

GOAL: Speak to Others about the Literacy Program

Contributed by Shanti Bhaskaran
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Overview

There are at least four ways you can make a difference by speaking to others about the literacy program:

- You can inform adults who need help with their reading and writing about the literacy program and encourage them to join;
- You can inspire someone to volunteer their time as a tutor to help an adult learn to read;
- You can inform your City Council, local legislators and donors about how important it is to fund your literacy program; and,
- You can raise awareness about the issue of adult literacy.

Here's an example: George, an adult learner, spoke to a group of nurses about the library's literacy program and how it has helped him. The nurses learned that they need to offer more help to patients who have difficulty filling out the medical forms they gave at the clinic. George suggested that they let these patients know about the free tutoring for adults that the library offers. He made a difference in the community by sharing his story.

Getting Started

The most effective way to talk to people about the literacy program is to share your own "story" of learning to read and write as an adult. Your story will form the basis for creating a "script" you can use in speaking to others about the literacy program. As you answer these questions, your tutor can write down what you say.

Think of answers to the following questions to flesh out the details:

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- What made you join the literacy program?
- What were some of the tasks that were difficult for you to do before you joined the literacy program? (Think of at least 2 concrete tasks that were difficult, such as reading your mail or writing a check.)
- How did you feel when you first asked for help and met with your tutor for the first time?
- What difference has being in the literacy program made in your life (at home, at work, and in the community)? Reflect on one or more specific accomplishments and how it has affected your life. It could be tangible, such as “I got my driver’s license” or intangible, such as “I feel I have gained self-esteem.”

As you speak, your tutor will write down the story – word-for-word and not changing anything – and then read it back to you, section by section as necessary. You may have to speak slowly so that he or she can get it all down. As you listen to your story you will probably think of other details to add or changes to make. After you are finished getting your story down on paper, you and your tutor can type your story into the computer and save it so you can go back and add to it at any time.

If you are interested in sharing your story with others in the community, consider the following:

- Do you wish to speak one-on-one to a neighbor or co-worker about the literacy program?
- Would you like to speak to community groups or give an interview to the press, speak on the radio or appear on television?

Talk with literacy staff about what you are willing to do and please know that it is O.K. for you to work on this goal to whatever degree you are comfortable.

Websites

www.libraryliteracy.org – Visit the California Library Literacy Services (CLLS) homepage and watch the video clips of learners (Enrique, Leon and Kristy) telling their stories. From the homepage, under the Learner menu go to “Learner Stories” www.libraryliteracy.org/learners/stories.html to hear from eight more learners (each of these clips is about two minutes). Discuss what you found most compelling about these learner’s stories.

www.toastmasters.org – If you are truly interested in public speaking, consider attending a Toastmasters meeting in your community. Toastmasters is a non-profit organization dedicated to “helping people become more competent and comfortable in front of an audience.” If you want to practice your public speaking skills with others who are *also* practicing their public speaking skills, this would be a great place for you. On this website you can search for meetings near you and you can visit them and observe first without having to join.

Key Vocabulary

- ◆ Speech
- ◆ Present
- ◆ Inspire
- ◆ Encourage
- ◆ Persuade
- ◆ Script
- ◆ Advocate
- ◆ Communicate
- ◆ Network
- ◆ “Elevator Speech”

Reading Practice

Literacy Publicity Material. Together read the brochure, annual report, website or other publicity materials your literacy program shares with the community. Pick out 3-5 important points you could use in talking to others about the literacy program. Before you read, you might want to brainstorm some questions you have about the literacy program. Highlight the answers as you read the material together.

Here are some possible questions:

- How long has your literacy program been serving the community?
- How many adult learners does it reach in a year?
- How are your literacy program’s services different from those offered by others such as the adult school? (Look for words like “free,” “flexible” and “confidential.”)
- What other services does the literacy program offer besides one-on-one tutoring? (Small groups, book clubs, family literacy programs, etc.)

