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# The Interconnectedness between Adolescent Girls' Home Literacy and Adolescent Girls' School Literacy

## Abstract

Extensive research has been done in the area of home literacy. The research has found many connections to student school performance. adolescent girls' However, the connection between home literacy of and school literacy has yet to be explored. This action research project seeks to answer the question "How do adolescent girls' home literacy practices connect to adolescent girls' literacy practices at school?" This research focused on four adolescent girls from three different school districts. Methodology included the use of questionnaires delivered via Facebook Messaging and e-mail. Data analysis indicates that because adolescent students use a vast amount of technology outside of school, they would perform better and find learning more enjoyable if technology was used more in school.

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The Interconnectedness between Adolescent Girls' Home Literacy and  
Adolescent Girls' School Literacy

By

Jody Flannery-Calder

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

Dr. Maples

School of Arts and Sciences

St. John Fisher College

August 2011

## HOME LITERACY VS. SCHOOL LITERACY

### **Abstract**

Extensive research has been done in the area of home literacy. The research has found many connections to student school performance. However, the connection between home literacy of adolescent girls' and school literacy has yet to be explored. This action research project seeks to answer the question "How do adolescent girls' home literacy practices connect to adolescent girls' literacy practices at school?" This research focused on four adolescent girls from three different school districts. Methodology included the use of questionnaires delivered via Facebook Messaging and e-mail. Data analysis indicates that because adolescent students use a vast amount of technology outside of school, they would perform better and find learning more enjoyable if technology was used more in school.

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## HOME LITERACY VS. SCHOOL LITERACY

### **The Interconnectedness between Adolescent Girls' Home Literacy and Adolescent Girls' School Literacy**

When we look at the different literacies found in society it can be determined that literacies are dictated by social situations. Human nature requires an individual to react to any given situation in a way that provides them with hopeful success in order to meet the need to survive. This broad spectrum of survival can be broken down into many facets: how an individual learns to communicate basic needs, how an individual learns to communicate the need to be accepted, and how an individual learns to adapt to ever changing social situations. The commonality of these basic human needs is learning to communicate needs in social situations because these dictate success in survival. Literacy, can then be considered an intricate form of ongoing learning in which an individual successfully interacts, in any and every environment, that individual experiences at any given time.

This study and discussion will focus on the aspect of how social literacies can change between home life literacies and school life literacies for adolescent girls'. The recognition of the change between home/out of school literacy and school literacy is important because in order for students to be successful in life, they need to learn how to be successful in home literacy environments and be able to adapt to other literacy situations including the school literacy environment. Teachers play a very important role in this aspect of a student's life. If a teacher can support students by giving them the adaptation tools needed, then students will in turn be successful in school. Therefore, this research is necessary because when students are successful in a home literacy environment, they may not effectively be successful in a school literacy environment and fail to be successful in adapting to other literacy environments as well. As the goal for teachers is to help all students achieve success, this area of literacy adaptation becomes a

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serious focal point in helping students learn how to be successful in becoming accustomed to any changing literacy situation. Therefore, teachers need to recognize successful home/out of school literacies, such as constructivist teaching styles using technological literacies, and incorporate those literacies into the school environment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to fully understand how adolescent students can be taught to be successful in any literacy situation, it is important to look at how students acquire literacy in the first place. In short, we must break down *literacy* and *literacy instruction*. The following can give some insight into these definitions, Gee (1989) defines literacy as, “Control of the secondary uses of language (i.e. uses of language in secondary discourses [...non-home-based social institutions— institutions in the public sphere, beyond the family and immediate kin and peer group, (p.527)])” (p. 542). Literacy can also be defined as, “socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in Discourses (or as members of Discourses)” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 64). From these working definitions an individual can begin to take ownership of the term literacy and therefore become proficient as well as successful at adapting to changing literacy situations. In order to learn how literacy is acquired we must also look at the different and unique ways that children learn. Then and only then, can we truly begin to understand how important literacy instruction is during literacy acquisition and an individual’s to learn to adapt to changing literacy situations.

There are several theories that may help an individual to be successful in acquiring competent uses of literacy.

Kucer (2005) cites these as constructivist theories in saying,

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Developmentally, constructivism refers to the individual's active building of an understanding for how written language operates linguistically, cognitively, and socioculturally...when interacting with a text, the individual is simultaneously involved in two acts. The individual is constructing meaning...[and] a fuller understanding for how the linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural dimensions of the language operate. (p. 235-234).

We can presume the fact that sociocultural theory plays a major role in successful use of literacy. As previously mentioned, society makes the ground rules for what is acceptable in how people use literacy. Therefore, for an individual to use the information in a way deemed acceptable, an individual must know and understand how society operates. Being successful includes keeping up with the latest research as well as knowing historical background of any discourses to be participated in. Being in tune with the latest research and historical practices may seem like a great deal of information required to make a successful interaction, fortunately, schools are set up in such a way as to teach necessary skills, (i.e. secondary discourses), and build on primary discourses to help an individual make competent use of literacy.

In that literacy and its developmental theories are defined above, we must look at how literacy is acquired and learned. Literacy is acquired by exposure to social world around us and is therefore learned by the use of oral and written language, as they are the primary means of communications. Kucer cites oral language as the here and now and written language as mostly found as existing over space and time. Written language, therefore, can be carried over a long distance audience as opposed to oral language being person-to-person interaction. Most importantly, oral language is instantly perishable and written language can be permanent: a record of meanings exchanged (Kucer, 2005, p. 47). One important thing that separates oral and

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written language is the issue of context. In oral language context is surmised by voice intonation and physical actions, such as hand movements and facial expressions. Written language on the other hand needs to have specific details in order for the reader to make a complete understanding of what is being communicated. When a child is beginning to acquire language they are exposed to oral and written language. It is quite difficult to truly distinguish between the two. Oral language and written language can often blurred during the act of acquisition. For example, when a child listens to a book, the written language on the page becomes oral language when a caregiver relays the story aloud. Another illustration of oral and written language being used interchangeably occurs when children begin to acquire language. Because children cannot read written language at the beginning stages of language acquisition, they depend on people around them to communicate by using oral language to read a story for example. These social interactions play a key role in how a child acquires literacy and how they learn to adapt to changing social situations.

