Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives

A collaborative project with
ESL Writing and Rhetoric I at
Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

Compose
Contribute
Collaborate

Literacy Narrative Analysis Essay

For your first formal essay assignment of the semester, you will extend your investigation of entries in the DALN to write an analysis of some of the meaningful trends you find in literacy narratives. You have already listened to, viewed, and/or read four literacy narratives on the DALN and considered trends in those samples. For your literacy analysis essay, you will select at least four more literacy narratives, for a minimum total of eight narratives, as samples for your written analysis. You may also use the selections we have listened to/watched in class as additional examples. Remember to record the bibliographic information for each literacy narrative you select, including the title, author, date and URL (the web address for the entry) so that you can find them when you need them and record them in your works cited page (so that we can find them later).

Before you being writing, you need to spend more time with the DALN selections. This watching, listening, thinking, and questioning time will help you develop your ideas for what you might want to explore in your analysis essay.

Step 1 --Keep Listening/Watching

As you listen to/experience your new selections literacy narratives, continue to take notes on the guiding questions from *Listening to the Archive* assignment:

- What are these literacy narratives about? Is there a connection between them all or are they all different?
- How is "literacy" defined or talked about in these selections? Are these definitions similar to or different from your own definition of literacy or literacies?
- What do you know or think NOW about "literacy narratives" that you did not know or think before you began this project?'
- Were any of the samples particularly effective OR notably NOT effective in sharing a compelling and meaningful story? Why or why not?

Step 2 --Move From Observing to Analyzing

Now that you have your notes from your listening exercise, you have some data to work from. In order for any research to become more than a random collection of evidence, a laundry-list of observations, or a pile of information, you must work to interpret the significance of the data, and data does not interpret itself. You must search for the significance, for meaning. The significance you are going to talk about is not statistical;

it isn't scientific. You're not trying to prove that any certain percentage of people believe anything in particular about literacy. Rather, you will analyze the data and present an interpretation or translation of your data that contributes to a broader understanding of the purpose and significance of literacy narratives as well as an understanding of literacy itself. The significance, then, has to do with how well your observations do two things:

- contribute to critical understanding of the literacy and literacy narratives and why they are important,
- encourage more discussion regarding the relevance of the observations you make.

To do that, you should start with even MORE questions about what these narratives reveal about cultures of literacy or literacies. Go back to your notes or the DALN entries themselves, and try to answer the following:

- What has been the most interesting aspect of the literacy narratives you have read, listened to, or watched? Why is it of particular interest to you?
- How would you define literacy NOW and how has that changed since you began this assignment? Why is that important (or not)?
- What questions do these narratives raise for you? Make a list of at least 5.
- If you could say ONE BIG THING about what you find important, of value, or of interest in these literacy narratives, what would that be? What examples from the literacy narratives could you use to help expand on that one big thing?
- What has been meaningful to you, personally, about your exploration of the DALN selections? Why do you think you have connected to particular stories in this way?
- What similarities or connections are you finding between the narratives? How or why are those connections significant to you personally and to a wider understanding of literacy?
- How is "literacy" defined or talked about in these selections? Are these definitions similar to or different from your own definition of literacy?
- Were any of the samples particularly effective OR notably NOT effective in sharing a compelling and meaningful story? Why or why not?

Spend some time answering these questions, asking even more questions, exploring your responses to them and looking for patterns. Bring your written responses and notes with you to the next class and we will work together to craft focus statements for your essay.

Step 3 – Writing the Essay
Introduction

A. How do you plan to open your essay and help readers get interested in your DALN research? Start with an interesting moment or reflection and explore how/why you got interested in exploring literacy narratives on the DALN.

B. Share the "BIG" or "compelling" idea that you came to understand about literacy or literacy narratives through your analysis. Provide a framework for your discussion of that idea, in-depth, using source material from the DALN. Do this by:
   - Establishing a controlling idea for your essay that acknowledges general understandings of your issue (Most people think…) and then turn to make your central claim (…but I have come to understand…).
   - Following your controlling idea with a focus/structure statement. You don't have to use these "formulas" in the final version of the essay, but they can help you clarify what it is you are trying to say.
     - In this essay I will…. (articulate your big or compelling idea/claim). For example*, "In this essay, I will explore the experience of literacy as "struggle."*
     - Explain how you will explore that claim. For example, *"First I will share excerpts from selection of the DALN that highlight literacy as a struggle in a variety of different ways. Second, I will discuss how the metaphor of literacy as struggle conflicts with a common assumption that literacy is just a "natural" outcome of schooling. Finally, I will explore my own experience with literacy as struggle in and out of school."*

Exploration and Analysis

A. Support your BIG idea/understanding with specific moments from the narratives you listened to.
   - Select 2-4 compelling, interesting quotes from the narratives you selected to support your BIG idea. Cite them appropriately.
   - For each quote, write a minimum of two paragraphs introducing commenting on, analyzing, pointing out important features of, and expanding on the quote. Make sure that you articulate the connection between the quote and your BIG idea. If you cannot explain why the quote helps to make your argument and increase our understanding of what you have learned from the DALN analysis, drop it and find another example quote that does.

Conclusion

A. Explain what you understand now about different aspects of literacy that you had not thought much about before and what purpose you think literacy narratives might serve. Why do these stories matter?

B. Discuss, in detail, why you think this BIG idea matters – respond to the question, "So what?"

Floating Part of the Essay:

Relate these stories and examples in some way to your own experience of literacy.

- Throughout the essay make connections to your own experience and understanding of literacy. These are YOUR observations and interpretations – help us understand WHY you came to believe these things about literacy and literacies.

Works Cited – MLA Format