step to become a writer for professional journals or a mentor to new teachers. To share my experiences even on a small scale is what I believe teaching encompasses.

My literacy future holds a recommitment to reading for enjoyment outside of graduate studies and schoolwork preparation. Giving myself opportunities to read for relaxation will rejuvenate my desire to work hard in

the classroom and continue to refresh my own comprehension skill set.

Taking the step of observing teachers with more technological skills will be a big part of my future professional growth. I want to be able to provide a variety of media components to my students and be able to guide them to utilize those resources for school projects as well.

By reflecting upon my past experiences with literacy more often, I can recall the positive and negative stories and have them guide my daily practice in the classroom. I will look for every opportunity in my classroom to create a safe, engaging community for students to read, write, and share their stories, just as I have known the joy of sharing mine.