That being said, there are many ways literacy is acquired. The first is that of what children know of the world around them. Personal experiences dictate what and how children perceive the world around them for example, as children watch adults in their everyday life they begin to form ideas on how they should respond to literacy situations. Literacy is then acquired is through the role of an adult as mediator. Both parents and teachers play an important role in the literacy acquisition of children. Kucer (2005) defines this as *sociocultural*. The definition is, “The individual as actively constructing an understanding of the text as a member of various social groups” (p. 253). Goodman (1984), however, takes this one step further and defines this similarity as a *functional principle*, and states, “Negative or positive statements made by adults about schooling and the ability to read and writing, and the difficulty with or pleasure derived

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from reading and writing as shown by adults will also influence how children come to understand the functions of literacy” (p.321). Goodman touches on the importance of modeling to children. They learn from watching and observing everything adults say and do. It is important to remember that everything that is done and said will be absorbed and shape ideas in how children view literacy. For example, “As children pretend to be mothers, gas station attendants, store clerks, doctors, or teachers, they use reading or writing appropriate to those occupations (p. 322). Children are experiencing how the people in the world around them, especially those who impact daily life, use language oral and written.

Parent-child daily conversations are another way that adults play an important role in facilitating literacy construction in children.

Kucer (2005) says,

Together, the parent and child participate in a communicative event and negotiate and create shared meanings. Therefore, the adult and child socially and collaboratively construct the dimensions of literacy. This focus on meaning allows the child to take risks without fear of rejection. (p. 267)

Here we can presume that a parent begins to create an environment for a child to experience literacy. A parent, or any caregiver should be actively and positively involved in helping a child construct meaning when using language. Positive literacy interaction involves many conversations between adults and children, such as asking and answering questions and generally experiencing the world around them in a constant dialogue. By encouraging the importance of this constant dialogue adults can foster a pleasant and ongoing need for the child to be actively involved in, and experience through oral and written language, the environment in which they are experiencing.

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It is also important to look at the role the school learning environment plays in fostering a child's development of language and literacy. Larson and Marsh (2005) state the definition of school based literacy to be, "Pedagogization is defined as the socially constructed link between institutionalized processes of teaching and learning and literacy....In other words, students learn the D/discourses (Gee, 1996) required to conform to school practices and purposes, and are not considered legitimate contributors to those practices and purposes" (p. 22). From this definition we can understand how the institution of school views literacy: teach the students to learn what it is they need to know, but do not involve them in the practice of teaching. Mills (2010) furthers this definition by stating how school based literacy is used.

She states,

Providing expert guidance by teachers, books or technologies is one of the key responsibilities of schooling, and it is unreasonable to expect students to reinvent pivotal literacy practices of adults in social recreational, and civic engagement by themselves....The goal of literacy education is to point youth in the right direction so that they can extend their current practices to a wider range of productive purposes. (p. 40)

As mentioned above, the school environment plays a crucial role in the literacy development of students. It is important to remember that the home environment and school environment must work together to foster the growth and advancement of student literacy.

It is crucial for researchers as well as teachers to understand how literacy and language is acquired in individuals at home and in the school environment in order for researchers and teachers to be able to support students in learning how to adapt and therefore be successful in changing social situations. By understanding how language is acquired, we can understand why

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students may respond positively or negatively to new literacy situations. We must take into account a student's literacy life and upbringing at home in order to see what has shaped them in to the literacy beings they are today. After learning how a student responds to literacy situations at home it is then important to look at how a student is able to draw on those literacy practices in the classroom.

In that today's society demands that people use technology continuously, it is important to look at how technology is being used at home and in the classroom. Technology is considered a literary practice because it encompasses all means of communication. For example, social communication, oral communication, written communication, etc, as mentioned above by Lankshear & Knobel, can all be used via technology (i.e. text message, e-mail, blog, chat, etc.). When we compare home literacies and school literacies, it is crucial that we explore the use of technology. It is important to look at how a student's home life, including socio-economic status, place of living (urban, suburban, rural), and family structure can affect the amount of technology and types of technological literacies used outside of school. It is also essential to look at how schools are using technology to enhance the learning of students. Because technological literacies demand the attention of society today, it is important to explore the usage of those technological literacies by adolescent students out of school and in school.

### **Research Question**

Based on the theoretical framework discussed above, in that it is the importance of how an individual acquires language and literacy and is able to adapt to different literacy situations, it is important to look at how teachers can support students to adapt successfully from a home literacy environment to a school literacy environment. Therefore, given that literacy is a social

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practice dictated by social situations and interactions, this research project asks how do adolescent girls' home literacy practices connect to adolescent girls' literacy practices at school.

### **Literature Review**

As previously stated literacy begins in the home and continues to develop when a child starts attending school. In this literature review I will explore several themes that seem to impact literacy development in the lives of adolescents at home and in the school environment. The themes that often impact literacy development are sociocultural repertoires, parental involvement, technology, and learning theory.

### **Sociocultural Repertoires**

Sociocultural repertoires can include culture, social class, and popular culture. As found in work by Bourcy & Olcott (2003), Ma'ayan (2010), and Heng (2008) the sociocultural aspect of a student's life can dictate what and how a student can learn, use literacy and therefore, be successful in the school environment. Unfortunately, students may have to adapt their sociocultural backgrounds in order to fit into the literary school environment. Bourcy & Olcott (2003) discuss how a working class student is perceived through the lens of social class,

These perspectives helped us to see Crystal as working-class not only because her family's income qualified her for free lunch and her parents worked at blue-collar occupations but also because of her use of certain grammatical structure, her preferences for certain texts, and her access (or lack thereof) to official discourses associated with achievement spaces such as higher education. (p. 560)

In order to combat this negative stigma, however, Crystal chose to change her language to pose as middle class in order to be accepted in the school environment (Bourcy & Olcott ,2003). By changing her language Crystal was able to change the insinuation that she is literacy inept, but

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because of her social class she did not possess the language background to fully appreciate the advanced academic experience.