Read What Other Learners Have Written. Many adult learners have published their own stories of learning to read as an adult. You will find many of these books on your library shelves and especially in your library’s literacy collection – don’t hesitate to ask literacy staff for help. As you read or listen to these audio-books, think about how your story is similar or different:

- Life Is So Good by George Dawson and Richard Glaubman, 2001, Publisher: Penguin. This is the story of a man who learned to read at the age of ninety-eight. Discuss why George Dawson thought it important to tell his story. This book is also available as an audio book (abridged) read by actor LeVar Burton.
- Pick a book of adult learner stories, such as Oakland Readers (told by students in the Second Start Adult Literacy Program) and read a story or a poem. Check with your literacy staff to find these or similar publications. Maybe your own literacy program publishes such a book. Reflect on how telling your story might inspire someone in the community.
- The Teacher Who Couldn’t Read by John Corcoran, 1994, Publisher: Focus on the Family Publishing. This is the story of a man who was a high school teacher and hid a secret: he couldn’t read. Discuss if this book reminds you of any experiences you have had in your life. This book is also available as an audio book.
- My Dad’s Thoughts: Bits and Pieces of Life by Ruben Dozal Jr., 2005, Publisher: Rosedog Press. Ruben is an adult learner with the Vision Literacy (Santa Clara County Free Library)

program. He writes poems and stories about his experiences. Read his poem, included here, and discuss what it made you think and feel:

Why I Write This Way

I write this way because I know not another.
I make no excuses except my spelling is terrible.
I make no excuses for my sentences
That are run on together
For I don't know where or how to stop.
I am not proud of my education for
I spent some time in school.
I tried very hard to study but it was in vain.
The reason I write hard and painful is
Because that's the way life has been to me.
Hard and without mercy.
I never could say to my girlfriend,
"meet me at the show" or
"here let me buy you a ice cream" or
"let me take you out to a dance,"
Because I never had money to do it with
That's what made me work in the fields and I started being with older people.
-- I miss my younger years --
That's why I became a working young man.
Working for my school clothes and gym clothes.
Working in the fields, the ever-lasting
Fields of lettuce and beets.
Eight hours a day for eight dollars a day.
I worked in the fields for two years
Until they asked me how old I was.
I told them fourteen, fourteen, yes I said.
The foreman almost had a heart attack.
Needless to say that was the end of work
Without a school permit.
But, then I got a job
Cleaning ditches for irrigation.
Ninety-five cents an hour,
Twelve hours a day at temperatures of
125°, 110° or 115° ALL DAY.
With your arms moving, back bending.
But at the end of the week, PAYDAY!
The money went to my house first.
This is what ended my education.
Work, always work since
I was about eight years old.
If you were to tell me this is the way you write
I would say to you fine, show me.

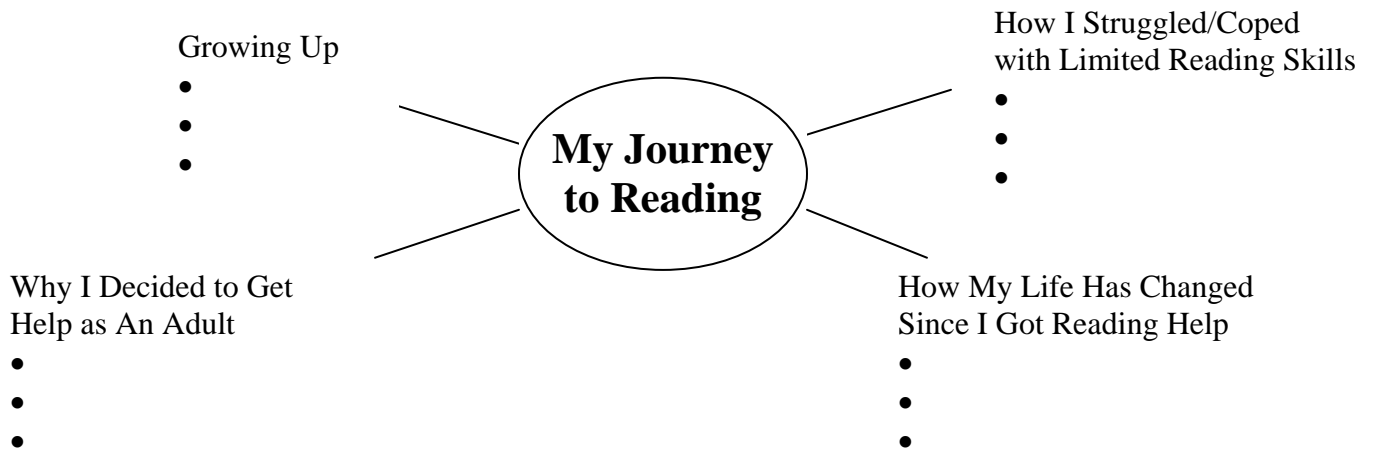
But, then I will tell you I write from my heart,
Not from books, but what I feel at the moment.
If someone reads my words and
It moves them and they tell me so.
Then my writings have served their purpose.
But no man has ever been given credit
By his own family.
But like I said before,
I am not proud of my education and
I make no excuses.

