

**TRANSITIONS:  
ADOLESCENT PERCEPTIONS OF  
THEIR LITERACIES AND LITERACY SKILLS**

by

Marcus B. Anderson

A Master's Thesis Capstone Project  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Education  
Department of Language, Learning and Leadership  
At the State University of New York at Fredonia  
Fredonia, New York

May 2014

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State University of New York at Fredonia

Department of Language, Learning and Leadership

**CERTIFICATION OF THESIS WORK**

We the undersigned certify that this thesis by Marcus B. Anderson, candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this thesis.



Dr. Cindy Bird  
Master's Thesis Capstone Advisor  
EDU 659 Course Instructor  
Department of Language, Learning, Leadership

May 14, 2014  
Date



Dept. Chair: Dr. Anna Thibodeau  
Department of Language, Learning, Leadership

May 16, 2014  
Date



Dean: Dr. Christine Givner  
College of Education  
At SUNY Fredonia

5-22-14  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my Mother and Father, Margo and Michael Anderson, for making this all possible. Thank you for your love, support, and sacrifice that you have given. If it were not for your guidance, I am certain I would not be the man I am today. I would also like to thank David White and the SUNY Fredonia Educational Development Program for their faith in my academic career and endeavors. I understand this opportunity you gave me came at the sacrifice of another potential candidate student; I never took that lightly.

I would also like to thank Neisha for her love and support. No matter the situation, you always push me forward to fulfill my goals and dreams. Thank you. I would also like to send a special thank you to the Anderson, Alvira and Vasquez families for all of their loving support. Thank you all for the fellowship, guidance, love, and wonderful meals that have brought so much joy to my soul. Thank you.

I would also like to thank the SUNY Fredonia Graduate literacy community for the friendship and support. I would also like to give a special thank you to Dr. Bird-- thank you for your instruction and influence throughout my graduate studies program. I confidently know that I am a literacy specialist, literacy coach and leader.

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**ABSTRACT**

This empirical research thesis examines how adolescents perceive their out-of-school literacies and literacy skills, and how they see themselves using or not using these skills within their current and future school work. With a sample of two participants from a rural high school in Chautauqua County, this study uses a qualitative methodology to collect data from researcher interviews and field notes. Descriptive interview data analysis reveals that adolescents instead of making connections between outside school literacies and in-school literacies appear to use the school model of literacy skills to determine out-of-school literacy skills, rather than have the out-of-school literacy activities produce their own model of literacy skills. Moreover, analysis indicates that these adolescents lack metacognition or metalinguistic knowledge about literacy skills and how they are transferable between various social groups or settings. Instead findings indicate a disconnect between adolescents' out-of-school literacies and literacy skills as the adolescents attempt to apply school-based literacy concepts to non-school literacy events instead of recognizing skills as being not tied to or limited to school class work. More metacognitive metalinguistic awareness may help students to recognize and transfer literacy skills across reading tasks and reading activities.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Statement of the Problem

Cultures determine identity in that they contain the music, food, fashion, gestures, beliefs and behaviors of the members of the group (Bird, 2005). Cultural identities are kept maintained by “literacy” -- “the ability to read, write and understand the ‘texts’ of a culture” (Bird, 2005, p.40). This idea of literacy tied to culture supports the theory of literacy as a social practice. Examining literacy as a social practice explores the idea of everyone simultaneously being a part of multiple communities, social groupings, or cultures; Gee (1991) calls these cultures, communities, or social groupings "Discourses" (p.8) spelled with a capital "D." The more aligned two Discourses are, the easier it is for an individual to transition between the two (Gee, 1991). Conversely, the less aligned, the less similar two Discourses are, the more difficulty an individual may have transitioning between the two. This converse may explain why many adolescents struggle with the literacy of school. Their adolescent culture, especially the texting and tweeting components of their cultural literacy, does not readily align with the American Standard English literacy of the American Mainstream Discourse used and taught in schools. Moje (2008) refers to the literacy of adolescents’ cultures as the “out-of-school literacies of adolescents” (p.112). To explore this problem of adolescents being able to transition successfully between their out-of-school literacies and the Standard English school literacy, I explore the following research question: how do adolescents perceive their own out-of-school literacies and literacy skills, and how do they see these as relating and connecting currently and in the future to their school work? An empirical research study will be conducted to answer this question in a Master’s Thesis.

## Background

The research question for this Master's Thesis Project emerged from two events. My Graduate Studies Literacy Education program at SUNY Fredonia contributed to my interest in this research topic. First in my adolescent practicum course, I examined a research article entitled *The Complex World of Adolescent Literacy: Myths, Motivations, and Mysteries* (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). The researchers examined why, what, and how often adolescents read. Their findings suggest adolescents are engaging in reading and writing in a variety of literacy contexts that take place outside school. Moreover, Moje et al. (2008) also concluded that the "mystery remains" (p.146) about how to motivate adolescents to use literacy practices that promote development of their social selves or identities, while also improving their academic outcomes within mainstream academics. This mystery and the methodology of their study caught my attention.

The second event was in the Graduates Program's Social Foundations of Literacy course. This course introduced me to the idea of literacy as a social practice and examined various socio-cultural issues regarding literacy. The course encouraged literacy candidates to become better able to address the socio-cultural issues and act in response to them as literacy specialist and leader. One such action is to become aware of some of the factors surrounding the school Discourse (and culture). Combining that thought with the work of Moje et al. (2008), I created my own research topic of examining ways to assist adolescent's students to transition between their out-of-school literacies and school literacy.