Ma'ayan (2010) provides another example of how the socioculture of a student can affect how that student adapts and performs in the school environment. In Erika's case it is urban culture that hinders Erika to be successful in school. Ma'ayan highlights an adolescent's multiple literacies such as "e-mails, magazines, and books...writing letters...poetry...using the computer to surf the web" (p. 627-8). However, despite Erika's repertoire of literacies she was failing in school because her urban lifestyle literacies are deemed intolerable and offensive by the school in which she attended (Ma'ayan, 2010). Erika like Crystal chose to adapt to the school environment. Unfortunately, by keeping quiet and not sharing her experiences, Erika was failing school.

Similarly, Heng (2008) provides insight as to how popular culture can limit the literary success of students in school. As in Erika's story, students have rich literate lives in which they read many types of stories and use multiple literacies outside of school. Unfortunately, again, the school deems the reading of "Comics, ghost stories, books in the Harry Potter series, and reading on the Internet" as unacceptable in school and therefore students are being seen as unsuccessful literary users (p. 42). Socioculture can affect student success in school. Sadly, however, the impact that the school places on the literacies brought in by students experiencing being part of a lower social class or a different cultural background can really hinder the success (because students have to adapt to the formal school environment) and impact future of students.

### **Technological Literacies**

Literacy development today is impacted hugely because of technology. Williams (2005) claims that literacy practices occur mainly online for many students, and that those students are

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“deeply and consistently” immersed in literacy (p. 703). Technology happens outside of school environment continuously. Likewise, Morgan (2010) states that students are able to use the technology that teachers bring into the classroom in such an advanced way, that they may foil the teachers original intent for the use of the technology. Because the students are using so many technological literacies outside of school, as Williams (2005) stated, students are able to use the technological literacies in school immensely well, as stated by Morgan. Additionally, Morgan’s study has some similarities to the studies of Bourcy & Olcott (2003), Ma’ayan (2010), and Heng (2008). The similarities are that technology is not entirely accepted in the school environment. For example,

“[the] identities [created] that until the involvement of the students in the blog project had no place in school. All three of our participants craft nuanced and complex identities using the compositional tools and experiences available to them. They are not disaffected, lazy and completely self-centered adolescents. They write a new self-understanding of who they are and present that to us, the readers (p. 236-7).

The students were again forced to adapt to use the literacy tool effectively. On a positive note, however, students adapted in such a way that they were able to use technology to their benefit and show the teachers their true literacy identities.

### **Parental Involvement and Support**

Probably the biggest influence on literacy development in the lives of students is what happens in the home. Parental involvement in student education can majorly affect the success of a student in the area of literacy. Dudley-Marling (2009), states, “The dominant theme that emerged ... was parents’ strong commitment to their children and their children’s education. Overwhelmingly, the parents identified education, particularly learning to read, as the key to

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their children's success in life" (p. 1731). Topor et al (2010) supports this as well in saying, "...increased parent involvement...was significantly related to increased academic performance, measured by both a standardized achievement test and teacher ratings of the child's classroom academic performance" (p. 193). By having supportive, involved parents, students gain increased opportunity to succeed in the academic world.

Additionally, Barone (2010) focuses on helping parents to be involved with their children's education by bring them into the school, and giving them opportunities to practice what the teacher does in the classroom at home. Her findings report that after given the opportunity to be involved in the classroom and by being given tools to use at home, as seeing them modeled in the classroom can help alleviate parent fears of helping students at home. She states, "Parents want to promote their children's reading development at home, but they do not necessarily understand how to incorporate school-based practices at home" (p. 383).

Another study looked at the role of fathers in the literacy education of students. Morgan et al (2009) has explored a little different realm of family and home literacy support by searching deeper into family structure and determining the extent to which fathers are involved.

The findings report,

...there were numerous reports of shared literacy activity between fathers and their children in the duration from one home visit to the next. Almost all fathers were reported to participate in literacy activities with their children to some extent, and just over a quarter of parents said that both mothers and fathers were equally involved in such activities (p. 181).

These findings only further support the positive role of parents concerning the success of their children's literacy education.

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Parental involvement can also be contributed to a student's feeling of self-worth in the world of academia. Katzir, Lesaux and Kim (2009) examine the relationships between reading comprehension, reading self concept and the home literacy environment. Through thorough examination of student surveys (including literacy activities), parent surveys (including family literacy involvement and the home literacy environment), library visits, along with academic test and comprehension scores, Katzir et al were able to determine the complexity of student success in the area of literacy. They concluded however, [that] "for typically achieving learners who are beyond the primary grades, factors such as child and family literacy practices and reader's self-concept indeed play a role in their reading comprehension" (p. 273). Therefore, the family life and home environment play a very important role in the literacy development of a child, and in turn, help a child to be successful and maintain confidence in the world of academia.

Based on the aforementioned studies and their findings, students benefit in a huge way from having support at home. Heng (2008) sums everything up by stating, "...a home environment that encourages learning is even more important to student achievement than the family's income, education level or cultural background..." (p. 40). By having support at home, students, again, receive the confidence they need to work hard and be successful in school, despite what research says about the sociocultural repertoires of the family.