Printed with permission from Ruben Dozal. © 1998.

- Visit http://nces.ed.gov/naal/kf_demographics.asp#3 which gives data regarding the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL). (Pick a statistic or two to discuss, such as, 30 million adults read at below basic literacy level nationwide. Look at the graph together under the section: Number of Adults at Each Prose Literacy Level. What does this mean?)

Writing Practice

Mind Mapping. While you remember parts of your story and share them, your tutor writes them down in a diagram called a “mind-map.” It lists the key ideas and experiences you talk about in your story. Discuss together the sequence of ideas and write the first draft of the story. Here’s a suggestion for one way to organize your thoughts:



Point of View. Discuss with each other the importance of keeping in mind the audience you plan to speak to about the literacy program. Is it a potential learner, a potential tutor or a politician? How does this affect the message you want to share about the literacy program?

Drafting Talking Points. Write down the items you would like to discuss when talking with a potential learner, a potential tutor, and a community leader. Note that these talking points are just reminders for what to say. Get comfortable with these talking points by practicing. The key is to speak naturally and not to read the talking points word for word.

Letters to the Editor. Read a few letters to the editor published by your local newspaper. Pick 2-3 sentences from your story and/or your talking points that can be used to write a short letter to the editor. (You can choose to submit it or not!)

Games & Activities

Interview and Report. Pretend to be a journalist and interview your tutor. Ask questions such as:

- What made you join the literacy program as a tutor?
- What makes tutoring rewarding for you?

Together write down as many of the answers as you can and think about what you could share to inspire someone to volunteer as a tutor in the literacy program.

The Two-Minute “Elevator speech.” If you had only two minutes with someone (like the Mayor) on an elevator, what would you tell them about the literacy program? (You can role-play as the Mayor or the Local Legislator!). One way to create your own elevator speech would be to take your story and pare it down to its most essential parts. When finished it really should only take two-minutes to share! Here are some tips for developing and using an elevator speech:

- **Do** make your Elevator Speech sound effortless, conversational, and natural.
- **Do** make it memorable and sincere. Open a window to your personality.
- **Do** write and rewrite your speech, sharpening its focus and eliminating unnecessary words and awkward constructions.
- **Do** avoid an Elevator Speech that will leave the listener mentally asking "So what?"
- **Do** consider including a compelling "hook," an intriguing aspect that will engage the listener, prompt him or her to ask questions, and keep the conversation going.
- **Don't** let your speech sound canned or stilted.
- **Do** practice your speech. Experts disagree about whether you should memorize it, but you should know your speech well enough so you express your key points without *sounding* as though the speech was memorized. Let it become an organic part of you. Many experts suggest practicing in front of mirrors and role-playing with friends.
- **Don't** ramble. Familiarizing yourself as much as possible with your speech will help keep you from getting off track.
- **Do** be warm, friendly, confident, and enthusiastic. A smile is often the best way to show friendliness and enthusiasm, while a strong, firm voice the best way to express confidence.
- **Do** take it slowly. **Don't** rush through the speech, and do pause briefly between sentences. Breathe.
- **Do** project your passion for what you do.