## Terminology

I propose the following "working definitions" for key terms related to this research study: I have selected to use the term "culture" in place of and synonymous with Gee's (1991) term "Discourse." Therefore adopting Gee's definition, culture is "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'" (Gee, 1991, p.3). A second aspect of culture, also adopting Gee's definition of Discourse, is that cultures are an "identity kit," which "comes complete with an appropriate costume and instruction on how to act and talk so to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (Gee, 1991, p.3).

For the term "adolescent," I have decided to use the age range used by (Moje, 2008, 2010) in her studies: "youth between grades six and twelve, with an approximate age range of twelve to eighteen years" (Moje, 2010, p.114). Building on the concept of *adolescent* and Gee's concept of *literacy* in a culture, I then define "adolescent literacies" as both in and out-of- school literacies; these terms are sub terms of adolescent literacies.

## Theoretical Stance

My theoretical stance for this Master's Thesis is literacy as a social practice (Gee, 1989) Examining literacy as a social practice explores the idea of everyone simultaneously being a part of multiple communities, social groupings, or cultures; Gee (1991) calls these cultures, communities, or social groupings "Discourses" (p.8) spelled with a capital "D." The more aligned two discourses are, the easier it is for an individual to transition between the two (Gee, 1991). Conversely, the less aligned, the less similar two Discourses are, the more difficulty an

individual may have transitioning between the two. Kucer (2009) also identifies that “one-to-one correspondence” between various forms and functions of literacies experienced at home and school, may be “difficult” (p. 225). These theories that focus on literacy as socially situated and embedded from the theoretical framework for this empirical research into bridging out-of-school literacies.

## **Rationale**

The rationale for this Master’s thesis research into how adolescents connect their out-of-school literacies to school literacy exists as a possible solution to the problem of adolescents being able to transition between their own literacies and school literacy, between two differing cultures. The theory of literacy as a social practice (Gee, 1991) supports the idea that adolescents have their own form of literacy. Bird (2005) examines the socio-cultural nature of literacy as it relates to students and teachers. She examines the choices teachers can make about what to do when students bring their out-of-school literacies into the school classroom. Moje (2008) brings a similar approach but specifically examines the literacies that adolescents bring to class. In both cases, Bird and Moje agree that teachers who are aware of and address adolescent literacies in their classroom are likely to positively impact their adolescent students. Further rationale for conducting this study comes from previous research.

At the conclusion of their extensive study into adolescent literacies, Alvermann and Moore (1991) call for a future examination of how and why teachers and adolescents use their literacies within the classroom. Over 15 years later, Hinchman and Moje (2008) call for research “to look more closely at particular students’ literacy practices, find out what they think about school, about different content areas, and about how their outside-of-school lives influence and

merge with their in-school lives” (p.121). They even propose that “an equally interesting question might be to ask how students and teachers weave such different and competing literacies together” (p.121). This call by leading researchers further adds to the rationale for this empirical research study. In addition, no current studies appear to exist that focuses on the adolescent perspective of their literacy and school literacies

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction to the Review**

The research question for this thesis project examines how adolescents perceive of their own out-of-school literacies and literacy skills, and how they see these as relating and connecting currently and in the future to their school class work. To answer that question, I have conducted empirical research. However, to help me understand the current research field and plan my research design, I have first generated a literature review. To find the related research studies, I have searched the major educational databases using combinations of key terms such as “multiliteracies,” “popular culture,” “adolescents, out-of-school literacies,” “leisure time and discourses.” I have selected the most relevant and helpful empirical research studies, reviewed them and grouped them below as follows: studies of in-school use of adolescents’ out- of- school literacies and literacy skills and studies of adolescents’ literacy skills in out-of-school leisure activities.

### **In-school Use of Out- of- School Literacies**

This first grouping of studies examines the in-school use of adolescent’s out-of-school literacies. In a qualitative research study, Alvermann and Heron (2001) examine the role of popular culture media in classrooms. The researchers specifically look at adolescents’ literacy practices as they engage with popular media. This case study of “Robert,” a ninth grade adolescent male who attends a public high school, uses the data collection tools of internet chat

rooms, observational notes, field notes and digital technologies. Findings indicate that Robert sought an “affinity identity” (p.121) through his interaction with the internet-based computer game of Dragon Ball Z (DBZ). Findings also indicate that Robert was engaging in “complex literacy practices” (p.121) for anime-reading materials related to his topic of DBZ. This study shows the role out-of-school literacies, especially those that are part of popular culture, can play in shaping adolescent identities and affinity groups. This study also indicates the positive results stemming from Bird’s (2005) and Moje’s work (2010) by linking out-of-school literacies and literacy skills.

In another in-school classroom study, Stevens (2011) identifies the beneficial ways that popular culture can be incorporated within academic content areas. The researcher examines the following questions: what planning must occur that is unique to popular culture lessons; how do lessons incorporating popular culture fit into existing curricula; and how will students respond to bringing more personal discourse into the classroom? The participants for this study were over 2000 students from Lincoln Middle School. A survey was used as the data collection procedure for this study. Findings indicate that students positively responded well to each content area lesson that was taught in this study .Results indicate the significance of multiliteracies, provide examples to support incorporation of popular culture into academics, and show ways that critical literacy can be enhanced by incorporation of popular culture within the classroom. This study relates to connecting the classroom culture with the out of school culture for engagement and success by students.