### **Learning Styles**

Finally, the last area that helps to determine the success of a student in the area literacy is that of learning styles. Teachers can greatly affect the success of students by supporting them with methods of teaching that maximize student strength. Heng (2008), Eakle (2009), and Moje et al (2008) support this statement by looking at the student background, and getting students involved in learning. Heng (2008) states, "Understand your students—know

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their background (e.g., family, interests and home life, hobbies like computer games); [d]on't force students to read what they don't like, which would require teachers to bridge the school-home gap to find out what adolescents *do* like to read" (p. 45). By reaching out to students and into their home lives teachers and educators can appeal to the interests of students and enhance student learning experiences a great deal.

Similarly, Eakle (2009) discusses how students can interact with text on their own, and by bringing in background knowledge; they are learning and having fun during the process. The article centers around allowing students to explore a museum on their own while hooked to tape recorders so that researchers can analyze how the students reacted to the museum exhibits and how they used their literacy skills. The students that participated in the study were able to use the museum texts in several ways. For example, a group of girls actually practiced decoding words that were not familiar to them , a group of boys continually made text to self and text to text connections without even knowing it , and another pair of boys were able to bring in knowledge from previous classes (Eakle, 2009). These examples are just a snippet of how students interact with text and use literacy to learn even when they think they are not. The teachers and museum staff in this study are making literacy experiences authentic for students. For teachers to reach out to meet student needs in the area of literacy, "may point to pleasures of seeing [and learning] not festered by goals of formal learning and perhaps support notions that certain things cannot be said or written only seen or felt" (Eakle, p. 213). By providing students with hands on learning activities, students are able to use the skills and tools, while having fun and learning at the same time.

Finally, by learning more about home literacy practices, student interests and learning styles teachers and parents can work together and encourage students to be successful. Moje et

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al (2008) affirms this statement by saying, "...what and why young people read and write outside of school may affect their continuing literate developments as they advance through school, especially in the disciplinary domains" (p. 147). Because the world outside of school has a major impact on how a student performs in school, teachers must be willing to embrace a student's background. By using the strengths a student already has (that has been fostered outside of the academic domain) teachers can help students to learn to be successful in all areas of academia, and in turn be successful in life.

In summary, Moje et al (2008) states,

Knowing that much of the reading and writing youth are motivated to do on their own revolves around the maintenance of social networks, relationships, identity development, and self improvement and self expression, how do we engage young people in the text of disciplinary domains outside of school (or in school, for that matter), which may often be far moved from the concerns of their lives? How do we build education interventions that acknowledge youths' strengths and interest, while also engaging them in content-based reading and writing? (p. 147-8).

Based on this literate analysis and my research question stated above, I will seek to find out more about the connection between adolescent girls home literacy life and adolescent girls literacy life at school.

## **Methods**

### **Context**

Research for this study will take place through literacy and technological avenues of e-mail and Facebook Messaging in order to allow the participants to use the technology that they

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are familiar and comfortable with. The reason for this is because the participants are my step-daughter, one of her good friends, and two children of my friends that live several school districts away. After the parental consent is received and confirmed the participants will be communicating with me through Facebook Messaging and through e-mail in order to utilize the girls' use of literacy technology and to protect the girls' privacy. Parents will have access to this communication if requested. The reason for using Facebook Messaging page is to take away pressure from having the participants answer questions face to face and to alleviate having to meet with participants and coordinate busy schedules. The research, mentioned in the article review suggests that students today use technology for several hours each day and by using the Facebook page I will be meeting them on their ground and comfort zone. My hope is to get more detailed responses from each girl as well as learn a little bit more about their use of literacy through friendly messaging systems such as a closed Facebook page.

The girls live in rural, suburban, and city areas of western New York State and therefore attend different schools. The socio economic status of all the girls is middle class.

### **Participants**

My step-daughter Paca, (a pseudonym), and her two sisters come to my house every Friday through Sunday during the school year and every Friday through Tuesday during the summer months. Paca is a 14 year old Caucasian female. Paca currently attends F.L. City. Middle School and is in eighth grade. She enjoys spending time with her friends, walking around town, listening to music and reading an occasional book. She spends her school week at her mother's home near the middle school with her four sisters. Paca describes herself as honest, trustworthy and nice. She describes herself as a student as being hardworking and on time with assignments. According to the 2009-2010 New York State Report Card, F.L. City Middle

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School is comprised of 3% African-American or Black, 2% Latino or Hispanic, 1% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and 95% white students. Also, 22% students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

I also see Paca's friend Quinn (a pseudonym) on a regular basis. Paca's friend Quinn (a pseudonym), I see on a regular weekend basis as well. Quinn is 1 years old and a Caucasian female who currently attends eighth grade at Lythionia Suburban Middle School. She enjoys using Facebook, texting, reading and taking walks. During the school week Quinn lives with her father and her brother at their home in the village Lythionia. On the weekends, Quinn spends time with her mother and grandmother, who lives just down the street from me. Quinn describes herself as responsible, dependable and a hard working student. She describes herself as a person as fun, full of life and nice. According to the 2009-2010 New York State Report Card, Lythionia Suburban Middle School is comprised of 4% African-American or Black, 2% Latino or Hispanic, 6% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and 88% white students. Also, 11% students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

My good friend's daughter, Lucie (a pseudonym) also willingly participated in my research study. Lucie is 12 years old and attends 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Howelltown Middle School. Lucie lives with her mother, father and two sisters, four dogs and several fish in the rural area of Howelltown. In her free time Lucie enjoys reading, playing soccer, and practicing her clarinet. As a person Lucie describes herself as funny, loud, outgoing, intelligent and athletic. As a student Lucie sees herself as focused, ready to work and into the topic. According to the 2009-2010 New York State Report Card, Howelltown Middle School is comprised of 10% African-American or Black, 9% Latino or Hispanic, and 81% white students. Also, 42% students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

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Lucie's good friend Medap (a pseudonym) also agreed to participate in my research study. Medap is 12 years old and attends 7<sup>th</sup> grade in rural Howelltown Middle School with Lucie. Medap lives with her mother, father, two sisters and a cat. In her free time Medap enjoys playing sports, reading books, and also enjoys practicing her clarinet. Medap describes herself as kind, optimistic, loving and very considerate of other people. As a student Medap sees herself as making sure her grades are good and responsible.