- **Do** maintain eye contact with your listener.
- **Do** be prepared to wrap up earlier than you were planning if you see the listener's eyes glazing over or interest waning.
- If you are uncomfortable with the kind of speaking that the Elevator Speech entails, **do** consider joining a group such as Toastmasters to boost your confidence.

[Do's & Don'ts from Quintessential Careers http://www.quintcareers.com/elevator_speech_dos-donts.html]

Independent Practice

- Practice telling your story to someone you are comfortable with, such as a friend or family member.
- Interview a staff member from your literacy program and find out three facts about the literacy program that would be good to share with the community.

Real World Practice

- Talk to your literacy program staff and ask to sit in on an orientation your literacy program hosts for potential learners or potential volunteer tutors. Ask if they would like you to share your experiences briefly with the group.
- Once you are comfortable sharing the message that you have practiced at tutoring sessions, ask your program staff if there are other groups they would like you to speak to.
- If your goal is to speak to individuals about the literacy program, brainstorm where you can find opportunities to do so: at work, at church, to a neighbor or a family member. Keep a journal of who you talked to about the literacy program during the week. Discuss with your tutor what worked and what didn't, so you can refine what you say for the future.

10 Tips for Public Speaking:

- 1) **Know your material.** Pick a topic you are interested in. Know more about it than you include in your speech. Use humor, personal stories and conversational language – that way you won't easily forget what to say.
- 2) **Practice. Practice. Practice!** Rehearse out loud with all equipment you plan on using. Revise as necessary. Work to control filler words ("um," "uh," etc.); Practice, pause and breathe. Practice with a timer and allow time for the unexpected.
- 3) **Know the audience.** Greet some of the audience members as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to strangers.
- 4) **Know the room.** Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practice using the microphone and any visual aids.
- 5) **Relax.** Begin by addressing the audience. It buys you time and calms your nerves. Pause, smile and count to three before saying anything. ("One one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand. Pause. Begin.) Transform nervous energy into enthusiasm.
- 6) **Visualize yourself giving your speech.** Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear and confident. Visualize the audience clapping – it will boost your confidence.
- 7) **Realize that people want you to succeed.** Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative and entertaining. They're rooting for you.
- 8) **Don't apologize** for any nervousness or problem – the audience probably never noticed it.
- 9) **Concentrate on the message – not the medium.** Focus your attention away from your own anxieties and concentrate on your message and your audience.
- 10) **Gain experience.** Mainly, your speech should represent *you* — as an authority and as a person. Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. A Toastmasters club can provide the experience you need in a safe and friendly environment.

From: www.toastmasters.com

Milestones

- **Initial Effort:** You write your story and then from it you create a script and/or talking points that you can share with various audiences. Research Toastmasters groups in your area and visit one of their meetings to observe.
- **Making Progress:** You are clear on how the message needs to be conveyed for different audiences, such as potential learners and potential tutors. The message includes not only your story but information about the services the literacy program offers. You are more at ease and confident conveying your message in practice sessions.
- **Accomplished:** Depending on the scope of the goal as you defined it when you set the goal, success can mean:
 - Speaking to an individual at church, work or at home about the literacy program

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- Presenting your story, either along with your tutor or solo, at an orientation or training for potential learners or volunteers
- Feeling that you can now confidently speak to others, such as community leaders or donors about the literacy program

Be sure to celebrate your success and share the good news with your literacy program staff!

Next Steps

Read together the brochure of the Adult Learner Leadership Institute, a statewide leadership training program for and by adult learners. This is a class you attend one Saturday a month for six months where you will get to meet learners from different literacy programs and practice public-speaking, presentation and networking skills. (Your Literacy Program Coordinator can help you get a copy of the brochure.) Consider applying for the Institute next year to continue to improve your leadership and public speaking skills.

Contributor's Biography

Shanti Bhaskaran. Shanti is the Literacy Program Supervisor of Read Santa Clara, the adult and family literacy program of the Santa Clara City Library. Read Santa Clara has hosted the Adult Learner Leadership Institute (formerly called the Henry Huffman Leadership Institute) since 2009.