In a mixed methods research study, Stockdill, Darin, and Moje (2013) examine the relationship between students’ literacy and engagement in Social Studies classes. The researchers question the possible connections between students’ reading practices and interest and Social

Studies learning. The participant total for this study is 802 adolescents: 174 students born in Mexico, 1/5 African American, and 34% born in Latin America. Participants are 60% of youth identified as being Latino and 48% being able to read and write in their native language. Data collection tools consisted of interviews, observations, and surveys. Findings are that young adolescents use out of school literacies and engage with texts to explore dimensions of their own identities as well as themes such as conflict and struggle. Findings suggest that attention of these connections in the social sciences may engage students to develop their thinking in literacy practices regarding Social Studies. The researchers identify that there is a “gap” between the everyday readings of youth’s topical reading interest and their academic interests regarding Social Studies (Moje, 2013). This study is relevant to my research question because the researchers identify a cultural disconnect between home and school content areas. Moreover, this study may indicate adolescents being unable to see a connection between their out-of-school literacies and application of those literacies skills to their class work.

In a qualitative study bridging out- of -school cultures to the in-school culture, Morrell and Duncan (2002) examine connecting school culture to the out-of-school culture of diverse adolescent students. The participants in this study were an English class, located at an urban high school in northern California. This study incorporated hip-hop culture into traditional English Poetry. Data collection tools consisted of samples of students’ work, interviews, observational notes, field notes and presentations. Findings reveal that influences of hip hop transcended race and ethnicity, displaying a positive interest among adolescent participants; students in the non-mainstream were able to display critical and analytical skills with academic texts within the study. This study indicates that positive outcomes may occur when due to out- of- school literacies are linked with in- school culture. Moreover, this study indicates students’ ability to

transition the literacy skills of “hip-hop” literacy for academic success.

In another urban study, Muhammad (2012) examines adolescent African American girls’ experiences with writing to help shape their identities. This study took place over a five-week period at a writing institute designed specifically for African American girls. The participants of this consisted of 16 girls, ages 11-17 years who were attending this writing institute. The participants met for three days a week, for three hours, at a Midwestern university. Muhammad examined the following research question: “how did the experiences in a socially collaborative space (a summer writing institute) help black adolescent girls make meaning of their identities, as compared to her classroom experiences?” (p.207). Data collection consisted of interviews, artifacts, daily lesson plans and student materials throughout this summer writing institute. Findings are that the participants view the school culture as in contradiction to their identify; however the girls were able to connect to the institute where they felt the curriculum aligned with their experiences, historical literacy framings, literature, and writing to produce self –expressions that created and reflected their identities. This study shows how contradictions of race, gender, literacies and literacy skills can create a divide between in-school and out- of- school cultures. Findings also indicate a disconnect between adolescents’ cultures and school culture and that teachers knowing students’ out of-school literacies can assist in positive school results for the students.

Sanchez (2010) identifies ways of allowing adolescent students to analyze texts of popular culture within the classroom context, thus validating the language and literacies (and literacy skills) that students engage in outside the classroom. The researcher started with the following questions: “how does one student’s essay demonstrate an integration of hip-hop literacy practices and academic literacy?” (p.480); and secondly, “how might a nontraditional

reading of a student's essay, which draws on his participation in hip-hop literacies and use of AAL (African American Language), help educators appreciate and value students' linguistic competencies and challenge the supremacy of SAE (American Standard English)" (p.480). The participants consisted of 15 students, but this published portion of the study focuses only one student's essay within the course. Robert was an African American male from a Midwestern American city. The methodology consisted of the participants analyzing a text, which resulted from their own inquiry; Robert then selected a song entitled "Why?" by Jadakiss; where each line of the song begins with a question, thus requiring the audience to ponder many societal issues and issues dealing with African American experiences. Findings indicate that the participant was able to access a hip-hop text for academic purpose. The research study demonstrates that allowing popular culture within the classroom can validate adolescents' out of school literacies; while two cultures may be dissimilar, there are means of connecting prior out-of-school experiences of adolescents to in-school academic work.

In another qualitative study, a teacher draws upon her own literacy skills to influence her classroom. Skerrett and Bomer (2011) examine how a teacher drew on her students' out-of-school literacies to influence her teaching within a reading classroom. The researchers explore the following questions: "what conversations and activities in this classroom brought student's everyday literacy practices into school?"; "what connections did the student and teacher make between outside practices and the official curriculum?" (p.41). The study takes place in a ninth grade reading classroom in an urban high school in a Southwestern American State. The student participants of this study were identified as reading below grade level, according to state standards. The participants in this study included the teacher, and the majority of students in the class (at the highest point of attendance, there were 6 boys, 7 girls, 2 African American, 10

Hispanic and one Caucasian female between the ages of 15-17). Data collection tools consisted of interviews, classroom observations, field notes, student assessment and artifacts related to the curriculum. Findings are that through teacher pedagogical practices, a teacher could use her ability to develop a curriculum that had scaffold and engaged students' use of outside literacies within the classroom. These findings indicate that teachers can make pedagogical decisions to transition out- of- school cultures to the academic culture; it is through teacher knowledge of the out- of- school literacies that this can be done.

Winestein (2006) examines the impact of adolescent rapping along with other out- of- school literacies on the in-school academic and culture. Winestein analyzes the central role of writing rap lyrics and how it affects and applies to success within the school culture. The participants were four students who use rapping as a tool connecting their out- of- school literacies to in-school life. Findings indicate that these four students did have a “depend understanding of figurative language” (p.280). Findings also indicate that rap provides pleasure, affinity to family and community, experiences, play, and engagement for adolescent students. This study helps to indicate how adolescent identities are also formed through the usage of their out- of- school literacies within the classroom. The study further indicates “rapping analysis” (p. 280) as the out- of- school literacy leading to classroom success.