### **Researcher Stance**

As the researcher in this study, I acted as what Mill (2007) calls an active participant observer. An active participant observer can be described as: "When [teachers] are actively engaged in teaching, [they] observe the outcomes of their teaching" (p. 58). In short, an active participant observer teaches and then adjusts according to student reaction and behavior. I have conducted my research in such a way that I was able to ask questions and based on student answers, ask more questions accordingly. I have a Bachelor's Degree in Childhood Education. I am certified to teach birth-6<sup>th</sup> grade. I am not teaching at this time, but am fortunate to have three step-daughters in which to share my literature and teaching knowledge. Currently, I am working on earning my Master's Degree in Literacy Education at St. John Fisher College.

### **Method**

During this study I interviewed the girls on several aspects of literacy in their lives, including using literacy at school and using literacy out of school and at home. The initial meeting took place over lunch at my house in order to speak with the girls face and face and get parental permission slips. I was hoping to get the girls excited about sharing how they use literacy with me during this meeting.

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The first interviews consisted of meet and greet type questions. I wanted the girls to feel comfortable with the types of questions I asked, and be willing to explain themselves as they should in order to respond to the questionnaire in detail. The participants were encouraged to share their likes, dislikes, and general information about themselves. As mentioned above, this interview took place face-to-face.

The second questionnaire took place through Facebook Messaging and e-mail and consisted of questions concerning each girl's literacy life in home and out of school. The girls answered open ended questions about how they feel about literacy practices such as reading and writing, and rated how much time they spend pursuing those areas in their lives outside of school.

The third questionnaire consisted of open ended questions pertaining to each girls experience with literacy related activities in the school setting. I hoped to obtain information about each girl's likes and dislikes as well as suggestions on how teachers can make school more fun and interesting for adolescent girls. By finding out this information, I hoped to gain insight as to what the girls think about their current learning environment and what can be changed in order to meet their needs as students.

### **Quality and Credibility of Research**

While executing this research it was important to make sure that the quality and credibility of the study is valid. In order to carry out quality and credible research I used Mills (2007) definition. He states that credibility must include prolonged participation, persistent observation, peer debriefing, triangulation, and the collection of documents and artifacts. I was able to accomplish the aforementioned activities by communicating almost daily with my participants over an extended period of time. During this time I was able to observe the

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participants actions and thoughts geared toward literacy. I was also able to discuss the artifacts gathered from the participants with my critical colleague in order to gain better understanding of the participant's viewpoints and feelings toward literacy at home and at school. I was able to use triangulation as a method of organization of collecting data through observation, artifacts, and communication. By doing so I was able to determine any biases that may have existed in my study and act accordingly. As a researcher I believe that my study was credible on all accounts.

Transferability was also taken into account during my research. Transferability refers to the belief that the data collected in this study will be transferable or permissible in other possible contexts, these being other students literacy lives (Mills, 2007). Transferability also refers to making detailed enough descriptions of the study in order to make judgments about the data being fitting to be found in other contexts. In order to maintain transferability in this study I was not able to develop generalizations to a larger group of participants.

I ensured dependability during my research as well. Dependability and triangulation worked together in this study by my willingness to use more than one method of data collection (collection of artifacts and interviews) as well as taking the time to discuss my findings with a critical colleague and analyze the findings of my study. By employing dependability in this study I maintained the stability of the data (Mills, 2007).

Finally, I made sure that confirmability was reached during my research by collecting a variety of data using a variety of collection methods. This ensured a cross-check of the data, again, as discussed with triangulation and dependability. Confirmability also refers to "intentionally reveal underlying assumptions of biases that cause the researcher to formulate a set of questions in a particular way and to present findings in a particular way" (Mills, p. 86-7). I

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was able to ensure confirmability by keeping a journal of my reflections and findings on a regular basis.

### **Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

In order to move forward in my research process, I needed to collect informed consent in order to protect the rights of the participants in my study. This study was a qualitative and quantitative study in which I worked with a group of adolescent girls. With the help of Paca, I distributed parental consent forms to each girl for her parents to sign and return. This form detailed the purpose for the study and allowed parents to understand that I would be communicating with their daughter through Facebook Messaging and/or e-mail. Until I received parental consent I could not move forward in the process. During the luncheon I obtained informed assent from each participant after explaining how the interviews were going to work and what each one was expected to do. Prior to the study parents and participants were informed that their daughters name and school name would be changed in order to protect their identity. All names provided in this research are pseudonyms and confidentiality was assured by doing so.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected using several forms of communication. As mentioned above, the girls were interviewed briefly face -to-face by myself in an informal setting over lunch. Here I was able to see how they interact with each other as social beings and how they interacted with me as an interviewer and the step mother of one of their friends. By using Facebook Messaging and email I was able to keep a record of questionnaire answers provided by each participant. I was able to go back to the girls' answers and ask them follow up questions in order to obtain more information on their literacy practices. There were a total of three interviews, including various follow up questions.

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**Findings****Types of Literacy Used Daily**

Participants were asked to rate the following statements according to how often they participate in that specific literacy event per day on a scale of 1-5: 1 being never and 5 being every day or more.

Table 1

Statement	Average Rating	Percent of Daily Usage
Read a book	4.75	95%
Read a newspaper	1.50	30%
Read a magazine	4.00	80%
Read an online article or blog	3.25	65%
Use a chat room	2.25	45%
Read for school	5.00	100%
Free write	2.50	50%
Write for school	3.25	65%
Use e-mail	3.75	75%
Use Face book	2.75	55%
Text	4.00	80%
Blog	2.00	40%
Use the internet for fun	3.75	75%
Use the internet for school	2.50	50%

\*Highlighting denotes technology usage.

