

Zekun Li

Professor Jenna Zan

ENGL 1105 First-Year

Writing 8 September 2022

Literacy of My Upbringing

Before reading this essay, I would like you to think about this question: “Why can I read?” Also, I ask myself a similar question: “Why can I write this essay?” The answer to these questions is that we have the power of literacy. When we are able to read the first letter in the alphabet “A” in a book or write our own names, we then unknowingly gain this power that connects us to the entire world. The human brain has evolved over millions of years to acquire the intelligence of today, gradually understanding the use of eyes to read murals and the use of hands to record things. And so has my upbringing, from the beginning of my ignorance to now writing about my history of literacy with my hands.

I assume that writing your own names for the first time is not a difficult thing for you, my dear readers. However, as a Chinese boy, my first exposure to literacy was not an easy thing for me. I remember that day, when I was still happily painting on paper, my mom brought a blank paper in front of me. I thought it was my mom's encouragement of my master-level of painting and that I was going to draw a little duck on it. My mom knew what I was going to do so she made her first move. She quickly wrote three Chinese characters that I had never seen before on the paper. I stopped drawing on my paper, staring confusedly at these characters and then my

mom's face. She smiled at me and said, "This is your name, baobao (the nickname in my childhood)." After hearing this, I had never been so interested in those three characters because I knew they would stay with me for the rest of my life. I tried to write them with my pen, however, those strokes curved like noodles and I felt like I was drawing a weird painting. After a few attempts, I finally finished my "special painting". Then I compared my work to my mom's, I would say it was the worst copy of someone's work in my entire life. It's like contrasting a Van Gogh's work of art with a painting of a flock of roosters trampling underfoot. I lost my confidence and continued to draw my original painting. But my mom said I had to stick with it. She gently grabbed my hand, slowly teaching me the writing of my name one stroke at a time. The determination and the warmth of my mom's hands revived my confidence and gave me the motivation to write my name better. Finally, I could recognize my name that was written by myself. I saw in my mother's eyes the joy of having literacy for the first time and the hope for my future. Today, I always think of this story when I write my own name in Chinese. For me, literacy is not only an experience to improve my writing, but also a warm time to study with my dearest ones.

Speaking or presenting in front of a group of people is a horrible thing for the majority of students, including myself. However, I still admired my courage and confidence that I had on the day when I became a host for the first time. My kindergarten held a Children's day carnival every year. Each year would require a boy host and a girl host who were going to read lines in front of children, parents, and teachers. I was elected by my classmates and teachers because I can speak Mandarin fluently. But I was quite nervous and my mind was beating a retreat since I had never been a host before. I shared my thoughts with my teachers and they believed me that I

could do it. I practiced lines on the stage with my teachers every day after other kids were picked up by their parents. Finally, it was carnival day and all the children came with their parents. My heart was beating rapidly when I saw this lively scene. I recalled the moments when my teachers, parents, and classmates encouraged me and suddenly the nervousness disappeared. I grabbed my partner's hand and we walked together to the front of the stage. I read the lines as I practiced with my teachers and felt like a real professional host introducing an interesting event. Everyone in the audience clapped and applauded for us after we finished the introduction. This experience planted the knowledge of literacy in my young mind. Literacy is the ability to read skillfully, moreover, it is the ability to show your confidence and courage by using your language in front of people.

The path of developing literacy does not just happen in my childhood; it is also a lifelong process. It was the first year of high school. Because of my hard work and outstanding test results, I was promoted from ESOL English class to a regular English class. I was excited and determined to start a new journey in a new environment. However, things didn't go as I expected. The new class read Shakespeare every day, which was a total disaster for me as I couldn't understand those ancient English words at all. My classmates were all native speakers that understood more vocabulary than me. Soon, my English teacher assigned us an essay on our opinions on Shakespeare's opera Romeo and Juliet. There was no doubt that I had the lowest grade in class, which hurt my self-esteem a lot and an idea emerged from my mind that I wanted to return to ESOL class. After all the classmates left, I hid my frustration and mustered up the courage to talk to my English teacher. He believed that I had potential in English and asked me to come to his office hours every week. His encouragement ignited my confidence again. With

my goal and determination, I walked to his office after school and he patiently pointed out things I needed to improve on my English writing. Finally, my teacher posted another essay assignment and an opportunity to prove myself has arrived. I put all my effort into reading materials and tried my best to write a good essay. I didn't know how much time I spent in the library, but I believed that all effort would be rewarded. When I received the "graded" notification, I immediately opened my phone to check my essay's grade. It turned out that my belief was right: I got a perfect A+ on the grade. Literacy is not only my efforts to improve, but also requires the support of sponsors who played key roles in my literacy development.

Although in our life journey we will encounter many setbacks, these difficulties invariably also improve our literacy skills. To me, literacy is a warm time to study writing my name with my mom, an embodiment of reading lines as a host in front of people, and a process of developing writing skills with my dear teacher. "Why can I write this essay?" I ask the same question to myself one more time. Now I can answer this question confidently: "I am grateful for the person that I was, the person who was brave enough to face and overcome obstacles of literacy; I am also grateful for the person I am now, the person who is using his literacy skills to write this essay."