### **Adolescents' Literacy Skills in Out-of- school Leisure Activities**

These next studies are grouped by their examination of adolescents' free time leisure activities. Researchers Cypress and Lee-Anderson (2011) examine the "trends, genres and themes that boys enjoy reading" (p.61). The researchers examine what boys are engaged with to read about, the genres, reasons why boys pick particular trends in books, and which books have effects on boys' thinking and goals in life: in short, "what boys read" (p.61). The participants consisted of middle and high school boys, ages 13-18 years in Kentucky, Virginia, and North Carolina. Data collection tools consisted of student-completed surveys. Findings indicate that adolescent boys are reading a wide range of texts, are "reading at home," and are "engaging in a variety of texts that reflect positive life outcomes through character adversities" (p.68).

In another qualitative study examining free time leisure activities of adolescents, Hassell and Rodge (2007) examine the leisure reading habits of urban adolescents. This study investigated five aspects of leisure reading of urban adolescent: "do adolescents read during their free time"; "what do adolescents read, if they read, when do they read, and why do they read"; "what topics and types of readings do adolescents like to read about"; "how is it that adolescents obtain reading materials"; and "who influences them to read?" (p. 23). Participants came from an urban middle school made up of approximately 1,340 students in grades 5-8. Student demographics were 66 %Latino, and 27% African American. Results on state assessments indicate that 68% were performing below basic reading levels, and 23% at basic and only 9% were proficient readers. Data collection consisted of a five page 20 item questionnaire. For this study, 715 students completed the questionnaire. However, data from 131 were unaccounted for. Findings indicate more than "two-thirds of participants read for fun or to learn new things

because they were bored” (p. 25); magazines were “popular choice” of reading by both female and male participants; participants read about people who were like them; and reading during summer was not popular with either gender. These findings indicate that adolescents are reading outside of school; they support what Moje (2010) identifies as the “myth” that adolescents do not engage in reading.

In an international qualitative study, Tan, Yen, and Abdullah (2012) examine the digital, technological and contemporary literacy practices of Malaysian adolescents. The participants consisted of 54 adolescents from an urban secondary school located in Penang: 38 Chinese, 12 Indian, and 4 Malaysians. Data collection tools consisted of field notes and a questionnaire that participants completed. Findings conclude that 80.6% of the language these teens use on the internet is in English, 10.6% is Malaysian and 8.8% is Chinese. Findings also indicate various websites that Malaysian adolescents are engaged with and visit frequently. This study leads to more investigation of adolescent online literacies beyond the academic culture. Through understanding adolescents’ literacies, educators and administration can transform curriculum to meet the needs of ESL students within the academic culture.

In another qualitative study, Sanford and Madrill (2007) examine the range of multiliteracies activities that engage adolescent boys’ time and the types of literacy skills and understandings they learn through interacting with alternative texts. The researchers started with the following questions: “what success are adolescent males finding in out- of- school literacy practices”; “what literacy practices are occurring when adolescent males participate in instructing the creation of video games”; and “where is a space for adolescent males to think critically about video game content?” (p. 439). This study was held over a period of nine week long video game making summer camp session. Adolescent instructors (aging from 11-16 years

of age) and adolescent camp attendees (ranging from 8-12 years of age) were a part of this study. Instructors were hired by a midsized Canadian city to run camps in a video game facility. Data collection included observations, field notes, focus groups, interviews, and digital images of games. Findings reveal that significant and powerful learning is occurring during video game making and play; the researchers indicate that adolescents are being successful at out-of-school literacies. This study may indicate the power of adolescent male out-of-school literacies and how they could be utilized with classroom instruction if altered in a way to fit to curriculum. This study also identifies what literacies and literacy skills adolescents are using in video game creation.

In a qualitative study examining adolescents' free time, Nippold, (2005) identifies literacy as a leisure activity for young adolescent students. The researchers started with the following purposes: "to examine the preferences of younger children and adolescents regarding reading as a leisurely activity during their free-time, in relation to other free-time options that might be available and engaging"; "to examine the amount of time young adolescents spent time reading, and what they choose to read"; to determine "if preferences for free-time activities and reading materials change due to age and gender differences among the stage of late childhood through the early stages of adolescents, being ages 11-15" (p.95). The participants in this study were 100 sixth grade children (50 boys and 50 girls) with a mean age of 11.7 years and 100 ninth grade adolescents (also 50 boys 50 girls) with a mean age of 14.8 years, 90% of participants were English speakers and of European American descent. All participants were enrolled in public school, located in a lower income area in western Oregon; participants were also considered "typical achievers" (p.95) in regards to academics within this study. The methodology consisted of teachers asking student to voluntarily participate, All participants were

administered a two page survey that contained the three research questions proposed for this research study. Results indicate that reading is the least popular free- time activity of adolescent students ages 11-15 years, while music, sports, concerts, watching television, and videogames are preferred activities. Findings indicate that reading decreases during these years, while email usage increases for social purposes during this adolescence stage. The most popular reading materials among young adolescents were magazines, comics, and novels. The study correlates with Moje (2010) “myths” that adolescents do not read; it provides evidence that they do read depending on the “context.”

In this mixed methods study, McKool and Gespass (2009) examine the relationship between teachers’ personal reading habits along with their instructional practices. The questions that guided their research are as follows: “do reading teachers engage in reading as a leisure activity”; “do teachers who read for pleasure use more instructional strategies based on best practices than teachers who do not”; “is there a difference between teachers who read for leisure and those who don’t in terms of how they can motivate their students to read”; “is there a difference between instructional practices used by the teachers who value reading in their own lives and those who do not?” (p. 265). The participants of this study consisted of 65 elementary school teachers of grades 4, 5, 6. The participants were pulled from a convenient sampling for this study. Data collection tools consisted of surveys. All participants held master’s degrees and were teachers with 10 years or more of experience. Findings from this study indicate that while most teachers do read leisurely, only about half of them reported reading for pleasure on a daily basis; (2) teachers who read more than a half an hour a day used a greater number of best practice strategies in their teaching; (3) educators who value reading the most tended to share their experiences and insights from their individual readings; (4) educators who read for pleasure

“utilize extrinsic and intrinsic as motivators” (p. 271). These findings reveal the teachers and how they perceive themselves as readers. This study allows for personal reflection from evaluation of personal perceptions as a reader and educator.

