

Second Grade Reading Journey

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Introduction

For this assignment, students in WRS 101 were asked to write a personal narrative relating in some ways to their writing experience. Dalton Low wrote a charming story about his struggles with learning how to read texts in French. With the help of a tutor in a library, a place he found eerie at first, Dalton not only improved his reading but gained a new perspective on how learning and accepting help can lead to personal growth.

Keywords: French immersion, language learning, library, reading, tutoring



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² *Writing across the University of Alberta* (WAUA) publishes undergraduate student writing from writing studies courses and courses focused on writing studies practices and scholarship at the University of Alberta. You can find WAUA online at <https://writingacrossuofa.ca/>.

This story takes place when I was in second grade, around 12 years ago. I went to a French Immersion school, meaning that throughout all my classes the teachers would speak in French, and the students would be expected to do the same. Practically every single class would be taught in French with the exception of English class, naturally. Math, Science, History, and even art classes were all taught in French. If a student were to have a poor grasp of the language, it would ripple throughout all their courses, leading to them having a poor grasp of everything because they could not understand what the teacher was teaching them. I was one of the unfortunate few who didn't have the best understanding of the language, leading to me falling further and further behind my peers.

The problem was first noticed by my homeroom teacher who was in charge of running reading tests for every student. I remember that when I did my reading test, I was only able to understand the most basic words. I had great difficulty getting through stories written for students younger than I was. I was about a grade level below what my peers were at. When it came time for parent-teacher conferences, my teacher brought up the concern and illustrated the risk of me falling behind all my classmates. The teacher recommended that my parents hire a tutor for me so that I could catch up to my peers. My parents, wanting me to succeed and have a good education, began the search for a new tutor. They found a female French immersion high school student who was willing to tutor me on weekends at the public library. As a second grader, hearing that I had to go to an extra hour of what was essentially like school on the weekend wasn't the greatest news. I was devastated; I cried and cried until I couldn't keep crying anymore, and then I just pouted and was an angry little child.

When I first started being tutored, the library gave me a strong sense of unease. The walls were a shade of grayish blue that felt like the inside of a hospital room. Light would spill in through the windows, but it only managed to make the walls look even more gray. For my second-grade self, this place felt like a prison that I would be freed from temporarily only to be yanked back inside like some cruel joke. I found my tutor at a table, and I sat down, refusing to look up as if my eyes were glued downward. The blueish-wavy texture of the table is still etched into my mind to this day. My tutor handed me a book and told me to read out loud, and so I did in a tone that made my frustration very clear. Every time I would make a mistake the tutor would explain where I went wrong. At first, I felt as if the tutor correcting me was an attack on my ego and my sense of worth, and I rejected the tutor's attempts to try and help me. Once I started listening to the tutor's instructions, I felt a strong sense of despair. I felt like I would never be able to improve, and I would always struggle to read, making my learning feel pointless. Once both of those feelings had dissipated, I felt ready and capable to try and improve my reading.

As the weeks counted upwards, things began to change. I became more comfortable in the library and with the tutor, and I genuinely began to somewhat enjoy the reading as I got more comfortable with it. With all these changes, I was improving more and more every tutoring session. Where once I would have had incredible difficulty reading the easiest of books, now I could read difficult books with relative ease. Eventually, the tutoring lessons had to stop, and by my final lesson it was staggering how much I had improved within that time. At this point, it was getting near the end of the school year, and there was one final reading test that I had to do.

The teacher called my name, and we went out into the hallway. She handed me the book that I had struggled to read during the first reading test that I did. Now, I read the whole thing without making any mistakes. She handed me more and more advanced books, and I read them all without any errors. The teacher then told me the results of the test, I was now a grade level ahead of my peers. She told my parents that in all her time teaching she had never heard of anyone improving that much. I was moved up into the advanced French writing and reading class, and I had no difficulties. This was the first time I had to struggle to try to improve myself, and it taught me the value of hard work and determination. When I heard the news of how much I had improved, I was ecstatic. Even for my second-grade self, it felt as if all the work had I put in was all worth it in the end. In future school years, I would advance to higher levels in French writing competitions. I graduated high school with a bilingual mention, which will allow me many more opportunities for further education and employment. The time I spent learning and growing as an individual paid off, and I had learned many important lessons along the way. I learned the value of hard work, I learned how to grow as a person and why that is important, but most importantly at the time, I learned to read.

This story is about overcoming obstacles, about bettering yourself even when it's difficult. My parents could have heard that I was struggling, decided that French wasn't for me, and switched me to an English school. But that wasn't the route we took, and I am very thankful for that. Perhaps if I had rejected the idea of bettering myself, that would have become the precedent, and I wouldn't have developed as much as a person because of it. If I had moved to an English program, I likely would never know many of the people I met through the French Immersion program that helped shape who I became as a person. I would never have known the teachers who inspired my love for Math, Science, and History. If it were not for my efforts in trying to improve my reading, I would be an entirely different person in an entirely different place. My journey to better my reading and writing also happens to be my journey to better myself. We must embrace the difficult parts of our lives because, in the end, we come out as new people, celebrating a new dawn with a whole new perspective.

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