

Identity Gained and Identity Lost

The Problematic Relationship with Literacy Sponsors

Kizha Tiope¹

Writing across the University of Alberta, 2020
Volume 1, Issue 1, pp. 25-28
Published November 2020

Introduction

This assignment asked students to select a literacy sponsor, either an individual or an institution, from their personal experiences with literacy and explain to their readers how their interactions with this person or organization shaped or affected their development as a reader or writer.

Keywords: Literacy, sponsorship, bilingualism



This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>.

¹ Correspondence: tiope@ualberta.ca.

A well-accomplished literacy sponsor is often described as someone who helps a learner with their literacy even when their interests don't align with the learner's. However, if the sponsor's and learner's goals are misaligned, this can easily lead to the learner feeling neglected despite the support the sponsor gives. Even though my parents had sponsored me in developing early literacy skills when I was a child, their persistence in enforcing success through learning a new language led to feelings of isolation. It conflicted with my passion for the literary arts and my attempts to preserve my old identity in the languages I spoke originally.

One of my earliest childhood memories was reading bilingual books in Tagalog and English and writing my own fairytales in Ilonggo. And for that, I truly consider myself lucky that my parents provided me with books that initiated my love for reading and writing. Perhaps it was in the sole privilege of being exposed to an abundance of languages that I inevitably took it all for granted. Once I arrived in Canada at eight years old, I was forced to preserve my old identity or accept a Westernized one. As suspected, I lost touch with my mother tongue and my passion for literacy because it involved skills in a language I wasn't comfortable in.

To help me culturally transition, my parents insisted on speaking English at home, a decision that made me resent them to this day. Rather than believing in my ability to eventually learn English in school and giving me the opportunity to practice many languages, my parents blocked my ability to be literate in any Filipino language. At times, I speculated on the cruel possibility that they also chose to speak English at home to improve their own English skills more than my own. It's true that I learned English so quickly that I was placed in regular English classes in the same year I came, but I also lost the ability to speak any native language just as fast. The logic in their decision was understandable because immigrant parents want nothing more than for their child to do well in school.

My parents had always fully sponsored me as long as it involved excelling in my academics, but they lacked an understanding of my atypical passion for literacy. Having achieved their goal of sponsoring my English literacy skills to an adequate level, my parents deemed my fascination with expressing myself through language as unnecessary in progressing my academics. They would have wanted me to be interested in science and math texts rather than fiction books for my own entertainment. I was 12 years old when I asked my mother to buy me books for the first time. She refused because she considered it a waste of money. My parents gave me strange looks when I decided to give up my summer that year to write a sequel to my favourite book at the time. Sometimes I felt alone in my interests. Other

times, I felt relieved at the isolation because it gave me the opportunity to independently experience the world of writing and see where I could potentially go as an individual. Despite my parents' focal push away from the literary arts, I pushed myself to balance academics and my desire for literacy.

Even though it took me a long time to disregard my parents' passively judgmental eyes, I eventually learned how to gain comfort in my own uneasiness and regain the passion for reading and writing that had naturally come to me before. It's true that I didn't have my family to utilize as peer reviewers, but that didn't stop me from pursuing my goals in literacy. To this day, I still struggle with finding a balance between my Filipino heritage and a Canadian identity through language barriers, but it is a challenge that I have not faced alone these past few years. I eventually got the courage to confront my parents on speaking Ilonggo again in the house, which I can speak fluently today. Learning more Tagalog is the next challenge I face, but I am not afraid to face it because this time, I will have my parents as understanding literacy sponsors to guide me along the way.

This page intentionally left blank