In the focal study for thesis proposal, Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris (2008) in their mixed methods study challenge the myths associated with the texts that adolescents are reading. In this research, the authors pose the following questions; “what motivates youth to read outside of school”; “what is the relationship between what they read and write outside of school and their achievement in school”; “what do young people in one community read and write outside of school” (p.113). Data in this study consisted of literacy practices, motivations surveys, and large scale reading diagnostics, school records, student artifacts, and interviews. Participants of this study consisted of two “waves” (p.1130); wave one consisted of 329 sixth, eighth, and ninth graders from two public schools and a religious school, from 2004 to 2005; wave two consisted of 716 ninth and tenth graders from one public school and a charter school in 2006. Findings suggest adolescents are engaging in reading and writing in a variety of literacy contexts that take place outside school. Moreover, Moje et al. (2008) also conclude that the "mystery remains" (p.146) about how to motivate adolescents to use literacy practices that promote development of their social selves or identities, while also improving their academic outcomes within mainstream academics. This study examines the student perspective rather than the teacher perspective of adolescent reading and writing.

**Summary of the Review**

All the research studies summarized indicate aspects of adolescent out-of-school literacies and literacy skills. These studies indicate positive results of using adolescents' literacies and literacies skills within the classroom setting. However, no current existing research indicates adolescent perceptions of these skills and how they see themselves using these skills in their future classes. This lack of research raises the possibility that adolescents may be unaware of the components that make up their out- of- school literacy skills and how those might relate to their school work. The next chapter of this study focuses on the methodology and design of this research which is intended to specifically examine adolescent awareness.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Design of Study**

For this research question about how adolescents perceive their out-of-school literacies and literacy skills and how they see themselves using these skills in their future school work, empirical research appears to be the most effective means to answer. This study uses a qualitative methodology. The intent is to talk with adolescents and have them think about their out- of- school literacies and the literacy skills they use during those activities. The second part of the study involves talking with these adolescents again, but this time have them reflect on how they see themselves or (might see themselves) using their out- of- school literacy skills in the classroom.

### **Participants.**

The participants in this study were selected from a participant pool consisting of eight students ranging from grades 9 to 11 and, 15 to 17 years of age. All participants reside within Chautauqua County of western New York State. Participants were all part of the same Academic Intervention Services (AIS) class in a rural high school. This class of AIS students were chosen because of the following criteria: are struggling readers and have been placed in an AIS class because they have scored below average in the English Language Arts class; have also scored below average on the STAR state reading assessments. Their low reading assessment scores qualify the participants as "struggling readers." "Student 1" was a 15 year old white male in grade 10; "Student 2" was a 15 year old white female in grade 11.

**Procedures.**

This research study began with the recruitment of students from the Academic Intervention Services (AIS) class in a local rural high school. From the pool of eight, two students agreed to participate in the research study. Once a schedule of meeting times was made, each participant met with the researcher in-person individually for the first session. This session was audio taped and each interview lasted about 20 minutes. The researcher asked a series of probing and prompting questions to get the adolescents to think about their out- of school activities and how literacy might be connected to each of those activities.

To complete my study, each adolescent participant met with the researcher two weeks later for a second interview. At that time the researcher had the participants review the notes and tapes from their first interview and make any changes or corrections the participants might want to. Participants were then asked a second set of interview questions about how they see themselves using their out- of- school literacy skills in their academic work. Participants who did not see any in-class use were asked to speculate about whether they see any chances of possible usage within the class.

**Data collection.**

Data collection occurred during the two interviews with the participants. Data consisted of the audio-taped interviews and notes made by the researcher during the interviews. A time frame of two weeks between interviews allowed the researcher to analyze the first set of data and generate questions and prompts for the second interview.

## Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis began right after the first interview. The researcher coded the data in light of the research purpose. Data collected from the first interview was analyzed to determine different or similar literacies and reading and writing skills these struggling reader participants used in their out-of-school situations. The researcher then took this list of literacy skills to the second interview and had the participants themselves review and analyze the data. Data collected from the second interview were then analyzed in light of the first set of data analysis and findings were produced that addressed the research question for this study.

Based on the data analysis, the first finding is that both participants have similar perspectives on what they think it means to "read"; both participant responses incorporated the idea of "reading" as being able to comprehend the words and what has been written. Thus, reading appears to be comprehension of both the text and the intended message. second finding is that both participants have different perceptions of "what kind of reader" they are. Here are their responses to that question:

Student 1: I like to read not that much; but if I do read, I read about sports, history, or scary books; besides that nothing else. I also read Stephen King.

Student 2: It has to be in my head.

These responses indicate that Student 1 sees himself as an occasional reader who reads primarily for personal interest; Student 2 sees herself as a selective reader who appears to read materials primarily to which she can make a personal connection.

Another finding is that both participants, although occasional and selective readers, do engage in reading activities outside of school or for pleasure. While Student one identifies reading sports, history, and scary books, Student two identifies engaging with face book-posts, text messaging, and instagram for reading. More specifically to identify the out-of-school reading activities the participants see themselves as engaging in, the participants were given a list of reading activities and asked to identify which of those reading activities they engage in outside of school. Here are their responses to that question:

Student1: video games, surfing the internet, blogging, emailing, chatrooms, some type of social media, reading websites, reading song lyrics, fantasy football, and for "other" subtitles to foreign movies.