Based on these findings students are using several types of literacy daily. They are reading every day and using literacy technology quite often, in fact, more than half (8/14) of the daily literacy activities are technology based. It is interesting that the students use technological literacies every day. Being that today's society is versed in technology it is not surprising, however. Social medias, such as texting, Facebook, blogging, and chat allow students to interact with peers even when they are not together. Moje et al (2008)'s statement that student motivation to read

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and write requires students to interact with peers and maintain social relationships supports the large percentage of technological literacies found in the study.

In relation to the technological literacies, students are still reading books almost every day and reading for school every day. Reading every day is encouraging because students are still engaging in traditional literacy experiences and they are being successful in using them.

### **Literacy at Home/Out of School**

Results of the survey questions suggest that the participants are exposed to literacy at home and at out of school environments. Participants report that they find reading books, texting, using the internet enjoyable out of school and at home. The participants all see their parents using literacy every day. Most often, students observe parents using literacy in the form of reading, texting, using the internet and e-mail at home.

### **Literacy at School**

Several interesting themes have emerged based on the “Literacy at School” responses from the student participants. These themes are the following: Didactic Teaching verses Desire for Constructive Teaching, Need for Content Area Literacy, and Misuse/Lack of Technology in Classrooms.

### **Teaching Styles**

The major theme the emerged from the participant surveys was the participant’s desire for Constructivist Teaching style verses a traditional Didactic Teaching style. “Constructivism assumes that learners construct knowledge as part of a process of making sense of their experiences” (Rolloff, 2010). Therefore, the when students interact with their learning they are learning in a more fulfilling way because they are creating the meaning for themselves. In direct contrast, Didactic teaching lecture-based classes “with many theoretical derivations of concepts

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where one concept is based upon another” can include providing students with notes, factual information and showing them the material to be learned (Ashcraft, 2006). When using didactic teaching, teachers are not allowing students to interact with the content or encourage bringing in background knowledge. Students, Quinn, Paca and Medap stated that they would like to be more involved in their learning. Quinn said she would be able to learn better if teachers made things more interactive instead of taking notes all the time. Paca agreed by saying that if she were a teacher she would get the students more involved by using hands on activities rather than just by taking notes all the time. Medap claimed that she would be able to learn better if teachers would explain some subjects more. She also agreed that by learning things in a fun way would help her students learn if she were a teacher. Quinn gave an excellent example of her social studies teacher’s preferred teaching style and how he “shows” the students history, “My Social Studies teacher is full of life. I’ve had him for the past two years and he is such a good teacher. He makes the class fun. He brings in Videos and Pictures to show us History. He doesn’t exactly say things that make me want to learn more it’s what he shows that makes me want to learn more” (Student Survey, February 18, 2011.” Quinn has provided a stellar example of Constructivist teaching, and is obviously learning and benefitting from her Social Studies teacher’s efforts.

The girls also expressed the need for fun when learning something new. Paca suggested games as a means to introduce a new unit of study. Lucie suggested beginning a new unit with a fun research project. Both girls have articulated the need for learning to be an enjoyable experience. The fact that this was mentioned more than once leads me to believe that these girls are not excited about starting new units of study in the school setting.

Medap shared how in the past she had used pneumonic devices, “we were learning about the 13 colonies, to remember the order, we make ideas of how to remember” (Student Survey,

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February 18, 2011). She also requested that teachers teach subject matter in a fun way and by making a way to remember facts. Medap appears to crave learning strategies to help her understand new content and to remember learned information.

Ma'ayan's 2010 study showed how much of a student's identity is expressed through literacy. Ma'ayan (2010) reports that if the home literacies are far too different from the literacies allowed in school, a student can therefore not feel part of the school culture and not be willing be engaged in subject matter easily, if at all. I found this evident in my action research as well. For example, Quinn stated that notes are boring and that she wanted to be involved in learning. My fear, as a teacher, for Quinn is that she will eventually feel unmotivated, by teaching style, and begin to not pay attention at all if she does not feel that her literacy identities are being taken into account.

The use of teaching styles in the classroom can have an immense impact on student learning. For teachers to really relate to students and encourage success, teachers need to allow students to be their own master's of learning. In short, students need to enjoy the process of learning by interacting with information and knowledge.

Moje et al (2008) also found that the literacy activities students participate in are motivated by relationships, social communication and self expression, [hence the vast use of technology communication], and the usage of these tools are far too removed from the classroom to support student learning. All participants of the study reported using technology literacies daily outside of school. Unfortunately, they all reported using technology literacies in school "rarely," "only to type up something," and "to do research." As a teacher, I find this disturbing because student needs are not being met and the things that students are good at, in this case the

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use of technological literacies, are not being used to foster more enjoyable and enhanced constructivist learning.

### **Need for Content Area Literacy**

Another theme that emerged through the survey was that for the need of content area literacy. The girls seem to recognize literacy as reading and writing in specific relation to ELA, but not so much as to reading for Social Studies, Language Studies, reading in Mathematics, Home and Careers, etc. For example, Quinn stated that English is the only class that she has to read for. Later on in her survey she talked about participating in “Current Events” in Social Studies. She said they research something that is happening today and share their findings with the class. Quinn shared this in the “Anything else you want to share” portion of the survey. The fact that Quinn placed her “Current Events” idea at the end of the survey leads me to believe that she does not equate this activity as literacy based, even though her method of sharing with the class must be based on writing, in some aspect, the current event down in order to share!

Lucie supports this statement by reporting that technology is used mainly in her Special classes, such as Home and Careers, Health and Music. Again, I believe that Lucie is not associating technology as being literacy based. It is my understanding that both girls do not comprehend that literacy is used in all subject areas!

Lucie made an interesting point when she suggested that teachers give less homework and provide less testing for ELA. Why shouldn't Lucie enjoy her homework, using the literacy avenues (she named literature genres instead of types of literacy) she referred to at the beginning of the survey in order to do homework and prepare for ELA tests? This makes me wonder what teachers are doing that are not meeting student's needs in order to enjoy learning and be successful in testing.