Student2: video games, surfing the internet, emailing, chatrooms, some type of social media, reading websites, reading song lyrics.

Thus data indicate a quantity of reading materials and a range of reading materials. Data also indicate that these two participants in the same class in the same school, engage in the same seven types of out-of-school reading.

Following their responses to the types of reading activities, participants were asked about the skills for reading they thought they used when engaging in those activities. Here are their responses to that question:

Student1: Everyone pretty much. Like literary elements like simile, metaphor and all that stuff, spelling making sure that is correct, paying attention, your

attention span. Just thinking is pretty much what it all is and keeping your eyes on the page and not getting bored with it because sometimes I'll read a book and forget about it and have to go back.

Student 2: Comprehension.

The response from Student 1 about literary elements appears to indicate his understanding of reading skills as being tied to literature. However, his mention of attention and not getting bored seem to indicate his sense of reading as involving the reader's personal connection to the text. His use of verbs (*making, paying, and keeping*) suggests that Student 1 understands reading skills as requiring active participation on the part of the reader. In contrast, Student 2 identifies skills with just one word: "comprehension." Combining this word with Student 2's *It has to be in my head* response to type of reader she is suggests that Student 2 has understanding of reading skills as being tied to personal understanding: the skill of having the text make sense to the individual reader.

To determine whether the participants were able to see a connection between the reading skills they felt they used in their out-of-school reading and their academic work, they were asked the following question and responded in the following manner:

Interviewer: Do any of these skills seem to you like they match something you do in class for your schoolwork?

Student 1: Yes, usually, all the time. Math and English; we are reading Macbeth. I have to know similes and metaphors and what kind of English is being used because it's different and older language and has different meanings.

Gym sometimes when I am taking a test I have to use my test taking skills and everything. And I take construction at BOCES [a vocation-based school] so when we are reading a book and I have to answer a question and when you're making something you have to pay close attention to what you're reading or making to do it correctly.

Student 2: Yes. English.

For this question, Student 2 continued with her interview response style of very brief answers. However, her response in context reveals more about her concept of reading and reading and reading skills. Her first response about the concept of "reading" as being able to comprehend the words and her list of selected out-of-school reading activities seem to point to her perception of reading as being limited to making sense of words. This brief response of "English [class]" appears to reinforce that concept of reading because of the heavy emphasis in English classes of reading paper-based printed literature. While Student 1 holds similar concepts of reading related to comprehension, his response to this question reveals a broader concept of reading, one where the skill of reading applies across curriculum areas.

Shifting from reading to writing, participants were given a list of writing activities and asked to identify which of those writing activities they engage with outside of school. Here are the responses to that question:

Student 1: journal writing, blogging, emails, And fan fiction, some type of social media:

Student 2: twittering, tweeting, face book, chat rooms, writing stories or

narratives (fiction or non-fiction).

This data indicate a quantity of writing materials and a range of writing materials. Data also indicate that these two participants in the same class and same school, engage in similar writing activities just as they do for out-of-school reading activities.

To try and identify with the skills of writing within these out-of-school writing activities, participants were asked about those writing skills.

Interviewer: What skills for writing do you think you use when engaging in these activities?

Student 1: You use correct spelling you use your words to describe adjectives and verbs, and metaphors and similes all literary elements like characterization and all that other stuff. Because we have to use them for an essay that I'm getting used to using; and thinking and learning making sure you don't forget about it and elaborating like describing in detail more like putting one word you can put it into three words so the person gets better like the setting.

Student 2: Legible writing.

Interviewer: Do any of these skills seem to you like they match something you do in class for you schoolwork?

Student 1: Yes.

Student 2: Yes, writing essays in English. We are writing essays in Global Studies now.

In spite of Student 1's broad concept of reading, his concept of writing appears to be limited to the one for school writing and its strong use of conventions; spelling and diction ("put it into three words"), and the inclusion and detailing of literary components and conventions such as characterization " and all that other stuff". With Student 2's outside of school writing activities being "twittering, tweeting, face book, chat rooms" using electronic communication, her response of "legible writing" appears to more strongly connect her concept of writing to that of school-based writing.

This researcher then took this list of literacy skills to the second interview and had the participants themselves review and analyze the data. Data collected from the second interview were then analyzed in light of findings from the first set of data analysis, and findings were produced that addressed the research question for this study. Below are the interview questions and responses given by the participants to identify how they see themselves using or not using these literacies and reading skills within their class work.

Interviewer: Building on these notes from the first interview, I want to ask you if you think you have ever used the reading skill of Social Media in your class work.

Student 1: Yes, actually yes I have. Because when you're writing a research paper you might go on to Face book or something like social media and find something about what you're doing like the Buffalo Sabers or Buffalo Bills you can go on the face book and go on their page to look up stuff about them, like recent stuff that happened.

Student 2: For math I do surveys on Face book. When I don't know the homework

I put it on face book.

Interviewer: Do you see any ways or times when you might be able to use that reading skill in your schoolwork?

Student 1: All the time. When doing a research paper on a professional team you can look at their face book wall and see all the things they have done and trading and how many Super bowls they have won.

Student 2: Yes, in English if we do something like trying to connect with us as a teacher; he has been doing that lately. He is trying to understand how our minds think because it's different from when he was little he didn't have the technology and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Building on these notes from the first interview, I want to ask you if you think you have ever used the reading skill of Video games in your class work.

Student 1: Well I guess, because sometimes if you are playing a video game you are reading and you read your books and its like English and US History and stuff. I play MLB the show and I add averages when I bat so that plays into my English as well as my Math.

Student 2: No.

Data indicates that both Student 1 and 2 seem to confuse reading skills with computer/internet/social media skills. Furthermore, data appear to reveal that there may be a disconnect between understanding of their perception of skills for reading and the skills they actually use.

Lastly, participants were questioned on their ability to make connections between writing skills and current schoolwork:

Interviewer: Building on these notes from the first interview, I want to ask you if you think you have ever used the writing skill of Social Media in your class work.

Student 1: I only have face book, face book is what I use. But I can use face book for a biography and I put something I forgot on my wall and I remember that I did this but can't remember what day and time I can put it on my face book.

Interviewer: Do you see any ways or times when you might be able to use that writing skill in your school work?

Student 1: No.

Interviewer: Building on these notes from the first interview, I want to ask you if you think you have ever used the writing skill of emails in you class work.

Student 2: Yes, actually spelling normally so that helps when I have to email something to a teacher when I'm out or something.

Interviewer: Do you see any ways or times you might be able to use that writing skill in your school work?

Student 2: Yes.

Student 2 was also asked if she used the writing skill of social media, or saw any connections

within her school work; her reply to both was "no."

Data analysis indicates that both students' concepts of writing appear to be not tied to or limited to in school use. In response to if students were able to see these writing connections in their school work, they replied with brief one word responses, unable to expound on their responses. The interpretation of this analysis occurs in the next chapter of this thesis.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Interpretation**

### **Results**

A number of findings have emerged as results for this empirical study into adolescent understanding of out-of-school literacies. Findings reveal the following: adolescents in similar social and community settings appear to have similar perspectives on what they think it means to "read"-- being able to comprehend both the text and the intended message. Moreover, findings reveal that while they may have similar perspectives on reading generally, adolescents may have different perceptions of "what kind of reader they are" personally. Adolescents may see themselves as "occasional" or "selective" reader who reads for personal interest and to be able to make personal connection to engage with texts. Another finding is that adolescents do engage with a variety of reading and writing materials outside of the school context. Still further, findings reveal that adolescents instead of making connections between outside school literacies and in-school literacies appear to use the school model of literacy skills to determine out- of- school literacy skills, rather than have the out- of- school literacy activities produce their own model of literacy skills.

### **Reliability of Data**

Before an interpretation of the results, the issue of the readability of the data should be discussed. Data collection tools that were utilized in this research are audio-recordings of two 20-30 minute interviews and interviewers notes. The data themselves are the participant

responses to pre-set questions, along with researcher notes. These notes provide corroboration for the response data, and thereby assist the researcher in increasing the reliability of the data.

### **Interpretation of Results**

The findings from this study provide a basis for interpretation that addresses the research question and some broader implications. The first finding that adolescents in similar social and community settings appear to have similar perspectives on what they think it means to “read” carries the implication that reading is very much a social practice. Not only do these adolescents attend the same high school and therefore appear to develop the same concept of “reading,” they also appear to engage in similar out- of- school literacy activities—likely because they live in the same rural area with the same limited activities to both. The next finding that while they have similar perspectives on reading generally, they have different perceptions of “ what kind of reader they are” personally, also indicates reading as a social practice in that the social group of their family and home life contribute to make each adolescent unique from all adolescents. When participants see themselves as “occasional” or “selective” readers, they are demonstrating that they are still individuals and read as individuals even though they are part of the adolescent group. The finding that shows the adolescents reading as individuals indicates that they read for personal interest and to be able to make a personal connection to engage with the text.

Another finding is that adolescents do engage with a variety of reading and writing materials outside of the school context. However, instead of making connections between the outside school literacies and in-school literacies, adolescents appear to use the school model of literacy skills to determine out-of-school literacy skills, rather than have the out-of-school

literacy activities produce their own model of literacy skills. This method for making connections appears to reveal that these adolescents lack any metacognition or metalinguistic knowledge about literacy skills and how they are transferable between various social groupings (including in-school and out- of – school settings). Instead the adolescents appear to try and apply school-based literacy concepts to non-school instead of recognizing skills as being not tied to or limited to school class work. The more metacognitive metalinguistic awareness the adolescents develop, the more that may help them to recognize and transfer literacy skills as skills applicable across reading tasks and reading activities.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Overview of Study and Findings**

This empirical research thesis examines how adolescents perceive their out-of-school literacies and literacy skills, and how they see themselves using or not using these skills within their current and future school work. With a sample of two participants from a rural high school in Chautauqua County, this study uses a qualitative methodology to collect data from researcher interviews and field notes. Descriptive interview data analysis reveals adolescents instead of making connections between outside school literacies and in-school literacies appear to use the school model of literacy skills to determine out- of- school literacy skills, rather than have the out-of-school literacy activities produce their own model of literacy skills. Moreover, analysis indicates that these adolescents lack metacognition or metalinguistic knowledge about literacy skills and how they are transferable between various social groups or settings. Instead findings indicate a disconnect between adolescents' out- of- school literacies and literacy skills as the adolescents attempt to apply school-based literacy concepts to non-school literacy events instead of recognizing skills as being not tied to or limited to school class work. More metacognitive metalinguistic awareness may help students to recognize and transfer literacy skills across reading tasks and reading activities.