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### **Misuse/Lack of Technology**

As technology is a huge medium for literacy, it was amazing for me to find that all four of my participants reported using technology (i.e. computers, internet, and Smart Boards) extremely infrequently during the school day. The rarity of technology usage during the school day is in direct contrast to the amount of technology literacies used outside of school daily as shown in Table 1. Quinn reported using the computer/internet at school when she had to “type up something” or look something up online. She also mentioned using the computer/internet during French class in order to play games and complete quizzes. She also reported that all of her teachers except French and Science teachers use a Smart Board in order to teach. Why then, does Quinn report only using technology in French, Social Studies and English classes? I was under the impression that Smart Boards were to be used for interactive teaching. Quinn reports using technology very little in her school experience, perhaps this is the reason for her need to interactive learning under a constructivist type of teaching.

Paca reports using technology at an even lesser rate than Quinn in her classroom experience. She reports using the computer/internet once a week at school. The types of activities she uses it for are Facebook and research in the school setting. She also reports using technology for Home & Career classes and Social Studies classes. Paca also mentions that her Mathematics teacher, Spanish teacher, English Teacher, and Earth Science teacher use Smart Boards in their classrooms, however, she also expresses the need for constructivist teaching style and interactive learning.

Medap reports using the internet at school as type of literacy, but reports that it is only used rarely. She says that she uses technology at school for projects and book summaries. The classes she uses technology for are Social Studies, Spanish and Art. Medap also states that none

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of her teachers use Smart Boards. Medap has expressed the need for fun and interesting strategies to remember information learned, it is surprising to me that despite how much technology is used outside of school, according to Medap, there is very little technology being used at the school where she attends.

Finally, Lucie, being in the same school district as Medap, reports using technology at school very little as well. She says that the computer/internet is used mainly in special classes, such as Home and Careers, Health, Music and Art. She reports that Smart Boards are used in Social Studies and in her Mathematics class last year. Lucie's responses intrigue me as an educator because she reports using technology in special classes only.

There are many reasons as to why teachers should gain insight from their students pertaining to at home and out of school literacy practices. The reasons are because students are involved in using so much technological literacy out of school. Unfortunately, the technological literacy is not used in schools as often as students are using it. As seen in the results of my action research study, students are using literacy in and out of school daily; however, students are more apt to use technological literacies more than half of their free time out of school. What this tells me is that students are getting good at what they do outside of school, and they need to be doing the same things in school in order to enjoy learning, feel as though they are an active participant in learning, and therefore, be successful. Additionally, from the study, students can often be more informed and capable than teachers in using these new technological literacies (i.e. texting, internet, chat, blogging etc.) and therefore the interactive technologies are deemed unacceptable in the school setting. The results of my action study support the findings of Williams (2005), Ma'ayan (2010), Morgan (2010), and Moje et al (2008). Williams (2005) found that students are using technological literacies outside of school as well, and that students

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are doing just as much writing as in past years. My participants have shown this by how much texting, blogging, internet chatting, and instant message they report doing outside of school.

Again, I wonder how much more students would be engaged and enjoy the school setting more if these technologies were allowed.

Furthermore, Morgan (2010) supports the enhanced use of technology in the classroom, based on the study performed using internet blogging. Morgan found that students that usually had little to say in the classroom actually participated willingly in the blogging activity because they were able to use the technology they were used to, and were able to share things that were happening in their lives and be in control of their own learning. I saw a lot of this in my research study as the girls shared that they wanted to be involved in their learning. For example, Quinn's mention of her Social Studies teacher "showing" the students history, Paca and Lucie's need for a "fun" way to start a new unit, and Medap and Paca's need for learning strategies and ways to remember subject matter. The aforementioned examples clearly state the need for hands on learning, why not tie into technology as Morgan did, and allow the students to be in charge of their own learning!

### **Implications and Conclusion**

After looking at all of the previous research and the research done by myself, I have found that as a teacher I can learn a great deal from the types of literacy my students are using at home and outside the school environment. Probably the biggest gain, as discovered through my action research study, that I can make with students is to really and thoroughly incorporate many different technological literacies into my classroom setting. By having the technological literacies in the classroom, students may be more willing to be involved in their own learning.

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As Morgan's (2010) study shows: the blog (just one aspect of technology) helped these students immensely.

For example,

[the] identities [created] that until the involvement of the students in the blog project had no place in school. All three of our participants craft nuanced and complex identities using the compositional tools and experiences available to them. They are not disaffected, lazy and completely self-centered adolescents. They write a new self-understanding of who they are and present that to us, the readers. (p. 236-7)

Other teachers can learn from this action research study as well. It would be interesting to share the information provided with the teachers of my participants. My hope is that teachers would consider changing their teaching ways, especially if students are saying that they are not feeling connected to the subject matter they are learning. I also hope that teachers will try to incorporate more technological literacies into their classrooms. Unfortunately, I know that not all school districts are privileged to have computers in every classroom, or that teachers in certain grades have to do so much test preparation that they are unable to teach using technologies. Maybe it would be important to share my findings, and that of many other researchers, with the state test makers so they can see that test preparation is not helping students be successful in schools. As mentioned by my participant Lucie, she wishes to do less ELA test preparations.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this action research study. The first limitation is that of parental involvement. Parents were privileged to the information provided by their daughters in

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this study; however, parents did not answer questions as to how they view literacy in the home. If I were to replicate this study I would have parents answer questions similar to the girls. I would ask them what types of literacy they use at home and at work. I would also ask parents what types of literacy they remember using in school. And finally, I would inquire as to what parents would have liked to have in order to learn better during their educational experience.

Another limitation that I found in my action research study was that of teacher contribution. As a teacher I would have found it interesting to find out what other teachers in other districts are doing in their classrooms to promote literacy. I would also like to know what types of literacy teachers are using outside of school. Additionally, I would like to know what types of literacy teachers believe may be lacking in schools. I believe that the aforementioned information would enhance my action research study as well as help teachers to understand more about how to really enrich the literacy lives of students as a whole.