## Significance of Findings

The findings revealed from this research study have significance to classroom teachers of adolescents. Findings show the adolescents appear to use the school model of literacy skills to determine out- of- school literacy skills, rather than have the out- of- school literacy activities produce their own model of literacy skills. This finding is significant to classroom teachers because it offers them an insight into the adolescent mind and a way to assist adolescents to make connections and build relevance for their school work. Because findings show adolescents trying to judge or understand their out- of- school literacies using school skills, teachers could increase relevance by explaining or assisting adolescents to make that understanding more explicit. Then teachers could help adolescents increase their knowledge and decrease the home-school disconnect by bringing in the out- of- school literacy skills to the classroom. In addition, these findings are significant to reading specialists because they could use these findings as an opportunity and means to intervene and bridge adolescents' out- of- school literacies and literacy skills within their class work. A literacy specialist may also provide the necessary attention to develop explicit awareness of out- of- school literacies and literacy skills for academic success within the classroom setting.

The findings generated from this research study also have significance to the field of literacy itself. They support and are in harmony with Moje's (2008) findings in which she debunks the myth that adolescents are not engaging in a variety of reading and writing activities outside of the classroom. Findings from this study show adolescents *are* engaging in a variety of reading and writing activities outside the classroom, and that the adolescents recognize these activities as literacy - based.

This study into adolescents' perceptions of their out-of-school and in-school literacies aligns with the *International Reading Association (IRA) Standards for Reading Professionals (2010)*. Standard 1.1 requires a reading specialist to “understand major theories and empirical research that describe the cognitive, linguistic, motivational and socio-cultural foundations of reading and writing development, processes, and components, including word recognition, language comprehension, strategic knowledge, and reading writing connections.” (IRA, 2010, p.10). This research study is framed around "literacy as a social practice" (Gee, 1991) and the cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural dimensions of literacy (Kucer, 2009).

IRA Standard 4.1 requires reading specialist to “understand and value the forms of diversity that exist in society and their importance in learning to read and write (p.14). This research study examines the diversity of the adolescent culture and its heavy emphasis on social media and electronic communication. This study probes the out-of-school literacies and literacy skills of adolescents, which in turn provide this reading specialist with an understanding of these “literacies and of the socio-cultural aspects of the diversity of adolescents.

This research study also aligns with the NYS Common Core Standards that call for K-12 students to be able to “demonstrate independence, strong knowledge acquisition, respond to various demands of tasks, audiences, purpose and disciplines, comprehend and critique , value evidence, along with utilizing technology and understanding others cultures and perspectives” (p. 1) in various resources and texts. The participants involved in this study have an opportunity to increase their knowledge about literacy and literacy skills as well as the demands of various literacy tasks. In turn, the results of this research carry implications for classroom teachers about how to assist adolescent students to acquire literacy knowledge about response to literacy task demands.

## **Limitations of the Findings**

In this research study, there are limitations that should be addressed. In regards to the research question of this study, the question of how adolescents perceive their out-of-school literacies and literacy skills and how they see them connecting with their current or future schoolwork, assumed that students had an understanding of generic reading and writing skills. Results indicate their concepts of “skills” seem to be limited to work in school subject areas. Perhaps the interview questioning should have been more directed and probing into participants’ identification of literacy skills in out-of-school activities. For instance, the question “I want to ask you if you have ever used the writing skill of social media,” assumes that participants have a clear understanding of what those writing skills are. However, their responses show no understanding of writing as a communication or personal expression or no understanding of even the use of “texting” conventions to convey intended meaning.

Another limitation of this research study is the sample size of the participants. Although the data obtained in this study does reflect the adolescent perceptions of out-of-school literacies, these findings do not speak for all adolescents regarding their perceptions because making general statements is not possible from just two participants. However, this research data serves as a strong foundational ground which focuses on adolescents and their perceptions of their literacies and literacy skills, and will be useful for future research.

**Conclusion: Answer to the Research Question**

Many adolescents struggle with the literacy of school. Their adolescent culture, especially the texting and tweeting components of their cultural literacy, does not readily align with the American Standard English literacy of the American Mainstream Discourse used and taught in schools. To explore this problem of adolescents being able to transition successfully between their out-of-school literacies and the Standard English school literacy, I explored the following research question: how do adolescents perceive their own out-of-school literacies and literacy skills, and how do they see these as relating and connecting currently and in the future to their school work? Descriptive interview data analysis reveals that adolescents instead of making connections between outside school literacies and in-school literacies appear to use the school model of literacy skills to determine out-of-school literacy skills. Adolescents appear to lack sufficient metacognitive and metalinguistic knowledge to have their out-of-school literacy activities produce their own model of literacy skills. Thus the answer to how adolescents perceive their own out- of- school literacies and literacy skills appears to be that they perceive them through the lens or model of in-school literacies. Moreover, findings show adolescents have difficulty recognizing their out- of- school literacy skills as being not tied to or limited to school class work literacy skills—thus indicating a disconnect between adolescents’ out- of- school literacies and literacy skills. More metacognitive metalinguistic awareness may help students to recognize and transfer literacy skills as skills across reading tasks and reading activities. Therefore the answer to this research question of how adolescents see their out- of- school literacies relating and connecting currently and in the future to their school work appears to be that adolescents do not see their out- of- school literacies relating and connecting to their

school work – but reading specialist may be able to assist struggling readers by helping them to see and build on those connections.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Even though the results of this study indicate several findings of how adolescents perceive their out- of school literacies and literacy skills, and how they see them connecting or not to their future schoolwork, there is a recommendation for future research that may be beneficial to make. For this research study, perhaps it may be beneficial to follow up with future research that explicitly explains and details to the participants the literacy skill involved in various out-of-school literacy-based activities. As this research study assumed participants were knowledgeable of skills, findings show they were not. It may be that more metacognitive metalinguistic awareness may help students to recognize and transfer literacy skills as skills across reading tasks and reading activities. In support of this, future research might also include a study of teacher knowledge about the types of literacy skills existing in out- of- school literacy-based activities.

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