### **Questions for consideration**

Data that was not collected through the latter states of this research include oral conversations between the participants and myself. For example, participants would continuously log on to Facebook during at home hours, I found myself feeling as though I were intruding if I asked any more questions. Even though the internet is a social tool, for a parent or teacher to ask questions that do not have much to do with the safety of the child using technology media tools, is invading privacy, at least in my own thinking. Of course when the information is offered, then it is ok to ask questions. That being said, the issue of technological privacies must be looked at. How many questions can a parent or teacher ask concerning a student's time using technological literacies? What types of questions should students answer no matter the circumstances? What rights do parents have to their children's Facebook page, cell phone texts, blogs, etc? What

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rights do teachers have concerning student time spent using technological literacies? And finally, what damage can these distracting, yet useful technological literacies cause in the home and school environment? All of these questions would require further research to answer.

### **Conclusion**

This action research has been conducted with the intent to discover the interconnectedness between adolescent girls' home literacy practices and adolescent girls' school literacy practices. Gee (1989), Kucer (2005), and Lankshear & Knobel (2006), have all shown that literacy begins in the home and flourishes with the support of the home environment. Stemming from this however, multiple studies have been conducted by Bourcy & Olcott (2003), Ma'ayan (2010), and Heng (2008), amongst others that the home life of students can affect how the home literacy environment can be lost in the school literacy environment. Furthermore, studies conducted by Williams (2005), Morgan (2010), and Moje et al (2008) have shown how much technological literacies used in schools can benefit students and lead to literary success. However, little research has been carried out in the area of adolescent girls' home literacy practices and how they affect adolescent girls' school literacy practices. This action research was carried out through an active participant observer stance (via Facebook Messaging and E-mail) in order to gain the confidence of adolescent girls and to ultimately learn of their literacy practices at home and at school.

Based on the findings of this action research students are using immense amounts of technological literacies outside of the school environment but unfortunately, not many technological literacies are being used within the school environment. Students reported using technological literacies in special classes, such as Home and Careers, and on occasion, in ELA and Social Studies. I also found that students are craving a more constructivist, hands on, and

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fun method of learning. Perhaps this is related to the hands on aspect of technological literacies? Finally, I found that students are not viewing content area classes as literacy appropriate classes (with the exception of Social Studies on several occasions). Why are teachers not using content area literacies in a way that students understand them as a method of literacy (including technologies)?

If I were to replicate this study, I would definitely involve parents and teachers. As parents and teachers play a major role in fostering literacy education to children, I feel they would offer good insight into the area home literacy and how it can be connected to school literacy. I might even include adolescent boys, I am sure boys would have a very different view of literacies than girls!

This action research study has shown many important connections between the literacy lives of adolescent girls at home and the literacy lives of adolescent girls at school. The most important conclusion that I can draw from this action research is that technology is going to have to be the bridge to enhancing teaching using a more constructivist style, bringing in more content literacies through the use of technology, and just plain using technology more, like students do at home.

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**Appendix A***Literacy Research Study*

CONDUCTED BY: JODY CALDER

**St. John Fisher College: Capstone Spring 2011***Questionnaire 1: Getting to know you*

Please answer all questions to the best of your ability. Thank you for your help!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym (fake name): \_\_\_\_\_

School/Town pseudonym (fake name):  
\_\_\_\_\_

What sorts of things do you like to do in your free time?

How would you describe yourself as a person?

How would you describe yourself as a student?

What is one word other's might use to describe you?

Describe your family. (Who do you live with, brothers, and sisters, etc.)

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**Appendix B***Literacy Research Study*

CONDUCTED BY: JODY CALDER

**St. John Fisher College: Capstone Spring 2011***Questionnaire 2: Literacy at home/out of school*

DEF=\*Literacy is a form of communication and a way for us to understand the world around us.

(Examples include: reading {books, magazines, newspapers, blogs, Facebook posts, etc.}, writing, using the internet, texting, e-mailing, other social networks, online chats, gaming, and instant messenger)

What kinds of literacy do you use at home/out of school (include more than one if appropriate)?

What type of literacy do you find the most enjoyable?

What kinds of literacy do you see your parents use at home?

Please rate the following statements according to how often you use or participate in that event.

1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=every day or more (if more give the approximate number of hours) if this is something you do not use please put N/A, please record your answer on the line.

Read a book	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Read a newspaper	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Read a magazine	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Read an online article or blog	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Use a chat room	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Read for school	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Free write	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Write for school	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Use e-mail	1	2	3	4	5	_____

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Use Face book	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Text	1	2	3	4	5 (# sent per day_____)	_____
Blog	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Use the internet for fun	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Use the internet for school	1	2	3	4	5	_____

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**Appendix C***Literacy Research Study*

CONDUCTED BY: JODY CALDER

**St. John Fisher College: Capstone Spring 2011***Questionnaire 3: Literacy at school*

DEF=\*Literacy is a form of communication and a way for us to understand the world around us.

(Examples include: reading {books, magazines, newspapers, blogs, Face book posts, etc.}, writing, using the internet, texting, e-mailing, other social networks, online chats, gaming, and instant messenger)

What kinds of literacy do you use at school?

What is your favorite subject at school?

How much of your homework is literacy related?

How often do you use the computer/internet at school?

What types of activities do you use the computer/internet for?

What classes do you use the computer/internet for?

Do your teachers use smart boards? What classes?

Do you enjoy reading the books teachers choose for you at school? If yes, what are the titles, and why did you enjoy that book?

How do you think teachers can make school better for you to learn?

If you were a teacher how would you get your students interested in learning?

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Was there anything a teacher did or said that made you want to learn more? Give examples

Anything else you want to share about **LITERACY** at school: