

Schoolgirls in cyberspace: A cross-case analysis of the literacy practices of three fifth-grade girls  
in a social network site

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation is an exploratory study of the literacy practices of three fifth-grade girls as they used a social network site (SNS) for school related purposes. SNSs are widely used by adolescents, and because communication in these sites is accomplished mainly through writing, it is important to improve our understanding of what this kind of writing might mean for school-based writing instruction. Best practices in adolescent literacy instruction suggest that teachers need to build on the literacy practices adolescents develop in their homes, communities and peer networks to improve their motivation to engage with school-based writing. However, many educators tend to be dismissive of the writing practices adolescents engage in outside of school.

In this study I am to make explicit for educators the naturalistic writing practices adolescents use as they communicate with their peers in an SNS. In this study I also show that there are differences between students' writing practices that are related to their prior experiences with SNSs and facility with school-based literacy practices. Further, in this study I also connect the naturalistic literacy practices adolescents use in SNSs to the literacy practices we want them to develop through schooling. The findings from this study show that new multimodal writing practices like creating profile pages, using IM abbreviations, and "friending," can support school-based writing outcomes that include a deeper understanding of genre, audience awareness, and the ability to move fluidly between different contexts and purposes for writing.



## CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

On a comment wall in a social network site (SNS) a 10-year-old girl wrote:

Was up BFF had fun with u the other day i can't belive that i forgot all about that poem. i hate family issues i wish my mom came home. but it was fun being at your house last night and the week. i hate family issues but at least i have eacho other to get through the hard times. your ny BFF!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!1111

(Comment Wall Posting: March

10)

For a classroom writing assignment this same 10 year girl wrote:

During last years spring break my family and I went to the underwater aquarium in Minnisota. We saw sharks, stingrays, starfish and other fish. There were also jellyfish. The jellyfish amazed me the most because there was only 1 purple jellyfish that was really big. The rest were just pink and blue. After that we went to pet stingrays and look at more jelly fish. After we had pet the stingrays we went out to eat at Applebees and then when swimming.

(Discussion Forum: April, 8)

The differences between these two writing samples are striking. The first writing sample is replete with text messaging abbreviations, spelling errors, unconventional capitalization and punctuation schemes while the second writing sample contains few errors in spelling and punctuation and reflects conventions associated with academic writing. Although the writing conventions used in the first writing sample have caused widespread anxiety over a perceived

decline in the writing ability of adolescents, some literacy scholars suggest that the differences between these two texts is an indication that this ten year old girl may in fact, be developing *digital literacies* which are characterized by the skills, strategies and mindsets necessary to move fluidly between print and digital contexts for writing (Dowdall, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; O'Brian & Scharber, 2008).

Research on the literacy practices of adolescents as they use digital technologies like fan fiction sites, online video games, instant messaging (IM), and SNSs point to their potential to help students develop the writing practices valued in school (Chandler-Olcott and Mahar, 2003; Black, 2007; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Thomas, 2007). For example, adolescent girls writing fan fiction seemed to develop a heightened sense of audience as they received feedback from other users of the site (Black, 2007; Thomas, 2007). The findings from studies such as these have influenced policy and instructional strategy recommendations for teachers of English. For example, in a policy brief from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) titled *Writing Outside of School* it was acknowledged that:

The ubiquity of digital technologies for writing means that students of all ages are drawn to compose with them. The elementary student who turns to Webkinz after school, the middle schooler who sends text messages to friends, and the young adult who writes stories online—all of these individuals are drawn into writing with technology, even though they may not name their activities as writing. In the 21st century, facility with digital texts is increasingly essential, and the digital medium, with its images, audio, and text, engages students at the same time that it helps them develop many ways of representing themselves and their ideas in writing (NCTE, 2009 p.2).

Despite recommendations from the NCTE to integrate digital technologies into school-based writing curriculum, only 9% of teachers in U.S. schools allowed students to use a digital tool to interact with others in an online environment and less than 16% of teachers reported using an SNS as an instructional tool (Gray, Thomas, & Lewis, 2010). In fact, the vast majority of writing conducted with computers in U.S. schools was limited to word processing in which students created a “good” copy of a text that they had previously written with pen/pencil and paper (McClay & Mackey, 2009). As such, technology integration to support writing in schools is done so in a way that reproduces traditional school-based writing practices rather than the digital ways of writing prevalent in contexts outside of school.

Rapid advancements in information technologies have resulted in a new economy in which U.S. workers write more today than at any time in history (Brandt, 2009). For example, a majority of adults (93%) now use email and cell phones and 48% use these digital technologies to accomplish work-related tasks (Horrigan, 2009). New digital technologies have changed the way many adults form and maintain relationships. For example, a majority of adults, 65%, now use SNSs to keep in touch with family and friends (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011) and interestingly Facebook played a central role in building the most effective grassroots “Get out the Vote” movement in the history of American politics (Cogburn & Epinoza-Vasquez, 2011). Because communication with digital technologies is accomplished mainly through writing, writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is directly tied to digital technologies.

This study is about using SNSs to support best practices in adolescent writing instruction. There is mounting evidence that young people have embraced SNSs like Facebook and MySpace as one of their primary forms of online communication. According to a Pew Internet and American Life survey, 95% of all teens ages 12-17 are now online and 80% of those

online teens are users of SNSs (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickur, & Rainie, 2011). Interestingly, close to half of online teens (49%) admitted to lying about their age at one time or another so they could sign up for an account in an SNS, and although most sites like MySpace and Facebook have 13 as a minimum age, 7.5 million children under the age of 13 were Facebook users and approximately 5 million were age 10 or younger (Consumer Reports, 2011).

SNSs allow users to create multimodal representations of themselves through the construction of a profile page and then connect their profile pages to those of other users (Donath & Boyd, 2004). A successful profile page communicates specific messages about its creator and adolescents work hard at learning how to “write” these pages in order to shape and maintain their identities in these sites (Boyd, 2007, Perkel, 2008). Good writing in SNSs requires individuals to think carefully about the interaction of a variety of elements including images, sound, color, hyperlinks and words in order to construct these multimodal representations of themselves (Wilber, 2007). In this study I argue that SNSs can serve as pedagogical spaces for teachers to bridge digital literacies with school-based literacies in ways that support best practices in adolescent writing instruction.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a substantial body of evidence that makes it clear that adolescents are more likely to succeed academically and go on to be successful in adulthood when bridges are built between their everyday literacy practices and the literacy practices we want them to develop through schooling (Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Heath, 1981; Moje, Young, Readence & Moore, 2000). Fully 93% of U.S. teens say they write outside of school, and 50% of all teens say they enjoy their extracurricular writing. However less than 20% say they enjoy or are motivated by formal writing instruction (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith & Macgill, 2008). Research shows that

tapping students' motivation, interest and expertise with digital technologies outside of school can engage them in reading and writing in school (Hull, 2003; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). Although national and state standards for literacy curriculum advocate for the inclusion of digital technologies and the literacy practices associated with them in classroom-based writing instruction, the practice in the field is not adequately supporting this discourse (Alvermann, 2008; O'Brian & Scharber, 2008). This suggests there are substantial challenges to integrating digital literacies into classroom-based writing curriculum.

One challenge is that many of the literacy practices adolescents use to read and write with digital technologies have become naturalized or "blackboxed" (Latour, 1991) making them difficult for teachers to understand how they might relate to school-based literacy practices (Rowse, 2009). As stated by researchers examining teen writing with technology:

To understand the state of writing today among youth, we must also understand the technological sphere that teens inhabit and where writing and technology intersect. To fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of writing instruction today, we must fully understand the role that technology plays in this realm (Lenhart et al., 2008 p.2).

Therefore, there is a need for research that makes explicit the literacy practices adolescents use as they read and write with digital technologies like SNSs so that teachers can leverage these practices to develop the kinds of literacy practices we want them to develop through schooling.

Another challenge stems from variations in young people's experience and skill with digital literacies as they use technology in contexts outside of school. Research shows that students' digital literacies emerge in ways that reflect local circumstances, such as the length of time they had a computer at home; the family's ability to purchase stable Internet connectivity; the number of computers in the home and where they are located (bedroom or public area);

parents' attitudes toward computer use; parents' own experience and skills with computers; leisure time at home; the computing habits of peers; the technical expertise of friends, relatives, and neighbors; homework assignments; and the direct instruction provided by teachers in the classroom (Ba, Tally, & Tsikalas, 2002; Facer, Furlong, Furlong, & Sutherland, 2003; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Accordingly, adolescent leisure uses of technology tend to be highly specialized and narrow and developed through repetitive use of a specific application related to a particular interest or hobby (Buckingham, 2007). Additionally, while the digital divide may be closing in terms of access to material resources, the quality of the resources remains disparate (Lenhart, et al., 2008). These findings point to a participation gap (Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Weigel, & Robinson, 2009) in terms of adolescents' use of technology outside of school and signal a need for teachers to develop more nuanced understandings of their students' various digital literacies so they can more effectively build on them to support school-base literacy instruction.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the literacy practices of three fifth-grade girls as they communicated in a classroom-based SNS. Additionally, I aimed to identify the differences in the literacy practices of three fifth-grade girls as they engaged with their peers in a classroom-based SNS and to examine factors that contributed to these differences. Finally, I identified opportunities for teachers to build on the literacy practices adolescents use to write in SNSs to support best practices in adolescent writing instruction.

### **Importance of the Study**

Although research shows that students' interest in using various media outside of school can be tapped to engage them in reading and writing in school, few educators are using SNSs to

hone their students' writing skills in school contexts. Accordingly, professional development is needed if teachers are to effectively incorporate digital technologies into their classroom-based writing curriculum (NCTE, 2009). However, there are only a few studies that have examined adolescents' use of SNSs in regards to their literacy practices and few have made connections between SNSs and education (Boyd & Ellison 2007; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). To date the majority of research with the purpose of examining and identifying digital literacies has focused on the literacy practices of adolescents in out-of-school contexts (Merchant, 2008), and very few studies have examined digital literacies pertaining to the use of SNSs in school settings. Additionally, many children under the age of thirteen are participating in SNSs but few studies have systematically examined the literacy practices of children in this age group. This examination of the literacy practices of three fifth-grade girls as they interacted in an SNS for school related purposes is intended to fill that gap.

### **Research Questions**

In this study I work from the premise that if educators are to integrate digital technologies in ways that will benefit their students future academic, work and social lives, then more information is needed about the literacy practices of children as they use digital technologies to communicate both in and out of school. To this end I asked the questions:

1. What are the literacy practices of three fifth-grade girls when participating in a classroom use of an SNS?
2. How did their literacy practices differ and what contributed to these differences?
3. What are the implications of these findings for adolescent writing instruction?

To answer these questions I began by examining the writing conventions employed by three fifth-grade girls as they created profile pages in a classroom-based SNS. Then I compared and contrasted the writing conventions of the three participants to determine differences in their literacy practices relative to scores on standardized measures of writing ability and prior experience with SNSs. I then made inferences about what the differences between the literacy practices of three fifth-grade girls might mean for educators seeking to bridge the digital literacies students develop in contexts outside of school with the literacy practices we want them to develop through schooling.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Adolescent literacy:** Although many social constructions of literacy rely on age related definitions, recommendations for best practice in adolescent literacy instruction usually target students in grades 5-12 (Hinchman & Sheridan-Thomas, 2008).

**Best practices for adolescent writing instruction:** Research-based strategies promoted by literacy scholars and professional organizations such as the National Council of Teacher of English (NCTE) whose aim is to improve classroom-based literacy instruction.

**Classroom practices:** The ways in which teachers make sense of what they do including their interactions with students and instructional design. Classroom practices involve attitudes, feelings, values and social relationships that regulate who gets to produce or access textual content, at what point, and for what purpose (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1995).

**Digital literacies:** Refers to those literacies that have emerged in the post-typographic era (Reinking, 2008). Socially situated practices supported by skills, strategies and stances that enable the representation and understanding of ideas using a range of modalities enabled by digital tools (O'Brian & Scharber, 2008 p.67).



**Literacy practices:** Socially recognized patterned ways of using texts and technologies to get things done in the world (Street 1984; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). They involve more than “knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use” (Scribner & Cole, 1981 p. 236).

**Naturalized literacy practices:** Reading and writing practices broadly defined that have become second nature (Rowse, 2009).

**New literacies:** A term that reflects the belief that there is an intimate relationship between technology and literacy practices and that rapid advancements in information and communication technologies have radically changed the literacy practices need to be successful in contemporary society (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003).

**Print-based texts:** Paper-based texts in which alphabetic letters and words are the primary carrier of meaning (Kress, 2003). It is the construction of these texts that is the primary focus of classroom reading and writing instruction (Bearne, 2005).

**School-based literacy:** How literacy is framed in official standards and assessments of reading and writing ability (O’Brian & Scharber, 2008). Although the NCTE supports the use of digital technologies for school-based writing instruction, standardized measures of writing attainment focus almost exclusively on skills and strategies for reading and writing print-based texts. These types of assessment appear to be driving classroom practices (Corio Lankshear, Knobel & Leu, 2008).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

I begin the literature review by presenting The New Literacies Study (NLS) as a theoretical lens to examine literacy practices of three fifth-grade girls using an SNS as part of their classroom language arts curriculum. I then define what is meant by the term digital literacies and describe those characteristics. Next, I present research that has theorized about how digital literacies might support school-based literacy. I then examine empirical studies related to the literacy practices associated with adolescent use of SNSs in contexts outside of school to determine how they might support school-based writing instruction. Finally, I present third space pedagogy as a concept with which to understand how teachers might use SNSs to support best practices in adolescent writing instruction.

### New Literacy Studies and Literacy Practices

This study is situated in the New Literacy Studies; a body of work in which literacy is defined as more than an act of individual cognition involved in the encoding and decoding of print-based text, but also involves knowing how to use various texts and technologies to communicate purposefully in multiple social and cultural contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2000; Heath, 1983; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; New London Group, 1996; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1995). The basic unit in the NLS framework is situated in *literacy practices*, which involve observable “literacy events” that are mediated by both print and non print texts, plus the values, attitudes, and feelings, of the individuals involved in producing and consuming those texts (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). From this perspective, using a cell phone to send a text message is a literacy practice in the same way that using a pen to write an essay is a literacy practice.

Research conducted through the lens of NLS is noteworthy for identifying how people use technology to build and participate in literacy practices that involve different kinds of values, sensibilities, norms, and procedures that differ from conventional literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; New London Group, 1996). This line of research has been especially valuable for educators as they have examined the literacy practices of young people as they read and write for their own purposes outside of school, and it highlighted their considerable intellectual accomplishments and potential as learners despite poor school-based performance (Hull & Schultz, 2001). NLS scholars pay particular attention to the way literacy practices carry meaning through their entrenchment in specific cultural values and orientations and claim that what counts as legitimate ways to read and write varies according to context (Street, 1984). For example, using a cell phone to send a picture is a literacy practice that serves a meaningful purpose in the lives of many adolescents outside of school although it is not a literacy practice that is presently valued in school. Thus the NLS perspective is useful for examining the literacy practices of young people as they use new digital technologies like SNSs to communicate in both in-and-out of school contexts.

This study is located specifically in a body of research known as the “digital turn” where scholars within the NLS tradition have shifted from the study of print-based reading and writing practices to the new textual practices mediated by digital technologies outside of school (Mills, 2010). Scholars working in this line of research claim that digital technologies have not just “technologized” ways of doing familiar things but facilitated new social practices related to producing, representing and consuming knowledge, and fundamentally changed how work gets done and relationships get formed in the digital age. Knobel and Lankshear (2007) refer to these changes as “new literacies” which reflect changing epistemologies about what counts as

legitimate texts for reading and writing to accomplish one's purpose in the world. "New literacies are more 'participatory,' 'collaborative,' and 'distributed' in nature than conventional literacies and less 'published,' 'individuated,' and 'authorcentric' than conventional literacies. They are also less 'expert-dominated' than conventional literacies"(Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 9). For example, the creation of sites like Wikipedia has introduced the notion of collective intelligence by allowing users to contribute knowledge and expertise regardless of educational background and location. Although new literacy practices do not necessitate the use of digital technologies, the affordances and constraints of digital technologies have moved these literacy practices to the fore, and as such, they are often referred to as "new literacies".

### **New Literacies and Digital Literacies**

To identify digital literacies, NLS researchers pay close attention to how individuals use texts and technologies to communicate in digitally mediated environments. In particular they focus on the cultural norms involved in text production and consumption (Street, 1995). For example, one must know that writing on a comment wall in an SNS is reserved for lighter dialogic conversation while more personal information is exchanged through email (Rowse, 2009).

NLS scholars use the term *literacies* as a plural term to recognize that people read and write differently in different settings according to the tools to which they have access. In this study the term *digital literacies* is defined as the "socially situated practices supported by skills, strategies and stances that enable the representation and understanding of ideas using a range of modalities enabled by digital tools" (O'Brian & Scharber, 2008 p.67). The terms *new literacies* and *digital literacies* are often used synonymously and are the subject of much debate (Reinking, 2008). To avoid confusion, the term *digital literacies* will be used to refer to the way people read

and write with digital tools and *new literacies* will be used in reference to the epistemologies associated with rapid advancements in the tools for communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Scholars within the digital strand of the NLS have shed light on the nature of digital literacies.

Digital literacies are characterized by new textual features, such as modified genres or text structures that tend to be brief, spontaneous, and more interactive than other written texts. For example, IM reflects a responsive, spoken-like form that contains a combination of conventional spellings and new abbreviations that have become recognizable to frequent users of the discourse (Chrystal, 2001). The multimodal nature of text created with digital technologies has shifted focus from linguistic features to elements of design as the visual nature of the digital texts has become more salient. Thus competence with digital literacies involves the ability to read and write multimodal texts that are comprised of linguistic, aural, visual and kinesthetic elements (Kress, 2003; Luke, 2003). These shifts require individuals to read and write differently as they read and write laterally across modes, sampling the multimodal resources available to them (Kress, 2003). For example, a comparison of a textbook from the 1930s, a current textbook, and a webpage, all dealing with the same subject matter, shows the increasing importance of design as writers use images and other semiotic resources more frequently which has important implications for how individuals read texts as images provide less specificity, but offer more generality (Ranker, 2008).

Digital literacies are also socially mediated. In fact, it is not the computer or the Internet that is central to digital literacies, but the way that these tools shape social relations and practices (Barton, et al., 2000; Lankshear & Knobel 2003; Kress, 2003). In fact, the maintenance of social relationships is a central function of digital communication (Valentine & Holloway, 2002; Wellman, 1997). For example, digital technologies have increased the interactions between

readers and writers and require a different mindset for participation (Jenkins, et al., 2009).

Additionally, just as in all communities, people in virtual communities develop guidelines, rules and regulations for “ways of behaving, interacting, thinking, believing, speaking and often reading and writing (Gee, 1996 p.3). Therefore participation in digitally mediated environments requires specialized knowledge of the way members of a particular online network linguistically behave or they risk being excluded or regulated to lower status within the group (Cherny, 1999; Crystal, 2001).

Digital literacies represent changing literacy practices resulting from rapid advancements in information and communication technologies. Emoticons and abbreviations are examples of how texts are becoming more visual due to the affordances and constraints of email and IM (Crystal, 2008; Jacobs, 2008). Digital literacies require users to attend to aspects of layout and design that are not normally associated with alphabetic print-based texts (Jewitt, 2006; Snyder, 2002). While these forms of writing may not be useful for academic writing, it is crucial for teachers to understand how emoticons work and the meaning of abbreviations’ used by their students in order to build bridges from one type of literacy to another (Wilber, 2008).

Digital literacies are the skills, strategies and mindsets individuals use to read and write with digital technologies. In the next section of this literature review, I will present the research related to the influence of digital literacies on schooling and described and define school-based literacy practices.

### **Digital Literacies and Schooling**

In 2004, the NCTE stated that:

As basic tools for communication expand to include modes beyond print alone, “writing” comes to mean more than scratching words with pen and paper. Writers need to think

about the physical design of text, about the appropriateness and thematic content of visual images, about the integration of sound with a reading experience, and the medium that is most appropriate for a particular message, purpose and audience. (NCTE, 2004, para. 38)

Like the NCTE, other professional organizations such as the International Society for Technology in Education (2007) and Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2008) have highlighted shifts in literacy as moving from reading and writing only print-based text to an expanded sense of reading and writing that includes multiple forms of non-print and print-mixed texts. However, with some important exceptions, most teachers do not acknowledge these shifts. For example, research on the integration of digital technologies in schools consistently demonstrates they are implemented in mostly cursory ways and are limited to word processing or use of drill and practice software (Gray, Thomas, & Lewis, 2010; Leander, 2007; Oppenheimer, 2003). The discrepancy between professional organizations recommendations for best practice in adolescent literacy instruction, and actual classroom practices has created confusion about what is meant by the term school-based literacy.

NLS scholars claim that school-based literacy is defined and sustained by current legislation, government reports, and mass media stories about school failure in terms of literacy instruction, which then causes school curricula to focus more on “basic skills” or functional literacy outcomes at the expense of engaging students in more complex literacy practices that align with how people read and write in the world outside of school (Gee, 2004; Street 1997). This point of view is supported by the fact that as of 2012 there are no items that assess digital literacies on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Cavanaugh, Barbour & Clark, 2009; Corio, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008). Thus NLS scholars tend to refer to school-based literacy instruction in the pejorative and view school-based literacy as an instrument of

marginalization and state control (Gee, 2004; Street, 1997). However, not only is this point of view unhelpful in changing school-based literacy instructional practices, it is incongruous with recommendations for best practices in adolescent literacy instruction.

The International Reading Association (IRA) and the NCTE (1996) addressed digital literacies within a comprehensive list of literacy standards. The standards relevant to digital literacies are delineated below and demonstrate the complex and rich literacy practices needed for personal and professional productivity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- Standard 4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g. conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively for a variety of audiences for a variety of purposes.
- Standard 5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety for purposes.
- Standard 6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e. g. spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- Standard 12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

To address confusion about what constitutes school-based literacy stemming from discrepancies between standards for writing instruction and the realities of classroom practices the term *school-based literacy* will refer to the way literacy is framed in official standards and assessments for adolescent literacy instruction (O'Brian& Scharber, 2008) and the term, *print-based literacy* will



refer to the skills and strategies used to construct paper-based texts in which alphabetic letters and words are the primary carrier of meaning (Kress, 2003).

Although official standards for school-based writing instruction advocate for the inclusion of digital technologies to promote authentic and meaningful writing projects and activities in schools, the reality of classroom practices concerning the use of digital technologies for writing instruction continues to be superficial and arbitrary, which can have negative implications for writing instruction in school. For example, when students' out-of-school literacy practices are not recognized as being valuable, they can become resistant to school-based literacy instruction (Moje & Sutherland, 2003; Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Additionally, teachers' preference for print-based reading and writing may lead them to not notice students' competencies or incompetencies with digital literacies and thereby fail to prepare students with the digital literacies increasingly valued in contexts outside of school. Research involving young people's use of digital technologies outside of school show that students arrive in school with varying degrees of exposure to, and experience and expertise with digital technologies. For example, some students have broad sophistication involving many forms of digital literacies but others develop particular digital literacies related to a hobby or particular interest at the expense of others (Ba, Tally, and Tsikalas, 2002; Buckingham, 2007). Additionally, some teachers assume that the digital divide has been closed though this is not necessarily the case. Students from high poverty environments still have relatively little access to the Internet or computers with the bandwidth needed to operate the sophisticated applications of their higher SES peers (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer & Morris, 2008). Thus it is essential that teachers begin to understand the diverse literacy practices of their students and find ways to capitalize on the diversity of their students' digital literacies in order to adequately prepare them for the world outside of school.

Though many parents of teens do not consider their use of digital technologies to send text messages, blog, post messages on SNSs as “real” writing, or children’s engagement with webpages as “real” reading (Lenhart, et al., 2008), teachers and parents need to recognize that posting messages to SNSs after school, sending text messages to friends, and writing stories for online fan fiction sites are all ways that adolescents are drawn into writing with technology. When teachers ignore or dismiss students’ interest in using digital technologies they miss opportunities to engage them in activities that help them develop many ways of representing themselves and their ideas in writing (Black, 2007; Dowdall, 2006; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Thomas, 2007). To address classroom teachers’ reluctance to embrace students’ digital literacies or failure to recognize some students’ lack of digital literacies, the NCTE has made three recommendations for K-12 teachers:

- Observe and encourage students’ multiple literacies as meaningful, complex, and relevant.
- Recognize varying levels of comfort and exposure to digital technologies.
- Re-examine the curriculum in light of shifting and multi-modal literacies, including the increase in interactivity, visual representations, and non-linearity for both writers and readers
- Provide authentic opportunities for Web 2.0 reading and writing, including activities that engage the current read-write or remix culture (NCTE, 2008b, p. 19).

However, in order for teachers to implement these recommendations, more information is needed about the diversity of digital literacies that adolescents develop and use as they communicate with digital technologies outside of school. In the next section of this literature review I will

examine the research related to the literacy practices of adolescents as they use SNSs outside of school.

### **SNSs and Digital Literacies**

One of the most recent technologies that appears to be influencing, shaping, and transforming the literacy practices of school-aged children are SNSs like Facebook, MySpace and Webkins. SNSs allow users to create profile pages that contain personal information such as age, location, interests, a profile photo, and a display of a list of friends who are also users of the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). SNSs have a wide variety of technical features like built-in blogging, IM, and email that allow users to leave “comments” or messages on their friends' profile pages. They also have applications that allow users to enhance their profiles by adding multimedia content such as photos and videos. Users create social networks in these sites through “friending” which is the process in which users give other users access to their profile page (Boyd, 2006). Profile pages tend to reveal a great deal of personal information through text and images, and this can help users identify each other's gender, age, purpose for using the site, relationship status, sexual orientation, ethnicity, geographic location, interests, education, and occupation (Jones, Millermaier, Goya-Martinez, & Schuler, 2008). This information allows users to form relationships based on what they learn about others' situations, interests, contacts and connections (Donath & Boyd, 2004).

There are only a few studies that have examined young people's use of SNSs in regards to their literacy practices (Boyd, 2006; Boyd, 2007; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Perkel, 2008). These studies suggest that teens have embraced written communication as they write and read messages on their profile pages, send emails, and instant message. However, teenagers do not view their electronic communication as real writing (Lenhart, et al., 2008). This may be in large

part due to a pervasive perception that the kinds of communication children engage in while using digital communication tools are frivolous, the equivalent of unproductive classroom talk, rather than serving an important educative purpose (Leander, 2007; Merchant, 2008). Considering the centrality of written communication in SNSs, and the high levels of engagement and commitment young people appear to have while using SNSs, it seems important for educators to understand what SNSs might mean for writing instruction in school.

It is crucial for teachers to understand how digital literacies work in naturalized context to create a bridge between the digital literacies students are developing in their lives outside of school and literacy practices we want them to develop through schooling (Gee, 2003; Moje, MacIntosh Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carillo, & Callazo, 2004; New London Group, 1996). In the next section I present findings from research studies that help to characterize the digital literacies individuals use and develop as they read and write in SNSs.

### **Multimodal Texts, Profile Pages, and Identity**

In SNSs, profile pages are concrete representations of who users are or who they want to become (Boyd, 2007). In order to establish these identities users must think carefully about the interaction of a variety of elements including photos, color, linguistic descriptions, and hyperlinks in order to communicate a specific message that will attract other users to their page. When young people choose a photo to represent themselves, or place song lyrics in their status update, they are drawing on rhetorical conventions to represent themselves (Rowse, 2009). Findings from several studies of SNSs suggest there is a set of conventionalized practices individuals must have knowledge of if they are to successfully create profile pages and successfully establish and maintain relationships in an SNS (Boyd, 2006; Boyd, 2007; Perkel, 2008; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Rowse, 2009).

In SNSs, youth writing is often less linguistically complex and more focused on visual and design elements. One study of MySpace found that teens that created original looking profile pages attracted more “friends” to, and comments on, their pages than those who relied on the default background design (Perkel, 2008). In another study of MySpace, teens explicitly talked about how they used color, backgrounds, layout and music to represent their moods and described how digital photographs helped them portray who they were and with whom they affiliated (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). These studies demonstrate that some teens understand how to use multimodal semiotic material to create concrete representations of themselves in SNSs which demonstrates their facility with the digital literacies needed to successfully establish relationships in SNSs.

### **Social Presence, Digital Writing, and Cybertalk**

The centrality of language and writing in order to establish a social presence in SNSs is also salient in studies of SNSs. In SNSs young people often adopt stylized language variations like urban slang (Kirkland, 2009) and frequently write using a language variation known as “cybertalk” (Dowdall, 2006), a term coined by Denzin (1999) that has two distinctive linguistic features. The first feature includes the use of symbols like emoticons, abbreviations and text formatting like writing in all capital letters to provide other users with information about emotions, movement and other expressions. The second is the blurring of distinctions between speech and writing as the use of signs and symbols signifies an attempt to perform speech through writing (Kress, 2003).

Communication in SNSs centers heavily on text-driven communication. In interviews students reported that they spent a considerable amount of time considering word choice in an effort to communicate sarcasm or humor in the absence of social cues. In a study of a high

school students use of a Myspace, the researchers observed that the use of unconventional visual elements, like writing in all caps to represent emotion or emphasis, and more importantly to demonstrate creativity in efforts to prompt “friends” to comment on their page (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). There are concerns that the reading and writing practices in which teens engage as they communicate in SNSs are degrading their quality of writing due to abundant use of abbreviations, careless spelling, inattention to grammar, and use of images like emoticons. However, in one study of MySpace it was found that one struggling reader and writer of academic texts consciously used cybertalk as an attempted to free himself from the constraints of school-based writing so that he could more purposefully construct his identity as a gifted writer of rap music (Kirkland, 2009).

### **Friends and Friending: SNSs as a Discourse Community**

In order for effective communication to occur in any discourse community, knowledge of the common literacy practices used in that discourse are required (Gee, 2004). For example, knowing when to avoid being too personal when commenting on a comment wall, and avoiding sending long detailed messages to members who are acquaintances rather than close friends are some of the literacy practices in SNSs that can have negative ramifications for users who do not comply with these practices. One of the most prominent literacy practices specific to SNSs is that of “friending”.

In SNSs, the term “friend” does not necessarily indicate that a meaningful relationship exists between two users. Instead users “friend” each other as an identity performance (Donath & Boyd, 2004). For example the number of “friends,” indicated by the number of profile pictures on a profile page, can serve as notches on a post for reputation and popularity for some teens (Perkel, 2008). While understanding that the nature of friendship in SNSs is a sign of being

digitally literate, knowing the skills and strategies, both technical and social, for attracting and making friends in SNSs is also important.

One strategy for attaining a large number of friends and comments on a profile page is related to designing creative and original looking profile pages (Perkel, 2008; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). These researchers found that teens placed a high value on creativity and originality in the design of profile pages. This included changing background motifs, layout, color and font sizes and style from that of the default template. To create an original looking profile page, users must have the technical skill involved in copying and pasting in order to modify the default profile page design. Although the act of copy and paste is technically simple it can have socially complex ramifications. However, because adolescents tend to view the number of comments and the number of “friends” as a sign of popularity, to create a profile page that does not communicate individuality and creativity can have negative implications in terms of social relationships in both online and face-to-face settings (Perkel, 2008; Wilber, 2008).

The research studies reviewed in this section helped to make explicit some of the digital literacies individuals use to successfully participate in SNSs in out-of-school contexts. However, several researchers from the NLS community speculate that when digital technologies are integrated in regular classroom routines they will be “domesticated” in ways that diminish their appeal and neglect to take advantage of their affordances that serve to prepare students for the new realities of the digital age (Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Leander, 2007; Stone, 2007; Black, 2007). Therefore, there is a need for investigations into the literacy practices of young people as they use SNSs for school related purposes.

Research on SNSs is still emerging. Most of the studies that do exist stem from communications, information science, sociology, cultural studies and computer science (Boyd &

Ellison, 2007). There are only a few studies that have explored the link between SNSs and education and fewer still that have done so from a NLS perspective (see Dowdall, 2006; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Kirkland, 2009; Moayeri, 2010; Perkel, 2008; Rowsell, 2009; Wilber, 2007). Even fewer studies have examined digital literacies or use of SNSs in school settings. The findings from this investigation of a classroom use of an SNS are meant to address that gap.

### **Third Space Pedagogy, SNSs, and Best Practice in Adolescent Writing Instruction**

The 21st century requires writers who can move easily between genres, think critically about new writing tasks and exercise audience awareness (NCTE, 2009). Research shows that the writing students do with digital technologies such as FanFiction.net and IM helps young people develop an understanding of audience, learn how to use the conventions of specific types or genres of writing, become more confident as writers, and develop effective ways to represent themselves through writing (Black, 2007; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Hull & Schultz, 2002). Research also shows that teachers can benefit from learning about the purposes, types, and languages of the writing their students engage in outside the classroom (Heath, 1983; Hull & Schultz, 2002). In this section of the literature review I use the concept of third space pedagogy (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejada, 1999) to identify how the literacy practices adolescents use in SNSs might connect with the writing practices we want them to develop through schooling.

Third space pedagogy involves teachers' leveraging students' linguistic resources to scaffold them into school learning and expanding the literacy practices that are typically valued in school (Moje et al., 2004). Although research on the literacy practice of adolescents as they



communicate in SNSs is still emerging, those studies that do exist provide evidence that the digital literacies used in SNSs can support school-based writing instruction.

### **SNSs and New Purposes and Places for Writing**

The NCTE (1996) standards three and four for the English Language Arts state that students should, “adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g. conventions, style, vocabulary) and employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing processes to communicate effectively for a variety of audiences for a variety of purposes.” Third space pedagogy involves helping students to cross over and succeed in different discourse communities (Moje et al. 2004). As previously discussed, SNSs are discourse communities in which individuals engage in literacy practices that differ from classroom-based reading and writing practices and are shaped by site-specific understandings shared by insiders (Devitt, 2006). There are a few studies of SNSs that suggest some adolescents appear to develop the ability to write for a variety of audiences and purposes as they move between writing for school and writing for their peers in SNSs (Dowdall, 2006; Greenhow, 2009; Kirkland, 2009).

In one study of an SNS called BeBo, a twelve-year-old girl demonstrated the capacity to competently construct texts that met the expectations of other users in the BeBo, and the expectations of her teacher for a school-based writing assignment. The findings in this study emphasized that although there are marked differences between the social languages, register, and formalities in the construction of the two texts, the participant did not experience dissonance to the extent that most adults and teachers assume. These findings suggest that children are capable of developing the capacity to become “easy-switchers” (Dowdall, 2006) who can move easily between school-based text construction and the kinds of multimodal texts afforded in an SNS.

Additionally, in a study of eleven high school students' use of MySpace, Greenhow and Robelia (2009) sought to understand the role MySpace served in the lives of these students.

Through interviews and content analysis of their profile pages the researchers found that these students demonstrated levels of sophistication in terms of attending to word choice, audience awareness and explicitly discussed their awareness of the differences between school-based and informal writing conventions. For example, in an interview one high school student commented:

With school you're always writing formal things like essays and you have to stick to standard English...when you go on MS, its more relaxed. You can use slang, create your own words, like, seriously, I have friends who create their own words on there...funny words, you can mess around (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009 p. 24).

These findings highlight the heightened attention to language use some adolescents develop as they move between writing in school and writing in SNSs.

Research on best practices in adolescent literacy instruction suggests that when adolescents receive responses to writing they have put on the Internet it helps them to imagine audience needs more clearly (Alvermann, 2008; Lindemann, 2005). Not only is an authentic audience for writing crucial in motivating students to write, it also appears that it provides students with motivation to attend to aspects of language and writing conventions as they work to shape their identities through writing (Black, 2007; Guzzetti, 2006; Thomas, 2007). The key points made in this section of the literature review suggest that SNSs may provide teachers with a context to employ third space pedagogy if they merge adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices with school-based literacy practices in order to encourage students to develop a deeper understanding of writing for a variety of audiences and purposes.

### **Profile Pages, Remixing, and New Digital Genres for Writing**

The NCTE (1996) standard six for the English Language Arts suggests that teachers should create writing assignments that ask students to interpret and analyze a wide variety of genres. Several studies of SNSs support the notion that the naturalistic writing practices users employ to construct these sites are conventionalized and constitute a new genre. For example, experienced users of Facebook and MySpace know that writing on someone's wall is reserved for lighter dialogic conversation in which the register is looser and less directly personal due the public nature of comment wall postings (Greenhow & Robelia 2009; Rowsell, 2009).

Additionally, experienced users of SNSs do not expect that information on a profile page will be taken literally, but instead write in ways that are performance oriented and creativity and humor are highly valued (Boyd, 2006; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Rowsell, 2009). For instance, teens often write comments on MySpace profile pages not necessarily expecting a response from another user but as a way to express an affiliation, or engage in a contest for status as users compete for the highest numbers of comments on their profile pages. To address the issue of new genres emerging from digital technologies such as SNSs, the NCTE recommends that writing instruction in school should engage students in a deep study of genre which includes those shaped by digital technologies (NCTE, 2008a).

Best practices for adolescent literacy instruction suggest that teachers should "...provide authentic opportunities for Web 2.0 reading and writing, including activities that engage students with the current read-write or remix culture" (NCTE, 2008a, p. 18). The term remix is used to reference the practice of creating multimodal texts by copying and pasting HTML into web pages to create an original work (Jenkins et al., 2009). Writing in an SNS is considered to be a multimodal art and a new genre by several literacy researchers (Perkel, 2008;

Rowse, 2009; Wilber, 2008). A successful page communicates specific messages about its creator. Experienced users copy and paste HTML code to modify their profile pages. Profile pages with interesting layouts are highly valued and can provide individuals with status as they attract comments from other users (Perkel, 2008; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). However students need to learn to think critically about issues of privacy, publicity, and intellectual property as they remix media to create multimodal representation of themselves (Wilber, 2008).

It has been suggested that the technically simple act of copying and pasting HTML or linking to other media on the Internet to create original looking profile pages would be problematic for educators concerns about copyright and respect for intellectual property, which might then cause them to prohibit the practice (Perkel, 2008). However, this would interfere with the ultimate goal of third space pedagogy which is to expand literacy practices that are typically valued in school (Moje et al., 2004). Additionally, prohibiting students from engaging in a literacy practice that is so central to the genre from which it emerges would likely diminish students' interest in using SNSs for school-based writing instruction. This finding signals a need for professional development to help teachers clearly understand the naturalized literacy practices specific to SNSs so that they can effectively use them to employ third space pedagogy to promote the development of both digital literacies and school-based writing.

### **Profile Pages, Identity, and Playing and Writing**

The important role of play in learning to write has often been overlooked in the classroom writing curriculum (Alvermann & Heron, 2001). Standard twelve of the NCTE standards for the English Language Arts advocate for students to use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information (NCTE, 1996). A few studies of SNS suggest that adolescents enjoy

writing in SNSs because they provide them with opportunity to use language to role play.

Communication in SNSs encourages role play as adolescents create profile pages to project their identities into an SNS-based community (West, 2008). Third space pedagogy involves providing students with writing assignments that allow them to overcome their ascribed identities in order to achieve identities that might align more closely with the reality of their lives outside of school (Moje, 2007). For example, a study of an African American male high school student writing in MySpace who had been identified as a struggling reader and writer found him to be a prolific and popular poet and writer of rap music (Kirkland, 2009). In interviews with the participant, Kirkland found that the student possessed sophisticated knowledge of language and made very conscious decisions word choices as he played with language to construct an identity that overcame his identity as an underachiever in school. This study suggests that adolescents use SNSs to practice writing in genres that schools purport to value even as they write for their own purpose using SNSs.

In another study, a twelve year old girl using an SNS called Bebo demonstrated her proficiency with digital literacies as she used the writing conventions associated with text messaging. However in a text she constructed for a school-based writing assignment her spelling remained conventional and her sentence construction included a variety of sentence types including confidently constructed complex sentences (Dowdall, 2006). At the conclusion of this study, the researcher suggested that the informal writing contexts of SNSs such as Bebo can provide adolescents with a space to experiment and play with language which may actually pull their conventional literacies along.

Research through the lens of third space pedagogy shows that extracurricular or out-of-school writing can draw on adolescents' social, cultural, and linguistic resources (Moje, et al.,

2004; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010). However in order for teachers to use SNSs to employ third space pedagogy they need to understand how to appropriate them in ways that value and respect the naturalized literacy practices that have become conventionalized in SNSs (Rowse, 2009). NLS scholars caution that if SNSs are to be appropriated in ways that support classroom learning then teachers must expand what counts as legitimate texts for reading and writing if they are to maintain their appeal for adolescents (Black, 2007; Thomas, 2007; Stone, 2007).

### **Classroom Uses of SNSs**

There are very few studies that have examined the use of SNSs in school settings. Only one study was found, by Moayeri (2010), which examined a classroom use of an SNS. In the study two classroom uses of an SNS called Ning were examined. In the first classroom the teacher allowed students to modify their profile pages to reflect aspects of the books they were reading. This teacher also encouraged students to use the site for purposes other than class assignments. That is, students were allowed to socialize and weave together their personal experience outside of school within the activities originally intended for classroom learning. Thus, in this classroom implementation of an SNS, third space pedagogy was employed as students drew on their “funds of knowledge” to support school-based learning.

However, in the other classroom, the main use of the SNS revolved around writing blog postings in response to teacher directed questions. The teacher also required students to adhere to academic writing conventions as they posted blogs and responded to each other’s blogs postings. In this classroom implementation students rarely logged on to the site outside of school hours unless it was assigned as a homework activity in which students were given a prescribed assignment to complete using the site outside of class time. In this example of a classroom use of an SNS the teacher did not employ third space pedagogy as she did not encourage students to

merge their out-of-school literacy practices with in-school writing activities. This finding signals a need for investigation into classroom-based SNSs so that teachers may more effectively appropriate them into their school-based writing pedagogy and curriculum.

### **Summary**

The studies described in this literature review demonstrate that SNSs can support the development of some of the writing practices we want students to cultivate through schooling such attending to word choice and developing a heightened sense of audience. However, some researchers from the NLS perspective speculate that when and if digital technologies are integrated into classroom activities they will be “pedagogized” (Street & Street, 1991), which will diminish their appeal, or teachers might neglect to take advantage of the affordances of digital technologies in ways that will prepare students for the digital age (Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Leander, 2007; Stone, 2007; Black, 2007). Still, there is significant debate over the alleged advantages and disadvantages of incorporating digital technologies into mainstream education but most of this debate is taking place without adequate pedagogical research and evaluation of new digital technologies in higher education and K-12 settings (Greenhow, Robelia & Hughes, 2009). Therefore, NLS scholars have urged researchers to forge investigations of digital literacies in institutional settings such as schools (Mills, 2010). The examination of the literacy practices of three fifth-grade girls as they used an SNS for school-based literacy development that constitute the present study, is meant to address this debate.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODS**

### **Overview of the Study**

Qualitative research informed by a NLS perspective, in which literacy is socially constructed rather than technologically determined, will provide educators with a more nuanced picture of what happens when digital technologies are used in classrooms (Lankshear, Snyder & Green, 2000; Hull & Schultz, 2001). The purpose of this study was to identify, and compare and contrast the literacy practices three fifth-grade girls exhibited in a classroom use of an SNS, and to use this information and finally to use this information to consider how student participation in SNSs might be used to support writing instruction in school.

Three cases were included in this study. A multiple-case study approach allows researchers to compare similar and contrasting situations so that patterns can be determined (Yin, 2009). I derive my definition of “case study” from the work of Denscombe (1998) who explains that the aim of a case study is to “illuminate the general by looking at the particular” (p.30). For the purpose of this research, each fifth-grade girl was considered to be a case. Through the construction of each case I was able to identify each participant’s literacy practices. I then used the concept of third space pedagogy (Gutierrez, et al., 1999) to frame a cross-case comparative analysis to examine how participants varied in the ways they exhibited digital literacies to examine how student participation in SNSs might support school-based writing instruction.

### **Context for the Research**

#### **The Researcher**

When I began this study, I was not an SNS user. Although I had heard of MySpace and Facebook, I had not participated in them. However, I had been using and conducting research on students’ use of digital communication tools such as chat rooms and discussion boards to



improve student motivation to read books. In a re-examination of data for an article submitted to *The Reading Teacher Journal*, I had discovered that I had misinterpreted some sophisticated strategies students were using for communication and had coded them as “off task” behavior. This realization echoed what Barton & Hamilton (2000) had observed: that, historically, schools have ignored children’s informal learning processes especially as they pertain to literacy development. This finding led me to begin reading the NLS literature. Although I was new to the NLS framework, it influenced how I began to conceptualize and collect data for this study. I became very self-conscious about dismissing any activity in which students engaged while using the SNS, and worked to understand how these activities might have pedagogical value for literacy learning in school. I often articulated my struggles and observations with the classroom teachers I had recruited for the present study and we worked together to create activities for a project called Reading Revolution that would take advantage of students’ enthusiasm for using SNSs in ways that met our pedagogical goals. These conversations and tensions were recorded in my reflective journal and served as a data source for this study.

### **Research Site and Activities**

Two fifth-grade classrooms, one located in Oakland, California, a large inner city school district on the west coast, and the other, located in a small rural school in Iowa, used an SNS to participate in a project called Reading Revolution. The goal of the Reading Revolution project was to create an online book club to improve student motivation to read books. The Oakland students had access to ten laptop computers and were provided an opportunity to participate in Reading Revolution periodically throughout the school day after they completed other classroom assignments and activities. Iowa students’ had access to a computer lab with enough computers for all twenty-two students to work independently on the activities for forty-

five minutes one day a week. Additionally, all students, both in Oakland and in Iowa, were encouraged to access the SNS from home, and preliminary data showed that many students spent time outside of school making blog posts, posting pictures, uploading music, and making comments on their peer's Reading Revolution profile pages.

Once students were given access to the site, they created a profile page. For security reasons, the site was password protected and only project participants were given access, students used an avatar to represent themselves for their profile photo, and used only their first names. The SNS used for this project was called Ning which allows the administrator of the site to create questions for the provisions of personal profile information. To this end, we asked questions that we thought students would find interesting and would help them to get to know each other such as "What is our favorite T.V show?" We also asked a few questions related to books and reading such as "What is your favorite book?" and "What is your favorite quote about reading?" To help students learn about each other we also used the discussion forum feature to facilitate discussion between students on topics such as "Earthquakes and Tornadoes" and "Who do you want to be president?" so students could share experiences and opinions in order to learn more about each other.

The first assignment for the Reading Revolution involved students posting book reviews of their favorite books on their blog. It was our intention that the students would read each others' book reviews and be motivated to read those books. Students also used the discussion forum to organize book clubs in which students would read and discuss a particular book together. In addition, the Oakland teacher and the Iowa teacher each chose a book that then both teachers would read aloud to their students. The Oakland teacher chose *We Beat the Streets*

and the Iowa teacher chose *Marley: A Dog Like No Other*. The discussion forum was again used to post prompts for students to share their reactions and opinions about these books.

Although improving students' motivation to read books was the primary goal for Reading Revolution, we also wanted students to socialize and form meaningful relationships with each other. To this end, we encouraged students to use the comment wall feature to communicate about topics of their own choosing. We emphasized that they attend to spelling and grammar when writing in the discussion forum and on their blogs, but we decided to let students free write when they posted comments to each other's comment walls. These activities guided interaction between the two groups of students over the course of the school year.

The Iowa location served as the primary site for the selection of participants for the cases studied. I chose the Iowa site because artifacts in the form of profile pages served as a primary source of data for this study. Because artifacts are difficult to analyze if they are detached from the contexts or persons who made them (Esterberg, 2002), I wanted to be able to have access to the context and the individuals who constructed the profile page to increase the richness of data. Because I was living in Iowa at the time of the study, I chose the Iowa location to serve as the primary site for data collection.

The Iowa school was ethnically homogeneous with 98% of students reporting to be of white non-Hispanic origin. Only 15% of students received free and reduced lunch, which is well under the state average of 33%. There were two teachers involved in the implementation of Reading Revolution at the Iowa site: the regular classroom teacher and a technology coordinator. The regular classroom teacher was early in his career with only three year of teaching experience. The technology coordinator was a 25 year veteran who had been an early adopter of computers to support student created multimedia projects.

### **Selection of Participants**

The selections of participants began with a convenience sample. At the beginning of the Reading Revolution project we sent home informed consent documents (see Appendix A), and an additional letter to parents (see Appendix B), to be signed by both parents and students. Eleven students returned the documents (six boys and five girls) and served as the participant pool for this study. In selecting cases it is important to focus on only a few variables (Yin, 2009). Because gender had been identified as a critical variable in the study of literacy attainment and motivation, I decided at the outset to choose either females or males to focus more clearly on the interrelationships between literacy practices in SNSs, academic literacy achievement and prior experience with SNSs.

In a multiple-case study, Stake (1995) argues “the first criterion for selection should be to maximize what we can learn” (p. 4). The criteria I used to select participants included levels of engagement, general reading, language use proficiency and prior experience with SNSs. A primary concern was identifying participants who were active enough during the project so there were be enough data to shed light on the literacy practices I was observing. To this end I narrowed the participant pool to participants who had received an above average number of comments (87) on their profile page and had posted an above average number of comments (96) on their peers profile pages.

Outlier cases tend to reveal more information than the representative case (Yin, 2009). Out of the participant pool only one participant, <sup>1</sup>Keli, had prior experience with SNSs and served as the *key case* to which the other cases would be compared. Because I was interested in

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<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

the interaction between digital literacies and school-based literacies I wanted participants with a range of school-based literacy skills. I obtained the participants scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) (see Table 3.1). Out of the remaining participants pool Jenny had the highest scores and Shauna had the lowest and so were chosen to serve as the comparative cases for this study.

*Table 3.1*

Participants' Scores for Reading and Writing on the ITBS

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Reading (ITBS Grade Level Equivalent)</b>	<b>Language (ITBS Grade Level Equivalent)</b>	<b>Level of Experience with SNSs</b>	<b>Number of Received on Profile Pages</b>	<b>Number of Comments Posted</b>
Jenny	9.2	13+	Novice	102	187
Keli	7.1	11.4	Experienced	154	129
Shauna	4.3	5.2	Novice	127	138

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected through: (1) participant observation and field notes, (2) artifacts in the form of profile pages and, (3) semi-structured interviews.

#### **Participant Observation and Field Notes**

To collect the data for this study I was a participant observer in the Iowa classroom over the course of one school year. According to Yin (2009), participant observers assume a role that goes beyond passive observers to being actively involved in the activities under study. Merchant (2008) suggests that if educators want to learn how to use digital technologies for classroom learning then educators need to pay close attention to how children use texts and technologies in their everyday lives. I played an active role in the Iowa classroom. I visited the Iowa classroom

once a week for one hour while students were in the computer lab engaged in Reading Revolution activities. During this time I helped the classroom teachers in the Iowa location trouble shoot technical issues and make decisions about student activity. In my field notes, I kept track of these activities and conversations between myself and the Iowa teachers as well as my reactions to these conversations and activities. In order to monitor student activity in the site, I created my own profile page, posted pictures, kept a blog, and posted comments to students' profile pages. I also spent several hours a week reading students' postings on comment walls and in discussion forums tracking conversation to find out how Iowa students were using the site, and to determine the types of activities that piqued students' interests. These observations and my reactions to these observations were recorded in my field notes.

### **Reading Revolution Profile Pages**

The profile pages served as the primary source of data. At the end of the year I downloaded all of the semiotic material the students produced as they interacted in Reading Revolution. This included each student's profile page, with its background colors, layout, motif, profile picture, photos in the photo gallery, linguistic descriptions, blog postings, music, videos as well as the comments on their comment walls and the comments they made to other users.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

If we want to know how to apply the literacy practices young people take up with a great deal of engagement in their private lives to school settings, it is essential that we build on their interests' and experiences with digital technologies (Merchant, 2008). Literacy practices involve more than just producing and consuming texts. They are intimately connected to values, feelings, unwritten rules, codes, and conventions (Barton & Hamilton 1998; Street, 1995). To recognize how students exhibited digital literacies as they participated in Reading Revolution, it

was essential that I attend to their understanding of the experience. To this end I conducted semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C) to allow participants to *express their opinions in their own words* (Esterberg, 2002) about using SNSs for school related purposes. These interviews helped me gain an insider perspective about students' perceptions of the value of using SNSs in the classroom. To begin each session I posed the following open-ended questions:

1. What did you like best about Reading Revolution?
2. If I were to do this with another class, what should I do differently?
3. Should other teachers use SNSs in their classroom? Why?

I then moved on to prompts I created in hopes of getting some clarification on some observation I had made during the participant observation sessions. For example, I noticed students seemed to enjoy changing backgrounds and profile pictures so I included prompts that would help to explain why students found these kinds of activities engaging:

1. Did you change your background or profile picture often? Why? Why not?
2. Why did you choose that icon for your profile picture?
3. Why did you choose that background for your profile page?
4. Did you notice other students changing their profile page often?

After each prompt I asked probing questions that varied with each participant. At the end of the interview I asked a few more open ended questions related to their access and computer use outside-of school. Each session was audio taped and lasted between twenty and thirty minutes.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Within-Case Analysis**

This study consisted of three different cases of fifth-grade girls communicating in an SNS for school-based literacy development. To understand how classroom uses of SNSs might

be used for literacy development in schools, it was important to identify the literacy practices of each participant over the course of the project. In case study design, each individual case consists of a whole study in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for each case. Then each case's conclusions are considered for replication by other individual cases (Yin, 2009). Therefore within-case analysis was used to examine each particular case for unique patterns before an attempt was made to generalize across cases. This process helped me to become intimately familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity (Eisenhardt, 2002).

Due to the relatively unexplored nature of texts created in SNSs, analysis of the data required several different layers of coding and interpretation. To analyze each case I began by qualitatively coding data for each participant. I began by reading and coding the interviews using a procedure called open coding (Esterberg, 2002) in which I went line by line indentifying themes and categories that seemed of interest. For example, all three participants mentioned "talking" or "chatting" to the Oakland students as one their favorite aspects of Reading Revolution, therefore, I developed a code called "*communication*". Additionally, all three participants had a very clear idea about how communication could be improved between students so I develop a code called "*rules for participation*." Other codes included:

- Home and family resources
- Profile page changes
- Peer relationships
- Message exchange

The open coding procedure was followed by focused coding in which codes were developed that more directly represented students' opinions of the activities that occurred during Reading



Revolution. For example, *message exchange* evolved into two additional codes; *satisfied communication* and *dissatisfied communication*.

The next layer of analysis involved content analysis of the participants' profile pages using the themes developed from the interviews to guide the content analysis (Esterberg, 2002). I began the content analysis by counting the number of photos, comments, use of technical applications like third party music players and blogs and text boxes. I then copied and pasted all of the comments posted and received over the course of the project into a spreadsheet. I organized the data according the time stamp on each comment (see Figure 3.1).

E1      fx      Location						
	A	B	C	D	E	F
	Name	Context	Date	Time	Location	Comment
1	Jenny	Comments	9/7	9:27 AM	Oakland	What's the weather like in Oakland? <sup>A</sup> Its hot here!
2	Jenny	Comments	9/12	8:45 AM	Oakland	Mayra, <sup>A</sup> The weather was so totally the same
3	Jenny	Comments	9/12	9:10 AM	Oakland	My name is Jessica! <sup>A</sup> I think Charlotte's Web is a really good
4	Jenny	Comments	9/12	9:16 AM	Oakland	Jeremiah, <sup>A</sup> I don't have a favorite food ether. <sup>A</sup>
5	Jenny	Comments	9/12	9:25 AM	Iowa	change your picture back.
6	Jenny	Comments	9/12	1:57 PM	Oakland	Hey Widad, <sup>A</sup> The book "House on Hackman's Hill is
7	Jenny	Comments	9/12	1:58 PM	Oakland	I love your joke!
8	Jenny	Comments	9/12	2:05 PM	Oakland	Read my "let's get to know each other" story and you'll find out! Who's
9	Jenny	Comments	9/12	2:07 PM	Oakland	I have to say, <sup>A</sup> your picture is really cute!
10	Jenny	Comments	9/12	2:13 PM	Oakland	Our School is very big. <sup>A</sup> We have a nice play ground that is pretty big. <sup>A</sup>
11	Jenny	Comments	9/12	2:20 PM	Oakland	My favorite singer is Ashley Tisdale. <sup>A</sup> Is Lola famos? <sup>A</sup>
12						

Figure 3.1. Spreadsheet containing comment wall data.

I then used themes from the interviews to develop codes for more categories. For example, the theme *dissatisfied* and *making new connections* led to a category called “Location” with two codes called “Oakland” and Iowa” which allowed for frequency counts of the number comments received by their peers and the Oakland students.

I then used a technique associated with discourse analysis in which texts are broken down into *idea units* (Gee, 1999) identified when a word, phrase, or image, introduced a new idea. For example, the comment “dont know ^ what r u doin” was counted as two idea units, indicated by the carat symbol placed between the two phrases. Next, to detect how these participants exhibited digital literacies over the course of the project, I developed additional codes derived from the literature related to the identifiable characteristics of digital literacies to help to detect these practices. For example, digital literacies are multimodal and are comprised of linguistic, aural, visual and kinesthetic elements (Kress, 2003; Luke, 2003) which allow users to engage in reading and writing practices that differ from older paper and pencil-based practices (Wilber, 2008). These include the use of symbols like emoticons, abbreviations and the use of unconventional capitalization and punctuation schemes to provide information about emotions, movement and other expressions. To this end I developed codes pertaining to the certain words, signs and symbols that reflected these literacy practices. For example, the comment “dont know ^ what r u doin” was coded as “2A” for the use of two abbreviations, “NP” for no punctuation, “NC” for no capital letters.

Communication in SNSs involves literacy practices that have been “naturalized” and use of the practices help distinguish novice users from the more experienced (Rowse, 2009). In order to recognize how the participants exhibited digital literacies it was important to be able to distinguish between expert and novice uses of the literacy practices associated with SNSs.

One naturalized literacy practice is related to purpose for communication. SNS communication tends to be performance-oriented rather than for the purpose of the exchange of specific and relevant information (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). To this end I developed codes related to what appeared to be the participants' purposes for posting the comment posted on the comment walls of other users (see Table 3.2).

*Table 3.2*  
Codes for Purpose for Communication

Code	Definition	Example
Validation & Appreciation	Comments related to profile information or profile page designs that are complimentary.	THANKS I LOVE UR PICS AND PAGE
Provide Information	Comments containing information requested from other users.	no i dont like barbies there just gross
Request Information	Comments made for the purpose of obtaining information from another user.	what show is Stewie from?
Prompt Conversation	A short greeting or general request for a status update or friendship request.	was up hi hey
Express Feeling	Containing visual elements or word play to communicate emotion.	nah she just jelous of me ^ lol ^ hahahahah

The unit of analysis for these codes was the idea unit and these codes included “PI” for *provided information*, and “RI” for *request information*, if the purpose of the comment seemed for the exchange of specific and relevant information such as, “no i dont like barbies” and “what show is Stewie from?” Another code, *validation and appreciation* (VA) was used if the comment

appeared to be for the purpose of expressing appreciation for content posted on a user's profile page:

THANKS I LOVE UR PICS AND PAGE

(Comment Wall Posting)

A code *prompt conversation* (PC) was also developed for idea units like “was up,” “hi” and “hey” that may have served as conversation starters. A code was also developed to for idea units that seemed to be used for the sole purpose of *expressing a feeling* (EF) like an emoticon or phrases like, “hahahahah” or “nah”. A final code, *salutation* (S) was used for idea units related to words and phrases that mirrored letter writing activity such as “Bye, Myra” or “Hey Jeremiah,”.

Another naturalized literacy practice pertains to the register individuals' use when they use certain technical features to communicate. For example writing on comment walls usually involves the use of lighter dialogic conversation that is less directly personal and tends to strike a familiar register that assumes the reader has background knowledge related to the content of the posting (Rowse, 2009). The unit of analysis for these codes was the entire comment rather than the idea unit. To this end, I developed a category called *tone* to help capture the register participants used in their comments.

I used the code “O” for *orality* when participants struck a familiar register characterized by use of colloquial English, included slang, and IM abbreviations that often disregard rules for standard spelling and grammar. I used the code “F” when the participants struck a more *formal register* characterized by longer, more complex and often complete sentences. Although these comments may have included contractions and an occasional IM abbreviation, they mirrored writing typically used in school. For example, the comment, “nah she just jelous of me ^ lol ^ hahahahah” was coded as “O” for informal as it contained few if any features associated with school-based writing. However, the comment, “Do you think Marcus is cute? LOL” was coded

as “F” for *formal* even though it contained one IM abbreviation because it contained a complete sentence and conventional punctuation and capitalization schemes.

I also developed a code for *Content* to capture the content of the postings in terms of subject matter. The codes were named *light dialogical and conversational* (LDC), *directly personal* (DP), or *creative performance* (CP). For example, a comment was coded as being directly personal if it provided an overly intimate feel or gossipy given the public nature of comment walls. For example, in the following posting was coded as *directly personal*:

Everybody is asking me are you and Marcus going out. You are soooo lucky. He is really cute. I'm like no! but you are cute. "NO we are not going out!" (are we?)

(Comment Wall

Posting)

The code *creative performances* (CP) was identified in postings made intentionally to one own profile page to attract attention or comment that seemed to be rhetorical rather than sincere requests for information or status updates:

hello whats up smile smile smile smile smile smile smile smile smile smile smile smile  
smile smile smile smile smile smile smile smile smile smile luv ya { as a friend }

(Comment Wall Posting)

Visual rhetorical conventions are salient in creative performance postings. They are characterized by pictures, use of all capital letters and repeated words.

Finally, the codes for *tone* and *content* were combined to develop a third category called *register* in which a determination was made as to whether the comment represented conventional literacy practices tested or valued in school which were coded as *School Sanctioned* (SS) or the distinctive features of *cybertalk* (C) the use of symbols, abbreviations and descriptions to provide

information about emotions, movement and other expressions; and the duality of orality and speech (Denzin, 1999). A final code, Conventional Plus (C+) was used if the comment was formal in tone but also possessed a few unconventional elements like dropping caps and punctuation but no visual elements:

well if you look at some of the pics that's what I look like i am 11 years old and my  
favorite food is soul food (Comment Wall Posting)

Once final codes and definitions were established, a second coder was given the code definitions and trained in the use of the coding scheme. Fifteen percent of the data were double coded to establish inter-rater reliability. The second coder was a trained social science researcher who had considerable experience conducting these types of analyses. To create the data set for the reliability check I put ten comments from each of the participants into a spreadsheet (see Figure 3.2). Each of the coders independently read each of the comments and apply applied the coding scheme.

	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	
	Comment	Idea Units	Purpose	Visual Element	Caps	Punc	Content	Tone	Register	Possible	Agreement	
1	Hey Dahri,^ w hat is	5	S/R/R/P/I	N	C	C	LDC	F	SS	11	11	
2	hismack?^ What does it	5	S/R/R/P/I	N	C	C	LDC	F	SS			
3	Hey Dahri,^ w hat is	5	S/R/R/P/I	N	C	C	LDC	F	SS			
4	hismack?^ What does it	3	S/P/V/A	N	C	C	DP	F	SS	9	7	
5	Hey Widad.^ I love pizza	3	S/V/A/V/A	N	C	C	LDC	F	SS			
6	too. ^I love your inke	2	P/I/P/I	N	C	MIX	LDC	O	C	8	8	
7	Yeah! ^Totally	2	P/I/P/I	N	C	MIX	LDC	O	C			
8	You and L are so MFEO	1	PI	A	C	N	DP	I	C	7	7	
9	You and L are so MFEO	1	PI	A	C	N	DP	I	C			
10	I got your message^ I miss	26	P/I/P/I/P/I/P/I	DW	C	C	DP	F	SS	32	32	
11	you soooooooooo much	26	P/I	DW	C	C	DP	F	SS			
12	I got your message^ I miss	5	v23/S/S	N	M	MIX	DP	I	C+	11	11	
13	you soooooooooo much	5	S/PC/P/I	N	M	MIX	DP	I	C+			
14	Hey^ what's up? ^I have the	5	P/I/S	N	M	MIX	DP	I	C+			
15	same background as you ^	7	S/EF/R/I	N	C	C	LDC	F	SS	13	12	
16	Hey^ what's up? ^I have the	7	S/P/R/B/T/I	N	C	C	LDC	F	SS			
17	same background as you ^	1	PC	N	N	N	LDC	O	C	7	7	
18	Hey,^ I appreciate it. ^So,	1	PC	N	N	N	LDC	O	C			
19	did you have a good	5	V/A/R/R/I	N	C	C	DP	F	SS	11	9	
20	Hey,^ I appreciate it. ^So,											
21	did you have a good											
22	yo											
23	yo											
24	I really like your background.^											

Figure 3.2. Data set for inter-rater reliability check.

After the first reliability check, there was disagreement on 13% of the segments coded. Most of the disagreement was around the codes for *tone* and *register*. For example, the coders disagreed on whether a comment had to have a formal tone in order to be coded as conventional plus (C+). It was agreed that comments coded as C+ must have a *formal* tone and a second reliability check was conducted and ended with the coders in 93% agreement.

After the inter-rater reliability analysis was complete, I divided each of the participant's comments into three time frames to represent the beginning, middle, and end of the project (see Table 3.3). The three time frames helped to detect patterns and changes in patterns related to the participants' writing practices over the course of the school year.

*Table 3.3*  
Number of Participants' Comments per Time Frame.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>End</b>	<b>Total</b>
Jenny	62	62	63	187
Shauna	46	46	47	139
Keli	43	43	43	129

Next, in order to detect patterns in how the participants used written language including sounds, graphics, signs and codes, I continued the content analysis by constructing tables to display the frequency counts. For example, I constructed a table for each participant in terms of their use of conventions associated with IM and academic writing conventions (see Table 3.4).

*Table 3.4*

## Use of IM and Academic Writing Conventions

<b>Writing Conventions</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>End</b>
Abbreviations	16	6	42
Multiple Punctuation	2	2	7
No Punctuation	31	28	12
Mixed Punctuation	0	6	3
Conventional Punctuation	1	2	0
All Caps	0	7	13
No Caps	42	35	29
Conventional Caps	0	1	0

The purpose of each case was to determine each participant's literacy practices and the difference in their literacy practices over the course of the project. Digital literacies are more than component skills involved in the construction of multimodal texts (i.e. the ability to upload a picture to a profile page) or the use of particular signs and symbols associated with IM conventions. They also involve ways of "...thinking, believing, feeling, valuing, acting/doing and interacting in relation to people and things" (Gee, 1996). To capture how each of the participants exhibited digital literacies I engaged in the process of constant comparison (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981) and worked to collapse the open codes that emerged in my field notes, interviews, and content analysis of profile pages into broader themes and categories as I moved between the data sources (Esterberg, 2002). To aid in the process I wrote analytic memos to help



me think about the emerging broader themes and categories (Esterberg, 2002). To guide my analytic memos I asked myself two questions:

- What did I notice?
- What changed?

One of the first things I noticed during the constant comparative process was that Keli, the most experienced user of SNSs, expressed a very different attitude about the form and function of profile pages than Jenny and Shauna, who were novice users. Additionally, her profile page was far more sophisticated in design than the other two participants. Coupled with the fact that an issue concerning students' use of images and changing background colors was a central theme in my field notes, the first theme that emerged was *Profile Page Design*.

A second thing that I noticed was that Jenny, who had exceptional scores for reading and writing on the ITBS, used language in her postings to the comment walls of other students in a very different way than did the other two participants. Additionally, in her interview, Jenny continually pointed to the writing styles of other students as a source of irritation, while the other two participants didn't mention the ways in which other users wrote on their comment walls at all. So a second theme that emerged was called *Digital Writing*.

A third thing I noticed was that Jenny posted more comments than the other two participants but received the fewest. However Keli, who posted the fewest number of comments, received the most, while Shauna who received the most number of from Iowa students but the fewest from the Oakland students continually pointed to the lack of communication between the two classes as a source of frustration for her while the other two students didn't mention lack of communication between themselves and the Oakland students at all. Therefore, the third theme

that emerged during the constant comparative process was *Interpersonal Connections*. I then proceeded to write up each of the case studies attending to whether and how the students exhibited digital literacies according to each of these themes. The themes also served as the basis for organizing the writing of the cases.

### **Within and Cross-Case Analysis**

Studying multiple cases makes it possible to build a logical chain of evidence (Yin, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To this end, I conducted a cross case analysis to seek a chain of evidence to determine whether and how a classroom use of an SNS might be used to support literacy development in school; the third question posed in this study. To answer this question I used the concept of third space pedagogy to serve as an analytical frame to build on the themes developed within the case analysis. To begin this process I took the defining characteristics of third space pedagogy which involves the use of students' everyday out-of-school literacies practices to serve as scaffolds to improve their academic literacy practices (Gutiérrez, et al., 1999). However, the ultimate goal of third space pedagogy is to “challenge, destabilize, and expand literacy practices that are typically valued in school” (Moje et al., 2004, p. 44). Therefore I conducted the cross-case analysis with the aim of looking for corroborating evidence that a classroom use of an SNS provided, or might have provided opportunities to support school-based writing instruction. At the same time I examined each of the cases to detect how a classroom use of an SNS may have supported or inhibited the development of the naturalistic literacy practices used in SNS to determine how teachers might need to expand their understanding of what counts as legitimate literacy practices or text for learning in school.

To conduct the cross case analysis I applied a constant comparison approach to look for similarities and differences in how the participants exhibited digital literacies over the course of

the project and connected those similarities and differences to how the teacher directed students to use the SNS. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1981), the constant comparative process combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all the social events observed. In this study, each of the cases was organized around three themes: Profile Page Design, Digital Writing, and Interpersonal Connections. Under each of these themes, evidence was presented as to whether and how the participants exhibited digital literacies. These themes served as the categories for comparison. Eisenhardt (1998) argues that cross-case analysis be used when searching for patterns. One approach in detecting patterns across cases is to select pairs of cases and list the similarities and differences between each pair (Eisenhardt, 1998). To this end I began the cross-case analysis by comparing the case of Keli, the *key case*, and the case of Shauna. Next I compared Keli with Jenny, and ended by comparing Shauna and Jenny. Throughout this process I listed the similarities and differences between each of the cases and making connections to the concepts of third space pedagogy.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, or the reader of an account (Creswell, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) list three criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, and confirmability. The use of multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1994) is a major strength of this study and served to address the three attributes of trustworthiness. First, the multiple sources of data allowed credibility to be addressed through a process of triangulation as the findings from the content analysis of profile pages was corroborated by the field notes and semi-structured interviews so a chain of evidence could be developed and maintained throughout the study (Yin, 1994). Second the multiple data sources allowed for a “thick description” (Geertz, 1993) of not only

participants' profile pages (content and visuals), but also the participants' feelings, attitudes and beliefs as they read and wrote in the SNS. The thick description provides sufficient detail so that the conclusions drawn from this study can be transferred and confirmed in future studies of classroom uses of SNSs.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Overview of the Findings**

In the NLS tradition there is a shared recognition that reading and writing practices associated with paper-based text formats are necessary but not sufficient for communicating across the current range of meaning-making platforms in society (Kress, 2003). The questions for this study were:

1. What are the literacy practices of three fifth-grade girls when participating in a classroom use of an SNS?
2. How did their literacy practices differ and what contributed to these differences?
3. What are the implications of these findings for adolescent writing instruction?

These data suggest that three fifth-grade girls, with varying degrees of facility with school-based literacy practices, and experiences with SNSs outside of school, exhibited digital literacies in some surprising ways, and there were marked differences in the literacy practices they employed over the course of the project. However, rules set by the classroom teachers and researcher may have unwittingly undermined some of the naturalized literacy practices familiar to experienced users of SNSs. These findings suggest that educators may need more nuanced understanding of the naturalized literacy practices that occur in SNSs in order to use them in ways that support best practices for adolescent writing instruction.

### **Classroom Teachers and Activities**

Matt, a fifth-grade teacher, and Kathy, the technology coordinator, were two enthusiastic educators who had a passion for using technology to improve the learning of their students. Matt wanted to use technology to meet content standards as well as provide his students

with a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning experience. Similarly, Kathy, who became a technology coordinator as a result of her experiences using of multimedia applications like HyperStudio with third grade students, was thrilled with the prospect that her computer lab would be used for a purpose other than keyboarding. Although neither of them had used an SNS like Facebook or MySpace, they had heard about these Web 2.0 tools and were eager to learn how they worked, and to integrate them in a way that would not diminish their appeal for students.

One theme that emerged during our meetings prior to the start of the project was the use of images for profile pictures. Although we thought that students would enjoy upload pictures of themselves, we felt it would be safer for students if they chose images to serves as avatars. We also thought that using images to serve as avatars would prompt interesting conversations between students. However, several students requested permission to upload actual photos of themselves and their families using the photo gallery feature. We decided to allow this activity as long as their parents gave written permission. Although this decision was controversial in the beginning of the project, it became central to one of the participant's literacy practices over the course of the project.

Another theme that emerged from our meetings concerned the writing style of the students. On one hand, Matt did not want to burden students with concerns of spelling and grammar as they communicated in what he saw as an informal learning environment. He was also concerned about marginalizing students with low language skills. But on the other hand, he thought it would be prudent to capitalize on student interest and motivation to practice some of the writing skills his students would be tested toward at the end of the year. When I suggested that the comment walls could serve as social spaces for students to socialize using informal writing practices, and the forums and blog features could serve as spaces for student to practice

the conventions of formal writing, he eagerly agreed. Additionally, Kathy and Matt agreed that as teachers, they would always model proper grammar and spelling as they communicated with the students in the SNSs.

During the first week of the project two issues emerged that suggested to us, that some rules needed to be implemented to ensure maximum learning opportunities for students in the SNS. The first issue concerned the students' use of images. The Oakland students began using images of their favorite pop stars to serve as avatars for their profile pictures and the Iowa students wanted permission to do the same. However, Kathy felt that this would be an opportune time to teach Iowa students about the school's acceptable use policy and copyright issues, she suggested that students only use images from a school-sponsored website that provided students with copyright free images.

The second issue involved students' enthusiasm for changing profile pictures and background designs. We were dismayed to find that the students spent the majority of their time changing their background designs and profile images rather than posting messages to each other. We made a rule that students had to post a least three messages to other students before experimenting with their background design and pictures. Although this activity was difficult to monitor, it appeared to have the desired effect, and students appeared to be spending more time exchanging messages with each other. In the following sections I present case studies of three fifth-grade girls detailing the literacy practices they employed and the difference in these literacy practices as they communicated in a classroom use of an SNS.

### **The Cases**

In this section of the findings I present each of the cases beginning with Keli, who was and experienced user of SNS with above grade level writing achievement scores. Then I present

the case of Shauna who was a novice user with below grade level writing achievement scores. Finally, I present the case of Jenny who was also a novice user but received writing achievement scores that were above grade level.

### **Keli: An Experienced SNS User with Above Grade Level Writing Achievement Scores**

Keli was the only bi-racial student in her class. Her mother was white and her father African American. Keli drew attention to her ethnicity by uploading a picture of her mother on her profile page and writing a caption that read, “Yep this is my biological mommy isn’t she pretty.” Her teacher described Keli as being a strong student who enjoyed reading and writing. When I asked him if he thought Keli underperformed in his classroom, he said:

Not really, she liked to read and she was on grade level at writing. Very bright student, school was her savior. (Personal Communication)

Keli had a computer at home and was the only participant with experience using an SNS prior to the Reading Revolution project. When I asked her how she spent her time using the computer at home, she replied:

I have a MySpace so I’ll get on MySpace then I’ll get on Ning and then I’ll probably get on Sims for a little bit and I have a playlist it’s a network for like music and you can put it on any website you want. So I get on that I rearrange my music. Cause I really like music. And I’ll add music. (Semi-structured Interview)

Like nearly half of American twelve year olds who have a MySpace profile, despite it being a violation of the MySpace terms of use (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010), Keli had begun engaging in social networking at a young age. However, contrary to popular media



portrayals of tech who are tech savvy as having poor school-based writing skills as a result of their engagement with social media (Thurlow, 2006), Keli scored above grade level on the ITBS. She ranked in the 71<sup>st</sup> percentile in reading achievement and in the 93<sup>rd</sup> percentile for language use.

**Participation.** According to the classroom teacher, Keli enjoyed Reading Revolution and in our interview Keli confirmed this. When I asked her what I could do to make Reading Revolution better she replied:

I don't know...it doesn't need to be fixed because I really like Reading Revolution.

(Semi-structured Interview)

Frequency counts of the number of comments she posted compared to the profile pages of other users show she was an active participant. She posted a total of 122 comments to the profile pages of her peers, well above the average of eighty-seven comments for her class. Interestingly she also posted seven comments to her own profile page, bringing the total number of comments she made throughout the project to 129. She made numerous comments to both the Oakland (52/129) and Iowa students (70/129). She posted nearly half (44%) of her comments outside of class time, providing further evidence that she was motivated to participate in this school-based implementation of an SNS.

When I asked her what she liked most about Reading Revolution, she replied:

I liked that you could get on and talk to people who you haven't met and find out what their interests are.

(Semi-structured Interview)

Frequency counts confirm Keli's active engagement with the Oakland students, whom she had not met in a face-to face setting. In fact, eighty-six (71%) of Keli's messages received replies by the Oakland students, far more than the other two participants in the study. Interestingly she posted the fewest comments (122) compared to the other two study participants. However, counter to what might be expected, she received the most number of comments (154) on her profile page.

Keli's ability to attract more comments to her page than she posted was likely related to her experience with the multimodal art of creating profile pages in MySpace. In SNSs creativity and originality can serve as social currency as changes in profile page layouts, colors and images can attract the attention of other users and prompt interaction (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Perkel, 2008).

**Profile page design.** Keli designed her profile page to portray herself as a fun loving girl who has a mind of her own and values family and friendship (see Figures 4.1, 4.2 & 4.3). For example, for her hobbies she wrote:

HANGING OUT WITH FRIENDS AND FAM. AND DANCING. LISTENING 2 MY  
MUSIC. OH AND I ALMOST FORGOT. SHOPPING

(Profile Page Personal  
Information)

Keli also appeared to be a confident writer. Students were encouraged to include a favorite quote about a reading or book but Keli instead included an original verse she had written which provided further insight into her identity as an independent thinker:

IIF YOU DON'T LIKE ME THAT'S TO BAD. IM NOT GONNA CHANGE. THIS IS  
ME!

~keli~  
Information)

(Profile Page Personal

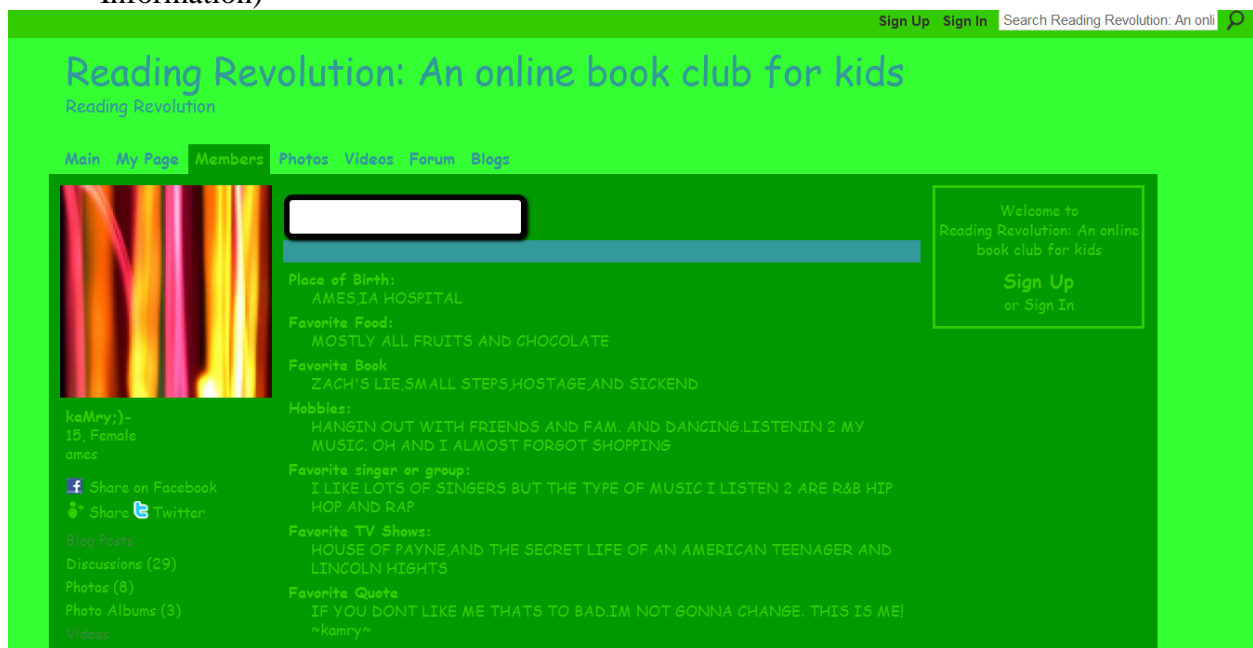


Figure 4.1. Keli's profile page with favorite quote.

Additionally, counter to the classroom teachers' directions to write a blog posting about a favorite book, Keli composed a blog posting that provided a detailed description of herself, her family, and her philosophy of life:

HEY, MY NAME IS KELI AND IM 12 YEARS OLD. MY FAVORITE COLOR IS GREEN AND MY FAVORITE SPORT IS VOLLEYBALL. I'M UNIQUE, FUN, CARING, ENERGETIC, JUST TOTALLY SILLY AND A GREAT FRIEND. I HAVE ONE SISTER AND ZERO BROTHERS. BUT I DO HAVE PETS. I HAVE A CAT AND A DOG. THEIR NAMES ARE GRACE AND GEMMA. IM THE TYPE OF PERSON WHO HATES TO BE JUDGE BY PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW ME. I THINK PEOPLE SHOULD BE THEMSELVES INSTEAD OF TRYING TO BE SOMEONE THEIR NOT. I ALSO THINK THAT PEOPLE SHOULD FORGIVE AND FORGET BECAUSE WHATS THE POINT IN HOLDING A GRUDGE AGAINST

SOMEONE ESPECIALLY SOMEONE YOU LOVE. WELL THAT'S ME AND  
 THAT'S ALL I HAD TO SAY. SO IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT ME  
 COMMENT OR MESSAGE!! PEACE OUT :D keLi;- (Blog Posting)

Keli was the only participant in the study to upload images to her profile page, and it appeared she thought carefully about the interaction between linguistic and visual elements in order to create a concrete representation of herself. For example, she uploaded images of quotes like “looking for a perfect girl? Then go buy yourself a Barbie doll (see Figure 4.2)

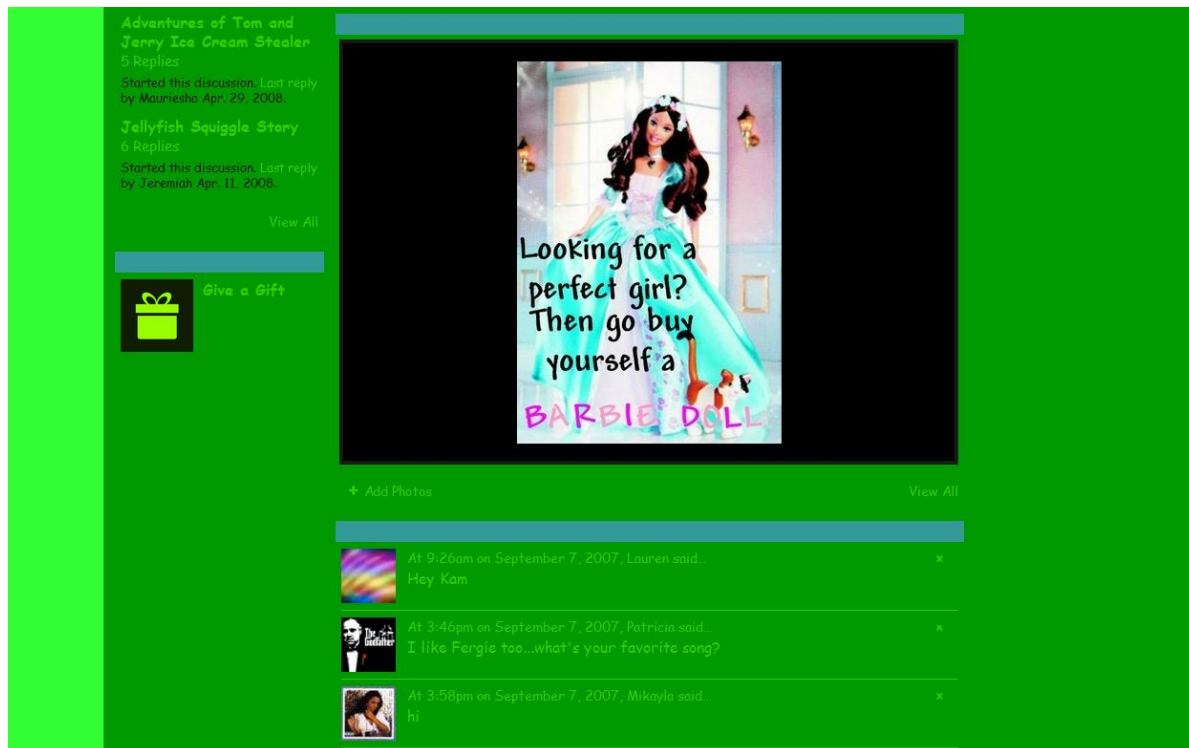


Figure 4.2. Keli's profile page continued with images.

Keli was also the only participant to embed a third-party application into her profile page (see Figure 4.3). Keli embedded a music player called Mixpod that allowed her to stream her favorite songs which included contemporary hip-hop artist like T-pain, Ciara, and Flo-Rida.

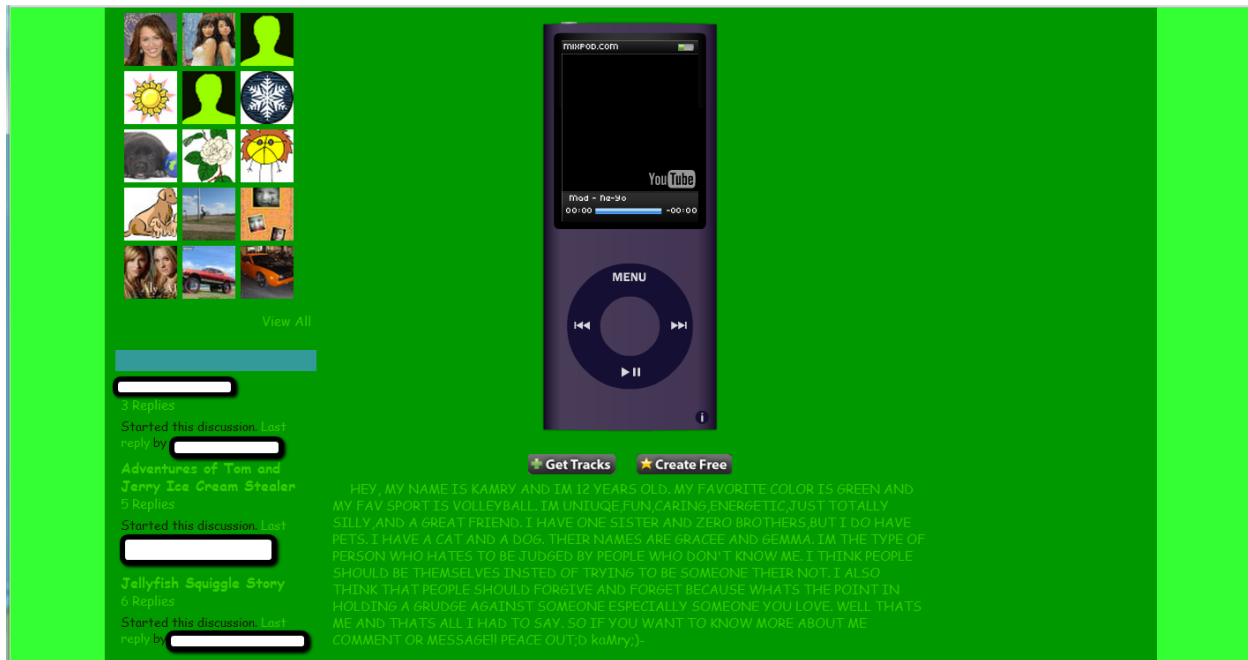


Figure 4.3: Keli's profile page with third party application called MixPod

Keli seemed to understand that her profile page was a multimedia pallet that she could use to portray a representation of herself, using photographs, colors, page layout and music to represent her mood, preferences and affiliations (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). When I asked Keli what she liked best about the Reading Revolution project, she replied:

Keli: I really like designing stuff so every time I get on I would at least change my page.

Interviewer: Oh yeah I really like this. Where did you find that picture?

Keli: On the Internet I looked in Google and I went to freepics.com and I just put it on there.

Interviewer: Can you explain to me why you like that picture?

Keli: Well its Baby Phat and Baby Phat (see Figure 4.4) is a brand for clothes and stuff and the person who designed it is like my hero. Her name is Kimora Lee Simmons. She

was a single mom of two kids and she designs all these clothes and their life is really hectic.



Figure 4.4. Keli's profile photo of Baby Phat.

Keli saw herself as a designer and that shaped her Reading Revolution experience. In addition to having the technical skills to create a successful profile page, she also had insider knowledge of the digital writing practice associated with SNSs.

**Digital writing.** A textual analysis of Keli's postings show, that from the beginning, she used the guiding tropes of chat and IM. She avoided the use of capital letters, used abbreviations, and multiple punctuation marks to achieve a sense of the spoken word through writing (Kress, 2003). For instance, the first two messages she posted in the site included all three of these linguistic features:

Keli: dont know what r u doin

(Comment Wall: September 5)

Keli im doing ok.how do u like school?!?

(Comment Wall: September 5)

She also seemed to enjoy sharing her knowledge of her digital writing practices. For example, on one occasion she defined the meanings behind a common text messaging abbreviation for other users:

DID U KNOW THAT LOL HAS 2 MEANINGS IT MEANS LOTS OF LOVE AND  
LAUGH OUT LOUD.SO LOL!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (Comment Wall: April, 7)

Even though Keli already had a command over the features of digital writing in SNSs, her digital ways of writing continued to evolve in interesting ways over the course of the project. In some ways it became more visual as Keli began to embed images in her postings. For example, during the final weeks of Reading Revolution she uploaded images (see Figure 4.5) that related to the content of her posting:

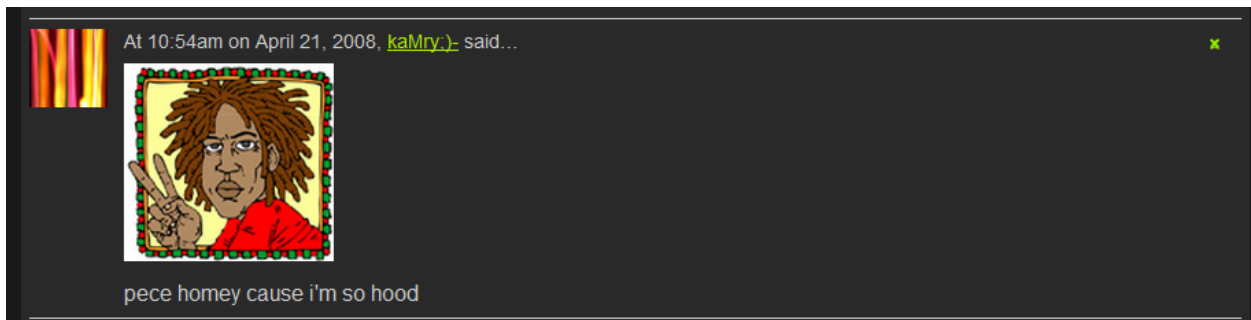


Figure 4.5. Keli's comment wall posting with image.

Additionally, Keli began to increase her use of the writing conventions associated with IM. For example, her use of abbreviations more than doubled toward the end of the project moving from sixteen abbreviations in her first forty-three comments to forty-two abbreviations in her final forty-three comments (see Table 4.1). Likewise, toward the end of the year, she began composing messages entirely in capital letters (13) and increased her use of multiple punctuation marks from two times in the first third of her postings to seven times in the final forty-three postings.

*Table 4.1*  
Keli's Use of IM Conventions

<b>IM Conventions</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>End</b>
Abbreviations	16	6	42
Multiple Punctuation	2	2	7
No Punctuation	31	28	12
Mixed Punctuation	0	6	3
Conventional Punctuation	1	2	0
All Caps	0	7	13
No Caps	42	35	29
Conventional Caps	0	1	0

Keli's increased use of IM conventions did not appear to diminish her ability to produce writing that aligned with expectations in school. Interestingly, as her use of IM conventions increased so did the number of idea units she communicated in the messages she posted to comment walls of other users. For example, during the first third of the project she communicated only fifty-six times but during the final third of the project her idea units increased to ninety-six. Additionally, her use of non-conventional punctuation, capitalization and text messaging abbreviations did not cross over to her classroom writing assignments. For instance, on one occasion her classroom teacher asked students to write a story involving their favorite cartoon characters and upload it to the Reading Revolution for their peers to read:

Adventures of Tom and Jerry Ice Cream Stealer: One day in Louisville, it was so hot that Jerry almost melted. He went to the refrigerator in Betty's kitchen and got one of Tom's



favorite milk bars. When Tom saw Jerry eating the bar he attacked Jerry.

Jerry started running all over Betty's house. Jerry was throwing plates, cups, cheese, and anything he could find. Jerry even took a hammer and whacked Tom right on the head.

As soon as Jerry reached the back door he set a mousetrap and went outside to find Sparky the dog. When Tom reached the door he stepped in the trap and hurt his toe and hand. When he got it off his hand he went outside to find Sparky right behind him. Tom started running and all of a sudden Sparky jumped on Tom and gave him a black eye. All the while Jerry was eating fresh cheese from a picnic basket. After Jerry was done he ran back into the house with Tom right behind him. Before Tom could even grab Jerry's tail, Jerry ran right into his mouse hole and got away, again

(Forum Posting:

April 26)

Although Keli left out two periods at the end of two sentences she consistently adhered to the traditional conventions associated with school-based writing. Interestingly, a message act analysis shows that Keli's digital ways of writing may have helped her establish and sustain relationships with other users in the site.

**Interpersonal connections.** Keli was very successful at establishing and sustaining relationships with both Oakland and Iowa students. As mentioned previously, she was the only participant to attract more comments (154) than she posted (129). In fact only 29% of her messages were ignored by other users. Keli's success at establishing and sustaining relationships was likely related to her facility with multimodal writing.

At the outset of the Reading Revolution project Keli appeared to have an insider understanding of the unwritten rules for participation in SNSs. Keli always (129/129) used a familiar register that included colloquial English, slang and disregarded many of the rules for spelling, grammar and punctuation in her comments to both Oakland and Iowa students. For example many of her postings (35%) were informal salutations that may have served as conversation starters, or ways of checking in, or public displays of friendship to other users:

hey girl was up (Comment Wall: September, 16)

yo man (Comment Wall:  
January, 10)

was up homey (Comment Wall: April,  
21)

Additionally, Keli's register also reflected the unwritten rule that comment walls are reserved for lighter dialogic conversation while more personal information is saved for private messaging applications (Rowse, 2009). Keli rarely used the comment wall for directly personal communication (14/129) with other students. Most of her communication involved showing validation and appreciation for other students' interests related to popular cultural:

if he an't gonna love you the way he shoud then let go isn't that some of the lyrics  
(Comment Wall: September, 12)

sweet! what is your favorite movie (Comment Wall: November, 11)

On the rare occasions that she did engage in directly personal communication (14) on the comment walls of other students (14/129), they were to her close friends in the Iowa classroom:

hey steph im so sorry for what i said at the capitol! do u forgive me? please!

please write me call or txt your bff kel (Comment Wall: March, 15)



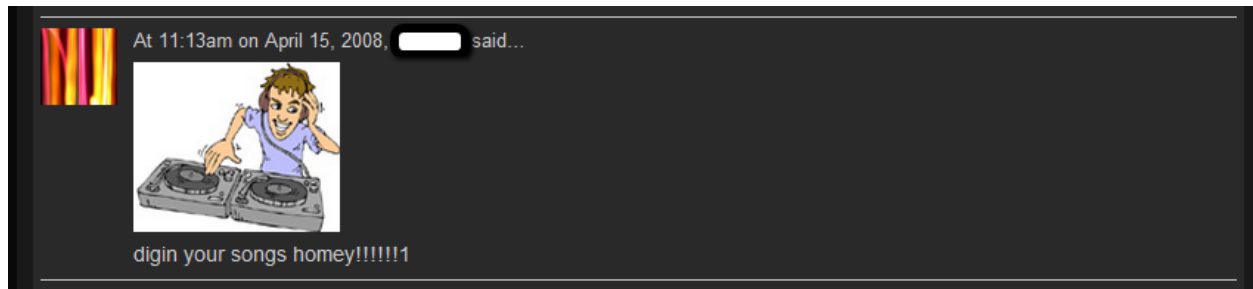


Figure 4.6. Keli's comment wall posting with image 2.

Over the course of the project Keli posted twenty-one messages that had characteristics of creative performances to prompt conversations with other users. Not surprisingly, she received responses to all of the messages coded as creative performances; which may partially explain why she received more messages than the other study participants.

Another explanation for Keli's success at establishing interpersonal connections with the Oakland students may have been related to her use of photos and music. In SNSs there appears to be standard forms of communication strategies depending on degrees of separation. For instance, uploading pictures tends to be a good way of starting conversation with users one does not already know (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Keli was also the only participant to upload photos, images and embed music into profile pages. Over the course of the project she uploaded twenty-one photos of her family, pets and images of sayings and words that were important to her (see Figure 4.7 & 4.8). For example she uploaded a picture of her dog wearing glasses and an interesting image of the word "Love":



Figure 4.7. Keli's photo of her dog.



Figure 4.8. Keli's image of love.

In fact, a content analysis of the comments left on her profile page show she received nineteen profile page comments expressing validation and appreciation for her pictures and profile page design.

nice new picture. I like it. I also like the pictures on your page!

(Comment Wall: September 14)

I love you page it's so cool

(Comment Wall: March 10)

You're pictures are awesome! You're sister looks just like you!!!!

(Comment Wall: May 18)

Heyy Keli...How u been...I love your layout (Comment Wall: May 14)

It appears that Keli's use of visual media, both photos and profile background design changes may have served as a "social lubricant and smoothed paths to relationships" as they provided material to be commented on by other users (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

**Conclusion.** Keli's prior experience with SNSs most likely contributed to her ability to engage in creative performances of identity as she changed the colors and layout of her profile page and uploaded images and music to create a multimodal representation of herself. It appears that Keli's ability to perform her identity with linguistic and visual elements also paid off in terms of supplying her with a powerful form of social capital as she gained status through attracting a large number of comments to her profile page and established relationships with users she did not have a prior relationship with and maintained relationships with users she had known in a face-to-face setting. Additionally, her facility with the discourse of SNSs did not appear to diminish her academic writing ability suggesting that Keli ended the project as an easy-switcher with the ability to construct texts that aligned with expectations of her peers in the SNS and her classroom teacher.

#### **Shauna: A Novice SNS User with Below Grade Level Writing Achievement Scores**

Shauna was an eleven year-old white female fifth-grade student from a working-class home. In the fifth-grade Shauna was below grade level in reading and just at grade level for writing. Her score for reading comprehension on the ITBS was at the thirteenth percentile, and her language use score was in the 39<sup>th</sup> percentile. When I asked Shauna's teacher if she had learning differences he said, "No, but reading was a challenge." (Personal Communication). Shauna had limited access to computers and the Internet outside of school:

If the computer is working I get on 2 or 3 times a week. But if the computer is not working I don't even try because it gets so frustrating because the computer will not work.

Interview)

(Semi-structured

Like many students from working class homes, the technology she had access to outside of class was often out-dated and Internet access was slow and intermittent (Robinson, 2009). These technology disparities can limit the quality and variety of technology experiences for these students. Not surprisingly then, Shauna had no experience with SNSs prior to Reading Revolution. This put her at a distinct disadvantage compared to other students who had experiences using social networking sites prior to the Reading Revolution project.

**Participation.** Shauna's inexperience with SNSs made it difficult for her to interact with other students at the beginning of the project. The following is an account of Shauna's interactions on her comments wall on the first day of the project:

Shauna to Oakland Student 1: i like pizza to (9:16 AM)

Iowa Student 1: was uppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppp (9:18 AM)

Shauna to Iowa Student 2: hi I like to read hairet tubman to (9:24 AM)

Shauna to herself: hi (9:26 AM)

Oakland Student 2: me to. i like to go to pizza hut whats you favorite place? (3:35 PM)

Oakland Student 3: hi my name is \_\_\_\_\_ I like pizza too it is really good. (3:40 PM)

Shauna to Iowa Student 3: hi (3:41 PM)

Oakland Student 4: Hey...I like to watch Big Brother 8 too. What else shows do u like?  
(3:54 PM)

Oakland Student 5: I like pizza too! (3:56 PM)

Oakland Student 6: I love Vanessa Huggen to but I like her better on High School Mucical2 I also like Miely Cyrus too (3:59 PM)

Shauna to Oakland Student 6: hey (4:17 PM)

Shauna to Oakland Student 7: hey (4:19 PM)

Oakland Student 8: What up (4:20 PM)

Shauna to herself: whatever (5:14 PM)

In this session, ten students, two in the Iowa location and eight from the Oakland location, posted comments to Shauna. However Shauna did not exchange information with any of these students. Instead, she posted two comments to users who had not posted to her comment wall. She also posted twice to her own profile page -- which may have been unintentional attempts to reply to other students' comments. Shauna's final posting "whatever" appeared to be an indication of her frustration with her first attempt at communicating in SNSs.

During a participant observation session the following day at school it became clear that Shauna did not know that she could click on the thumbnail of profile pictures that accompanied each comment to quickly and easily access that users page (see Figure 4.9).

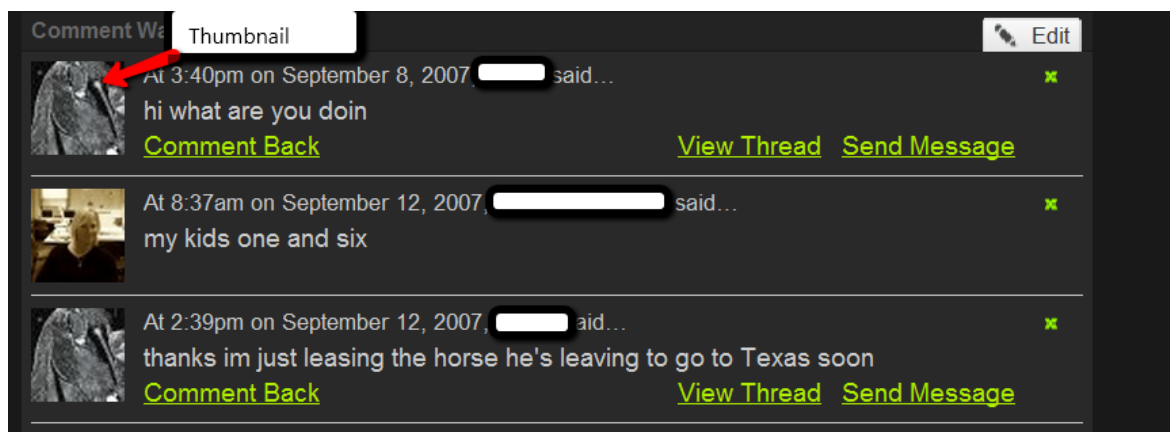


Figure 4.9. Thumbnail on a comment wall posting.

Instead, Shauna had been going to the "Members Page" (see Figure 4.10) and scrolling through all fifty-three profile pictures trying to identify the person who had posted a comment to her page.



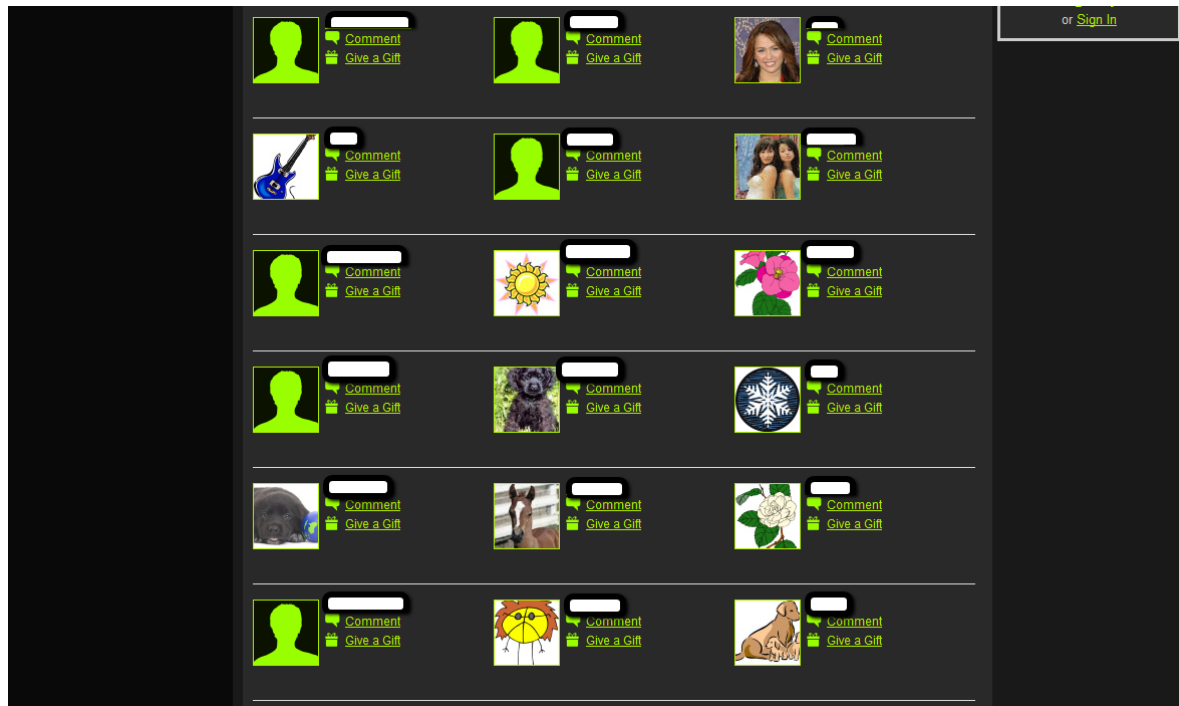


Figure 4.10. Reading Revolution member page.

Shauna described this as a very frustrating process because she often experienced difficulties remembering which profile picture went with which student and found the practice of frequently changing profile pictures among users to be confusing:

Yes! It was so confusing! I would usually look at their picture and not so much their name. Then it wouldn't be their picture anymore. It was O.K after awhile though.

(Semi-

structured Interview)

Shauna's difficulties were likely related to both low school-based literacy skills, which may have caused her to focus more on images and overlook alphabetic print-based clues like students' names, and her lack of experience with navigating SNSs that require knowledge of the functions of icons and ways of moving between pages in digital environments.

Eventually Shauna developed some of the skills necessary to more effectively participate in SNSs. One example of this can be seen in her ability to engage in more fluid message exchanges with other users. As addressed earlier in this section, Shauna's first attempt at exchanging messages with other students was not successful. However, mid-way through the project Shauna began to participate in more successfully exchanges of information. For example, Shauna participated in nine information exchanges with five students from both Iowa and Oakland during a twelve minute time period:

(1) Shauna to Iowa Student 1: hey we r in ning now just wanted to say hi. it is good that u and kelice are good now (March 10: 10:17AM)

(2) Iowa Student 2: Was up BFF had fun with u the other day i can't belive that i forgotall about that poem. i hate family issues i wish my mom came home .but it was fun being at your house last night and the week. i hate family issues but at least i have eacho other to get through the hard times. your ny BFF!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!1111

(March 10: 10:22 AM)

(3) Shauna to Iowa Student 2: awwwwwwwwwww u to! (March 10: 10:25 AM)

(4) Shauna to Oakland Student 1: hey thanks i like urs background to (March 10: 10:28 AM)

(5) Iowa Student 2: i know (March 10: 10:34 AM)

(6) Iowa Student 2: my Bff my Bff my BFF MY BFFF MY BFF MY BFF YOUR MY BFFF (March 10: 10:36 AM)

(7) Iowa Student 3: do you like the hawkeyes or the cyclones? (March 10: 10:37 AM)

(8) Shauna to Oakland Student 2: hey what up i love ur shirt.how old are u? im 10 but my birthyday is in april 8 th. (March 10: 10:40 AM)

(9) Shauna to Iowa Student 3: both (March 10: 10:42 AM)

These exchanges of messages suggest Shauna had developed the ability to negotiate multiple messages and interweave these messages into four larger storylines as she read and wrote multimodal texts during the Reading Revolution project. The first storyline involved providing emotional support to an Iowa classmate. In her first post Shauna touched base with a friend about an offline conversation.

The second storyline, constructed in postings 2, 3, 5, & 6, centers on a public display of allegiance and friendship with another classmate as they detailed activities that took place in their off-line worlds. Shauna completes a third storyline with posting four, providing validation and appreciation for an Oakland student's profile page who posted a message on her page on February 6. The final storyline is constructed with messages six and eight in which she engages with an Iowa classmate about favorite sports teams. Although the content of these messages may not seem particularly substantive, at the time of these message exchanges Shauna was reading on a third grade level. Given her reading difficulties, the speed with which she managed to comprehend and write alphabetic digital texts suggests high levels of engagement and motivation to read and write.

Despite her initial difficulty posting messages to other users in Reading Revolution, the forum became central to Shauna's use of computers during the course of the project. At the end of the year her teacher commented that Shauna was "highly active" in Reading Revolution and "loved it". Data showed that 70 percent of Shauna's messages were posted outside of class time--an indication that she was highly motivated to participate in Reading Revolution especially given her barriers to Internet access at home. At the end of the year Shauna's description of her home computer use supported her teacher's observation of active engagement in Reading Revolution

Well most of the time I get on Ning (Reading Revolution) or I spend time going to YouTube or yahoo music, listening to music and talking to people about it or listening to music while I'm on Ning (Reading Revolution) and posting messages.

(Semi-structured Interview)

Shauna's active engagement during the Reading Revolution project allowed her to overcome her disadvantages and develop more sophisticated knowledge of the discourse specific to communication in SNSs.

**Profile page design.** SNSs make it easy for users to visually represent themselves as they upload photos and choose background colors and layouts (Wilber, 2008). At the beginning of the project Shauna struggled to accomplish even the most basic tasks like uploading an image to serve as her profile picture:

Shauna: how did u get that

Shauna: how did u get the picture

Oakland Student: I searched "Avril Lavigne" at yahoo.com/images.

Shauna: how do u get the pictuer on the front on the main pictuer???

Oakland Student: what do u mean? (Comment Wall: September 14)

Although Shauna quickly developed the technical skills to appropriate and embed media into her profile page, she found it more difficult to grasp the unwritten rules and procedures for successful participation in SNSs. In SNSs, originality and creativity are highly valued and serve to provide users with social currency (Perkel, 2008). During the first month of the project Shauna uploaded a profile picture of a baby that was similar to another user's. This became the subject of gossip among other users and prompted accusations of "copy cat" behavior and actually caused another student to directly confront her:

Iowa Student: How come you got a baby like me

Shauna: what???

Iowa Student: Why did you get a baby picture like me?? (Comment Wall: September 28)

Interestingly, Shauna never responded to the accusation on the comment wall although she did address the issue by writing “my baby cuz chole” in the title of her profile page to indicate that the baby held special significance to her and was not a reproduction of another student’s theme (see Figure 4.11).

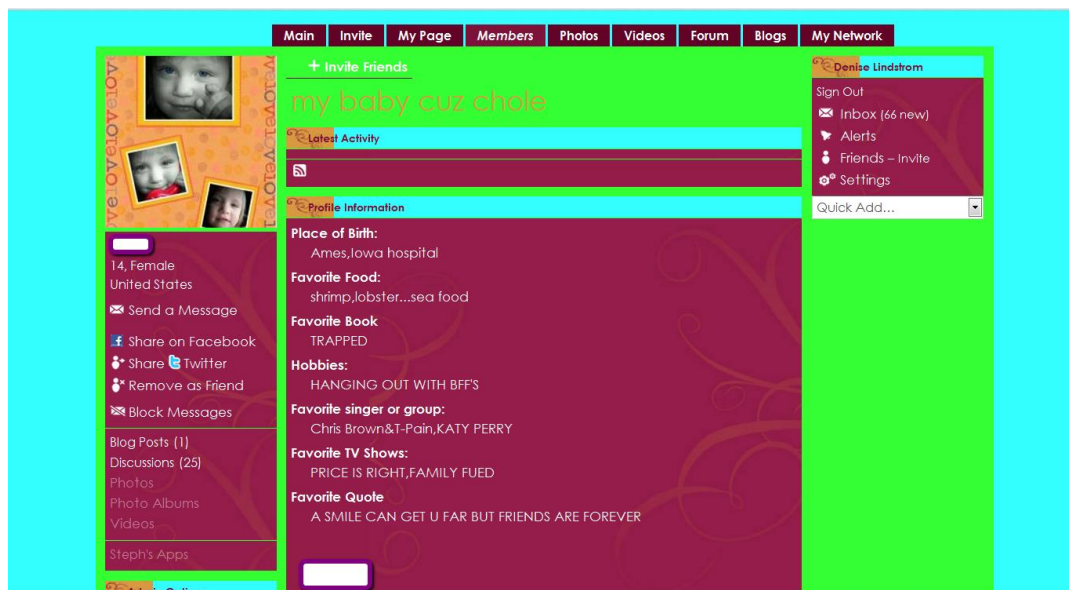


Figure 4.11. Shauna's profile page and profile photo.

Unlike Keli, who understood that her profile page design was an opportunity to communicate her identity to other users, Shauna saw the profile page as a product to be assessed by teachers. Several times during our interview she pointed to the need for teachers to monitor student activities as they communicated in the SNSs. When asked to give me advice on how to make Reading Revolution better in the future she said:

We can have pictures and stuff no music just one picture from clip art and that is it. And check and see in the comments if we have been talking about books and if they haven't you should tell them to start talking about books. (Semi-structured Interview)

It is likely that Shauna's suggestion to allow only one picture from clip art was prompted by classroom teachers. Early on in the project, after classroom teachers noticed students spending a considerable time choosing background designs and changing profile pictures, they made a rule that students were not allowed to engage in these kinds of activities until they had posted at least three messages to other users. In my conversations with classroom teachers at the time of this decision it became clear that they felt that the time students spent "decorating" their profile page was a distraction and off task which prevented students from communicating with each other.

Shauna's lack of experience with SNSs prior to Reading Revolution made her subject to the teachers' and researcher's limited conception of the purpose of profile pages rather than developing a more sophisticated and accurate understanding of profile pages as a concrete representation of identity that helps promote interaction between herself and other users. Although Shauna did not grasp the relatively subtle purpose of the profile page, she did develop some of the more obvious conventions that are familiar to frequent users of SNSs.

**Digital writing.** Writing in SNSs often reflects the conventions of IM as visual elements, like emoticons, abbreviation and excessive punctuation are used in the absence of social cues (Dowdall, 2006; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). During the course of the project Shauna began to experiment with these visual elements like writing in all caps and using multiple punctuation marks:

hey r u new??if so "WELCOME" what do u want for christmes????????????????????

(November 29)

Interestingly as her use of IM conventions increased so did her use of conventional punctuation. For example during the first third of the project, Shauna either used no punctuation (35) or excessive punctuation (11); and she did not use conventional punctuation in any of her posts during the first two thirds of the project (see Table 4.2).

*Table 4.2*  
Shauna's Use of IM Conventions

<b>IM Conventions</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>End</b>
Abbreviations	16	31	48
No Punctuation	35	29	16
Multiple Punctuation	11	15	7
Mixed Punctuation	0	2	18
Conventional Punctuation	0	0	5
All Caps	0	4	14
No Caps	46	42	29
Conventional Caps	0	0	0

Further, during the final third of the project, she posted twenty-three messages that included at least some conventional punctuation schemes. In this example of mixed punctuation, the first sentence ends with a period while the second does not:

hey we r in ning now just wanted to say hi. it is good that u and kelice are good now

(Comment

Wall: March 10)

Shauna ended the project with five messages that included various visual elements including no caps, all caps, and abbreviations, yet were composed entirely with conventional punctuation schemes:

hey wat r u doin? ask ur mom and dad if u can come to my B-DAY!

(Comment Wall: March

30)



These findings suggest that Shauna was becoming more aware of both unconventional and conventional literacy practices as she communicated with her peers in the SNS. She was clearly picking up on unconventional literacy practices from others, like Keli, who used visual elements like all caps, no caps, and multiple punctuation marks. She also appeared to develop increased awareness of punctuation as the project progressed. In the beginning most of her posts had no punctuation at all (see Table 4.2); however, instances of posts without punctuation steadily decreased during the course of the project, while her use of conventional and mixed punctuation increased. Modeling by peers likely played a role in her use of unconventional practices, but the increase in her use of conventional punctuation may have come about through a general increase in her awareness of the role of punctuation in writing as she played with different writing elements in her interactions with her peers. That is, she began to see punctuation as a tool that she could use when expressing her thoughts, ideas, and emotions in writing. So, rather than diminishing her conventional literacy skills, her participation in the SNS may have prompted her to understand and use conventional literacy practices in more sophisticated ways.

Shauna's move toward using conventional literacies was also apparent when, in the final month of the project, the classroom teacher asked students to upload a letter to a student who had moved away. For this assignment Shauna wrote:

Hey Girl,

How is Texas? I want to go to Texas really bad! Is Texas hot during the winter? I have never been to Texas. What is your school like? Ours hasn't changed much. We got a new kid named Tyler.

For our concert our songs are" Tiger Tiger ,"Talk To The Animals", "The Goat," Music of Life," and " Three Creature Feature."

LOVE,

Stephanie

(P.S.I MISS U A LOT!)

(Forum Posing: May 5)

Although she used an abbreviation and writes in all capital letters in two places, her writing in the body of the letter reflects conventional school-based capitalization and punctuation conventions. Shauna appeared to be simultaneously developing multimodal literacy practices that helped her produce texts that were consistent with the norms both in and out of school contexts.

Shauna's developing digital literacy skills may have had a positive influence on some other aspects of school-based writing. For instance, as Shauna increased her use of visual elements the amount of information she expressed in her posts (as determined by the number of idea units) also increased. At the beginning of the project a typical posting by Shauna consisted of one word greetings such as "hi" and "hey" resulting in a total of fifty-six idea units in forty-six posts during the first third of the project.

However in the final third of the project she expressed ninety-six idea units in twenty-six posts and the majority of her postings contained complete sentences (31/46):

hey how are u doing!!! here is a stuiped q but what is ur nik name

(Comment

Wall: March 5)

hi so u have any sisters? i have 2 jen is the oldest lizzie is the youngest !

(Comment

Wall: March 31)

Despite Shauna's developing digital literacies in terms of navigating multimodal text, adopting writing conventions familiar to users of SNSs, and expressing her ideas more completely, she struggled to establish relationships with users with whom she did not have an established relationship in a face-to-face setting; suggesting she did not fully develop the digital literacies needed for successful participation in the SNS.

**Interpersonal connections.** Over the course of the project Shauna was able to use digital writing to sustain her existing relationships, but struggled to create and maintain new relationships. Shauna received more comments from the Iowa students (107) than Keli (86) and Jenny (56) but received the fewest number of comments from the Oakland students (20) when compared to Keli (68) and Jenny (46); even though, like Keli, she used a familiar register and many of the conventions of text messaging abbreviations, incorporated slang, and disregarded conventional spelling and grammar rules:

what r u reading???

(Comment Wall: September, 21)

hey whats up no school for us to day

(Comment Wall: December, 11)

SUP

(Comment Wall: May, 19)

Shauna recognized that she was not effectively communicating with the Oakland students and pointed to the lack of communication between the two groups of students as an area for improvement during our final interview:

Make sure they are doing things that are appropriate and make sure they are talking to other people outside their class.

(Semi-structured Interview)

Shauna's suggestion that more monitoring of student interaction would improve communication between the two groups was likely misguided. Rather, lack of communication between herself and the Oakland students may have been hindered by Shauna's inability to attract the attention of

other users. For example, unlike Keli who made frequent changes to her profile page to attract the attention of other users (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009), Shauna rarely made changes to her profile page. When I asked her if she changed her profile picture and background very often she replied:

Ummm not so much. Usually I found just one background I really liked. Sometimes I might find one I liked better. (Semi-structured Interview)

When I asked Shauna if she noticed other students changing their profile page background and pictures she said:

Sometimes it kind of irritated me because they would change it so much and wouldn't talk so much. If you just change your picture and your background you might as well do other things because is suppose to be about learning about other people and finding more books. (Semi-structured Interview)

Shauna's suggestion that students should spend more time "learning about other people" and "finding more books" was likely what she considered to be a socially desirable response. Since these were the kinds of activities classroom teachers continually reminded students at both sites to engage in while discouraging students from spending time modifying and updating profile pages. However a content analysis of messages posted to Shauna's profile page demonstrated that changes to her profile page and picture often prompted the Oakland students to leave comments on her page. In fact four of the twenty comments she received from the Oakland students were made as a result of changes to her profile page:

hi, I like the way you decorated your page! (Comment Wall: September, 8)

blue and green are my FAVORITE colors! (Comment Wall: September, 8)

Hi Steph, I like your page! (Comment Wall: September, 14)

Hey steph !!! I luv your backround colors! (Comment Wall: February, 26)

Thus Shauna's reluctance to make frequent changes to her profile page was likely a byproduct of classroom teachers' rules that did not acknowledge the value of non-linguistic communication strategies, like frequently changing and updating profile pages—a common practice for frequent users of SNSs. These teacher-imposed rules may have unwittingly hampered Shauna's ability to naturally establish relationships with Oakland students while learning about and using the norms associated with communicating in SNS contexts.

**Conclusion.** Although Shauna was a struggling reader in school she quickly developed the digital literacies needed to communicate in the SNS. For example, she learned to read and write quickly across the multiple and changing surfaces of profile pages. She also demonstrated an ability to apply writing conventions that aligned with the linguistic expectation of readers in both the SNS and school-based contexts. This awareness, suggests that despite below grade level performance on measures of school-based literacy practices, Shauna was developing digital literacies to produce texts that were consistent with the norms for users of SNSs. Additionally, Shauna appeared capable of sustaining relationships with her Iowa peers, however, classroom rules set by teachers and researcher may have devalued profile page design which may have interfered with Shauna's ability to develop the digital literacies needed to create texts that would help her achieve social success with users with whom she did not have an existing relationship. This analysis suggests that Shauna was a learner and beginning to develop the digital literacies needed to become an easy-switcher.

**Jenny: A novice SNS User with Above Grade Level Writing Achievement Scores**

Jenny was an eleven year old white female from an upper middle class family. Her classroom teacher indicated that Jenny was a strong student, and described her home life as:

(She) lives in the country, very traditional family. I had been out to their place to pick pumpkins, awesome family! Mom is a homemaker dad runs a very large soybean association. She is very into her school work, loves band, just not gossipy and ok doing her own thing (Personal Communication).

Like most upper middle income families, Jenny's family provided good access to computers at home. Her family owned both a laptop and a desktop computer and she had considerable freedom in her use of them:

Interviewer: How often do you use the computer?

Jenny: About everyday for one hour or two hours.

Interviewer: What kinds of things do you like to do on it?

Jenny: Sometimes I go to Ning sometimes I go to Webkins sometime I write stories or play computer games.

Interviewer: Do your parents have limits or do get to spend as much time as you want?

Jenny: Practically as much as I want. Sometime my dad tells me to get off when I play too many games. (Semi-structured

Interview)

Although Jenny indicated that she used her home to participate in Reading Revolution and play video games, she also used the computer for school related activities like writing stories. This may help explain why Jenny's ITBS scores which were in the ninety-first percentile for reading and in the ninety-ninth percentile for Language Use -- far above national averages.

**Participation.** Jenny was moderately interested in participating in Reading Revolution.

According to her classroom teacher Jenny seem to be:

Active in RR and seemed to enjoy it but not as much as other students like Keli or Shauna. She was always on task posting messages or writing a blog, story, or poetry.

(Personal

Communication)

Her participation pattern confirmed this observation. Even though Jenny posted the most comments (180) out of the study participants, she posted the lowest percentage of her messages outside of class time (40%). She also voiced complaints about other students' communication patterns in Reading Revolution:

Interviewer: Do you have a favorite page or somebody you just like to post messages to?

Jenny: Chrystal always replies. Like some people just they just like usually she writes something that has to do with what I wrote. While other people are just like "sure". Just like one word. And then you have to go back and try to figure out what you were asking.

(Semi-structured

Interview)

Jenny's frustration with other students' communication patterns may have been related to her unfamiliarity with discourse features common among users of SNSs.

**Profile pages design** Users of SNSs create concrete representations of themselves as they chose backgrounds and profile pictures to send nonlinguistic messages about interests and affiliations. However, Jessica did not seem invested in designing her profile page. While Keli chose the fashion icon "Baby Phat" for her profile picture, and Shauna uploaded photos of a

family member to serve as her profile photo, Jenny choose an image of butterflies from clipart on a school sanctioned website to represent herself (see Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.12. Jenny's profile page.

Nor did she seem interested in discussing how her profile page might represent herself to other users in the site. When I asked if she changed her profile picture often she said:

Jenny: No I only did it once.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to change your picture?

Jenny: Because my old one wasn't going very well with my change?

Interviewer: Oh it didn't match the color?

Jenny: No because I changed my page to this one so I thought I should get a picture to go with it.

Interviewer: So you've had that picture for a long time?

Jenny: Well like half the year then I had another one.



Interviewer: What was the one you had before?

Jenny: A butterfly. It looks pretty much the same as this one but the background was different. it was purple.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to change your background?

Jenny: I was getting sick of the old one.

Interviewer: Do you think it tells people about you?

Jenny: Kinda yeah. It looks like my room. It would be like something I would choose

Interviewer: The color and design?

Jenny: Yeah.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to choose a butterfly for you profile picture?

Jenny: I like butterflies? I don't know.

(Semi-structured Interview)

Unlike Keli, Jenny seemed more interested in design as it related to matching color and motif. She did not appear to be aware of how her profile page might be used to reflect her personality or affiliations in the offline world. When I asked Jenny if she noticed other users changing their profile page backgrounds and pictures she said:

Jenny: All the time. Like it is annoying. Like last week that was so and so and now it not.

Sometimes it just drives me nuts if there always changing it and they can't be satisfied.

Interviewer: Why do you think they are changing it all the time?

Jenny: I don't know.

(Semi-structured Interview)

Although Jenny had good access to computers and the Internet at home, she was not familiar with the conventions used to create and sustain a profile in an SNS.

Unfortunately, as previously discussed, these classroom teachers discouraged students from engaging in some of the multimodal writing practices that are central to participation in SNSs. So unlike Keli, whose prior experience with SNSs provided her with insider knowledge, these practices remained “blackboxed” (Latour, 1991) for Jenny. Although the development of these skills do not necessarily depend upon their being taught in school as part of the formal curriculum, most children pick up on multimodal writing practices as they interact with their peers. Jenny may have needed some instructional intervention by teachers to understand the purpose and functions of profile pages in order to establish relationships with other users more quickly. So, like Shauna, Jenny received fewer comments expressing validation and appreciation for her profile page (9) than did Keli (19). Unlike Shauna, however, Jenny was reluctant to use some of the other textual and the linguistic conventions familiar to frequent users of SNSs.

**Digital writing.** Unlike Keli and Shauna, Jenny refrained from using the conventions associated with text messaging such as abbreviations and emoticons even though she appeared to have sophisticated knowledge of the practices:

Jenny: You and L are so MFEO (Comment Wall: November, 15)

Iowa Student: What's MFEO? (Comment Wall: December, 2)

Jenny: It Means Made For Each Other: ) (Comment Wall: December, 7)

Regardless of her knowledge of common text messaging abbreviations and emoticons she used only eleven abbreviations over the course of the project. While all three participants used relatively few abbreviations at the beginning of the project, by the end a dramatic difference in the frequency was apparent (see Table 4.3).

*Table 4.3*

Jenny's Use of IM Abbreviations Compared to Keli and Shauna

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>End</b>
Jenny	1	6	4
Keli	16	6	42
Shauna	16	31	48

Jenny used relatively few abbreviations she began using other IM conventions such as dropping capital letters and punctuations marks over the course of the project. For instance, at the beginning of the project, Jenny composed only six messages without punctuation, but after the middle of the project thirty of her messages contained no punctuation (see Table 4.4).

*Table 4.4*

Jenny's Use of IM Conventions

<b>IM Conventions</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>End</b>
Abbreviations	1	6	4
Multiple Punctuation	0	0	1
No Punctuation	6	20	10
Mixed Punctuation	2	3	5
Conventional Punctuation	53	38	46
All Caps	0	0	0
No Caps	7	16	22
Conventional Caps	53	42	34

Similarly, at the beginning of the project she composed only seven messages without capital letters, but after mid-year she composed thirty-eight messages without capital letters.

Interestingly, as Jenny increased her use of IM conventions her idea units began to decrease. In the first third of the project, Jenny's comments contained 249 idea units, but in the final third of the project her comments were reduced to 149 comments. However, it would be overly simplistic to claim that Jenny's ability to adhere to the conventions associated with school-based writing was diminished through her participation in the SNS.

First, analysis of her writing for a class assignment shows how she maintained her ability to use conventions valued and tested in school. For example, during the last month of school Jenny uploaded a letter she had written as a class assignment:

Dear Leyda, We all miss you a lot. Taylor and I miss playing with you at recess. We usually play with Katherine on the swings or the bars. What do you do? Do you like to swing? I wish there was soccer. What is your favorite sport? Mine is dance.

There have been a lot of tragedies lately. Hannah K's mom died, Garret's house burned down, and my "Sunday school teacher" died. I miss you. If you were here I would invite you to spend the night. We could fish, have a cookout, ride four wheelers, stay up late, play with the baby chicks, and much more! Please come back!

P.S. It would be awesome!!!!

Luv,

Jenny

(Forum

Posting)

Second, Jenny's increased use of IM conventions along with the diminished number of ideas units per posting may be evidence of a growing awareness on Jenny's part that a different set of conventionalized literacy practices were being used to communicate in the SNS. This is a key indication that Jenny was taking on characteristics of an easy-switcher with the ability to

adjust her writing according to the context and audience involved. However, a message act analysis shows that Jenny struggled to make interpersonal connections with other users in the site, and closer text analysis of Jenny's communication patterns show that she violated several unwritten rules for participation in SNSs which may have caused her to become socially isolated and suggest she did not fully develop the necessary digital literacies to be considered an easy-switcher.

**Interpersonal connections.** Although Jenny posted more comments (180) versus 129 for Keli and 127 for Shauna, she received fewer comments (102) versus 154 for Keli and 127 for Shauna (see Table 4.5). One reason for the low response rate from both Oakland and Iowa students may have been related to the register she used while posting messages to their profile pages.

*Table 4.5*  
Number of Messages Exchanged by Participants

Name	Posted		Received		Total	
	Oakland	Iowa	Oakland	Iowa	Posted	Received
Jenny	85	95	46	56	180	102
Keli	52	70	68	86	129	154
Shauna	50	81	20	107	138	127

Most writing in SNSs strikes a familiar register as users incorporate slang, and generally disregard many spelling and grammar rules and is typically synthesized into brief texts to send important information to other users (Dowdall, 2006; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Roswell, 2009). However Jenny tended not to use slang, and typically wrote grammatically correct and complete sentences that were consistent with school-based writing tasks.

For example on the first day of the project Jenny wrote on the profile page of an Oakland student:

Hey (Student Name),

The book "House on Hackman's Hill is about two cousins. They are both spending their summer vacation at their grandparent's house. There is an old house next to them. Its known to be haunted. So one night they sneak out and go to the house. The truth is it's full of scary things like ghosts. There is a jackle in it and a mummy. It's really interesting!

(Comment Wall:

September 12)

Coupled with her use of multiple complex questions she may have overwhelmed other users deterring them from responding to her messages. Although Jenny's sentence structures became less complex over the course of the project, they continued to reflect a more formal register:

do you like to fish, hunt, or ride fourwheelers?

(Comment Wall: April

15)

I don't really know. My dad is always gone, and when he is, I'm usually in the garden.

(Comment

Wall: May 5)

Additionally, Jenny tended not to engage in communicative acts to prompt conversations such as using one or two word phrases like "hi" or "what's up" that often resulted in interaction between users. In fact, in our interview, she made it clear she did not have an understanding or appreciation for these kinds of communicative acts. When I asked her what I could do to make Reading Revolution more fun she said:

I think you should tell them (students) to write other things rather than hi or whats up because how are you suppose to really reply to that? Because it really drives me nuts when I get like five messages and they are all Hi. I'm just...like.... O.K.

(Semi-structured  
Interview)

Although Jenny posted ninety-five comments to her Iowa classmates' walls, she received only fifty-six comments from other Iowa students, suggesting she was being socially isolated. A content analysis of comment wall postings suggests Jenny may have been unclear about the purpose of different features, like understanding when to use comment walls versus email to interact with peers -- which may have interfered with her ability to maintain relationships with her peers in the SNS.

Writing on someone's wall in an SNS is usually reserved for lighter dialogic conversation while more personal information is typically sent through private messaging features (Rowse, 2009). However, Jenny frequently used the comment walls for directly personal communication. In fact nearly 40% (69/180) of Jenny's comments were coded as directly personal.

For example she wrote:

Good. Did you here the rumor? Do you know who started it? If so, who did you here it from?

(Comment Wall: January

4)Hey STUDENT NAME Happy Birthday Do you think I like STUDENT NAME? Or that we make a perfect couple? (everybody says so but I don't believe them)

(Comment Wall:

February 8)

Everybody is asking me are you and STUDENT NAME going out. You are soooo lucky.

He is really cute. I'm like no! but you are cute. "NO we are not going out!" (are we?)

(Comment

Wall: March 5)

Although we discussed with students the importance of not posting messages that could be interpreted as bullying, and advised students against posting personal information such as phone numbers and addresses, we, unaware of the unwritten rules ourselves and hesitate to encourage to share information using the private messaging feature, never pointed out the subtleties involved in exchanging information that might be considered private by other users in a public forum. Jenny's violation of these unwritten rules may explain why she received far fewer comments from her Iowa peers than both Keli and Shauna who rarely posted directly personal messages on comment walls.

**Conclusion.** This analysis suggests that despite Jenny's high levels of school-based literacy achievement, she did not fully develop the digital literacies needed to foster and sustain relationships with other users in the SNS. Although she was developing knowledge of some of the conventionalized practices familiar to frequent users of SNSs she seemed disinterested in using the multimodal communication strategies which possibly hindered her ability to foster relationships with the Oakland users. Additionally she did not learn, like Shauna and Keli, which technical application was better suited for the exchange of personal information which may have interfered with her ability to sustain relationships with her Iowa peers. Her struggle to achieve social success with her Iowa peers and Oakland users indicates she did not exhibit a high command of digital literacies needed to create texts that would not create dissonance for those she sought to establish online relationships.



**Summary of Findings**

These data show that there were marked differences in the literacy practices of the participants as they communicated in an SNS. These data also show that these differences may be related to the participants' prior experience with SNSs, their levels of school-based writing achievement, and how teachers directed students to use the SNS. In the next chapter, I will discuss the implications of these findings for the use of SNSs to classroom practices pertaining to writing instruction.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **Discussion**

To guide the discussion of the findings, the concept of third space pedagogy was used to examine how a classroom use of an SNS might support best practices in adolescent writing instruction. Third spaces pedagogy is employed when teachers make use of students' out-of-school knowledge and linguistic resources to scaffold school-based literacy development. However, teachers also need to broaden their understandings of what counts as legitimate literacy practices for reading and writing in school. A comparison of the differences and similarities of the participants' literacy practices as they communicated in an SNS helped to identify opportunities for teachers to employ third space pedagogy in ways that draw on students' digital literacies to support writing instruction in school.

#### **Profile Pages and Expanding What Counts as Legitimate Writing Practices**

In order for third space pedagogy to be employed, teachers need to expand what they generally consider to be legitimate texts for writing to include multimodal texts such as SNS profile pages (Bearne, 2005; Moje, et al. 2004; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010). In this study, teachers may have devalued the naturalized literacy practices typically used in SNSs to create profile pages by placing limits on the kinds of images students could upload to their profile pages, and discouraging them from making frequent changes to their profile pages. As a result, Keli, who had previous experiences with MySpace, exhibited a better command of digital literacies than did Jenny and Shauna. Keli frequently modified her profile page by changing background colors and layout, adding music, and uploading pictures of family members, pets, and celebrities to her photo gallery. She seemed to recognize that creating a profile page was a design process:

I really like designing stuff so every time I get on I would at least change my page.

(Semi-structured

Interview)

Even though the teachers discouraged students from engaging in multimodal writing practices, Keli seemed to consciously or unconsciously, understand that these practices were critical for effective communication in SNSs and continued to apply these literacy practices just as she would in MySpace.

However, Jenny and Shauna who had not used SNSs other than for Reading Revolution, did not exhibit as strong of a command of digital literacies. They rarely made changes to their profile page backgrounds and never uploaded images to their photo gallery. In fact, Jenny only changed her profile page once and referred to changes in other students' profile pages as "annoying." Although Shauna, who admitted to occasionally changing her profile picture and background colors, received eighteen comments complimenting the changes she made to her profile page, still mirrored teacher perspectives that profile page design an off-task activity:

If you just change your picture and your background you might as well do other things because is suppose to be about learning about other people and finding more books.

(Semi-structured

Interview)

Jenny's approach to the construction of profile pages and Shauna's belief that changing profile pictures and backgrounds interfered with communication between students reflected traditional classroom literacy practices in which alphabetic meaning making is valued over the design of multimodal texts (Kress, 2003). However, best practices in adolescent literacy instruction

suggest that teachers need to include opportunities for students construct multimodal text like profile pages (Alvermann, 2008).

To employ third space pedagogy in a way that supports best practices in adolescent writing instruction teachers in this study could have allowed students to modify their profile pages by choosing background designs and uploading pictures to reflect personalities of literary characters or the setting of a particular book (Moayeri, 2010). Additionally, these teachers might have encouraged students to think critically about the interactions of photos, color, sound, and words to raise awareness of how different people might interpret images and words differently. These types of activities align with NCTE standards that encourage teacher to develop activities that help students image their audiences more clearly and to communicate effectively with both print and non print texts.

The differences in the literacy practices between Keli, an experienced uses of SNSs, and Shauna and Jenny, novice users of SNS, show that not all students develop the skills needed to attract and maintain the attention of others in cyberspace on their own outside of school. Because the ability to attract and maintain the attention of others in cyberspace is a skill in high demand in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, in which information is abundant but attention is scarce (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003), these finding suggest that there is an need for teachers to use digital technologies like SNSs to help students expand their repertoire of literacy practices to include the construction of multimodal texts. However, multimodal literacy practices as they occur in rapidly changing information and communication technologies may need to be continuously unpacked for classroom teachers so that they may repurpose them in ways that help students learn to read and write fluidly in both print and digital contexts.

### **SNSs and Playing and Writing in School**

Third space pedagogy can be employed when teachers draw on the literacy practices students develop in their homes, communities, and peer networks to hone their school-based literacy practices (Guitierrez, et al., 1999). A comparison of participants' digital literacies as they produced alphabetic texts in the SNS to socialize with their peers shows that the literacy practices used to be successful in a SNS can support some long standing goals for writing instruction.

Evidence that the study participants' use of digital literacies can support school-based writing can be found in Keli and Shauna's increased use of abbreviations and unconventional capitalization schemes. At the beginning of the project Keli used 16 abbreviations but only expressed 70 idea units. However by the end of the project Keli increased her use 42 abbreviations but increased her ideas units to 107 (see Table 5.1). Likewise, Shauna also used only 16 abbreviations at the beginning of the project and expressed only 56 idea units. However by the end of the project she used 48 abbreviations and more than doubled her idea units to 107 (see Table 5.1)

*Table 5.1*

Keli's and Shauna's idea units

<b>IM Conventions &amp; Idea Units</b>	<b>Keli</b>			<b>Shauna</b>		
	<b>Beg</b>	<b>Mid</b>	<b>End</b>	<b>Beg</b>	<b>Mid</b>	<b>End</b>
Abbreviations	16	6	42	16	31	48
All Caps	0	7	13	0	4	14
Idea Unites	70	82	107	56	98	96

These data show suggest that as the participants increased their use of IM conventions they may have became more willing to express their ideas in writing; a necessary step for

improving writing in all genres. Additionally, in an analysis of one of their classroom writing assignments, no use of IM abbreviations were found. These findings indicate that Keli and Shauna may have engaged with elements of school-based writing by attending to word choice, tone, and style as they made postings to the comment walls of other users, and for classroom-based writing assignments.

However, evidence that writing in SNSs can support school-based writing is most strongly supported in Shauna's case. For Shauna the opportunity to play and experiment with nonlinguistic visual elements in digital writing may have helped her develop a more sophisticated understanding of conventional writing practices like punctuation. Over the course of the project she reduced the number of postings she made with no punctuation from thirty-five to sixteen and ended the project by making five postings using all conventional punctuation schemes (See Table 5.2).

*Table 5.2*  
Shauna's Use of Punctuation Schemes

<b>Punctuation Schemes</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>End</b>
No Punctuation	35	29	16
Multiple Punctuation	11	15	16
Mixed Punctuation	0	2	18
Conventional Punctuation	0	0	5

Shauna's experience points to the potential of interactive multimodal texts like profile pages to provide students with language needs, a dynamic and flexible environment for learning to write (Dalton & Proctor, 2008).

Interpretation of these data suggest that the introduction of an SNS into classroom literacy activities may provide teachers with opportunities to employ third space pedagogy that build on students digital literacies to scaffold the writing practices promoted and tested in school. However, if analysis is limited to how an SNS might support school-based literacy practices, these findings would simply reinforce dominant school perspectives of digital literacies and may reduce them to a set of skills, or procedural knowledge to be applied and tested in school. This is not an implication that should be made from the results of this study. Instead, teachers need to consider how the naturalized literacy practices used in digital environments like SNSs might also prepare their students for the wide range of reading and writing purposes needed for successful participation in their future academic, work, and personal lives.

### **Easy-Switching: Using SNS for School-based Writing**

The ultimate goal of third space pedagogy is to help students to cross over and succeed in different discourse communities. SNSs are discourse communities in that they are social settings in which there are specific literacy practices, ways of reading and writing, which are expected by other users of a SNS. To be digitally literate individuals must move fluidly between print and digital contexts for writing. To be regarded as an easy-switcher, individuals must be able to produce texts that do not create dissonance for the reader (Dowdall, 2009). Mastery of the literacy practices of a discourse community is often indicated by the ability to form personally satisfying relationships with the other members in a particular discourse community. As we look across the three cases it appears that this classroom use of an SNS did not adequately support a novice user's adoption of the discourse that was familiar to experienced users of SNSs. This finding indicates a missed opportunity for classroom teachers to use third space pedagogy to help

students develop the literacy practices needed to cross over and succeed in an SNS-based discourse community.

As previously mentioned, Keli came to the study with mastery of the literacy practices needed to participate in an SNS-based discourse community. Keli's mastery of these literacy practices is most strongly demonstrated in her ability to establish relationships with other users. Not only did Keli receive the most number of comments (154) when compared to Jenny (102) and Shauna (127), she also received the most number of comments from the Oakland students (68) relative to Jenny (46) and Shauna (20). Keli's ability to establish relationships with the Oakland students occurred despite the fact that she, like the other two participants, did not have any face-to-face contact with the Oakland students (see Table 5.3).

*Table 5.3*  
Number of Comments Posted and Received

Name	Posted		Received		Total	
	Oakland	Iowa	Oakland	Iowa	Posted	Received
Jenny	85	95	46	56	180	102
Keli	52	70	68	86	129	154
Shauna	50	81	20	107	138	127

Additionally, a majority of Keli's comments (70% Oakland and 71% Iowa) were replied to by other users from both groups of students (See Table 5.4).

*Table 5.4*  
Participants' Messages Exchanged

Message Exchange	Oakland		Iowa		Total	
	Exchanged	No Reply	Exchanged	No Reply	Exchanged	No Reply
Jenny	36 (42%)	50 (58%)	30 (32%)	64 (68%)	66 (37%)	114 (63%)
Keli	37 (71%)	15 (29%)	49 (70%)	21 (30%)	86 (70%)	36 (29%)



Shauna	14 (28%)	36 (72%)	54 (66%)	27 (33%)	68 (52%)	63 (37%)

However the clearest indication that Keli had a full command of the literacy practices needed to participate successfully in an SNS-based discourse community is indicated by the fact that she appeared to have established some meaningful connections with the Oakland students:

Interviewer: Tell me what you liked about Reading Revolution.

Keli: I liked that you could get on and talk to people who you haven't met and find out what their interests are.

Interviewer: Who are some of those people you talked about and what did you learn about them?

Keli: I talked to a girl named Lily. She likes music. She has two pets. She just is really cool. And I talked to a few other people in my class.

Interviewer: Did you feel like you got to know some of the other Oakland students pretty well?

Keli: Yeah...pretty much Lilly. Yeah we talked for a long time.

Interviewer: Anybody else maybe you talked to every once in awhile?

Keli: Rachael. She was new so I hadn't really got a chance to talk to her a lot but I talked to her sometimes.

(Semi-structured

Interview)

In SNSs many adolescents associate their status with the number of comments received on their profile page (Perkel, 2008). Keli's use of the naturalized literacy practices familiar to experienced users of SNSs may have prompted other users to leave comments on her profile page more frequently than they did on either Shauna's or Jenny's profile page; which may have elevated her status in the Reading Revolution SNS.

However, neither Shauna nor Jenny was as successful as Keli at establishing social connections with other users in the Reading Revolution SNS. Although Shauna was successful at establishing relationships with her Iowa peers, she struggled to make connections with the Oakland students. Out of the three participants, Shauna had the largest number of comments (72%) which were not responded to by Oakland students. This probably explains why Shauna repeatedly pointed to the lack of communication from the Oakland students as an area for improvement for the Reading Revolution project:

Shauna: Because a lot of people on Reading Revolution don't so much talk to them and the Oakland don't talk so much to back to us. (Semi-structured Interview)

Shauna: Make sure they are doing things that are appropriate and make sure they are talking to other people outside their class. (Semi-structured Interview)

Shauna: Sometimes it kind of irritated me because they would change it (*profile page*) and wouldn't talk so much. (Semi-structured Interview)

In SNSs, not receiving replies to messages can create feelings of social isolation and reduce an individual's status within a discourse community (Boyd, 2007; Dowdall, 2006).

Shauna's frustration concerning the small number of comments she received from the Oakland students is indication that she did not fully develop the digital literacies to become an easy-switcher who could move easily between print and digital contexts for writing.

Jenny, despite her high levels of achievement in school-based literacy practices, was the least successful at forming interpersonal connections in Reading Revolution. A full 58% of her

messages were not replied to by the Oakland students and even more (63%) were not replied to by her Iowa peers. Although she did not express the feelings of social isolation that Shauna did, she did complain about writing practices of users:

Jenny: Like some people just like usually writes what I wrote while other people are just like “sure.” Yeah just like one word. And then you have to go back and try to figure out what you were asking. (Semi-structured

Interview)

Jenny: I think you should tell them to write other things rather than hi or Wats up.

Because how are you suppose to really reply to that? (Semi-structured Interview)

Jenny: Because it really drives me nuts when I get like five messages and they are all

“Hi”

(Semi-structured

Interview)

Although data showed that Jenny may have been developing the ability to become an easy-switcher; for example she moved from writing all her comments in a formal register (48/48) at the beginning of the project, to writing some of her comments using a familiar register toward the end of the project (27/48). Additionally, although Jenny clearly had knowledge of IM abbreviations, she used only eleven IM abbreviations in her postings to the comment walls of other users. Even though Jenny did not express feelings of social isolation, she pointedly expressed her frustration with the literacy practices of the other Reading Revolution users. Out of the three participants she received the fewest number of comments to her profile page even while posting the most, not only suggesting social isolation but diminished status as well.

Possessing the ability to control one’s position in an SNS requires a command of digital literacies. Keli was able to draw on her “funds of knowledge” in the form of digital literacies that

she had developed through her use of MySpace to elevate her status in the SNS. Shauna and Jenny, however, whose only experience with an SNS was classroom-based, did not appear to develop a full command of the digital literacies needed to establish personally satisfying social connections. This finding suggests that the classroom-based SNS may have hindered the development of some of the digital literacies needed to be successful in SNS-based discourse communities.

Best practices in adolescents' writing instruction are successful when students understand that texts are written in social settings and for social purposes (Moje, 2007). Research shows that writing in digitally mediated environments can provide students with a heightened sense of audience as they receive responses to writing they have posted online (Black, 2007; Lindemann, 2005; Thomas, 2007). However, if teachers are going to use SNSs to promote audience awareness and practice writing for different purposes, they may need to make explicit and model some of these new literacy practices. For example, they may need to model playing with language and using images to conduct a creative performance through writing; as was apparent in Keli's case. They may also need to explicitly give students' permission to use writing conventions like IM abbreviations in order to become easy-switchers with a better sense of how to write for a variety of purposes and audiences in the digital age.

### **Practical Implications**

In this study, data showed adolescents come to school with a wide range of experiences with digital technologies and this had important implications for teachers seeking to integrate digital technologies into their classroom-based writing curriculum. These findings demonstrate that some adolescents like Keli develop a firm grasp of digital literacies on their own outside of school. Research shows that building bridges between the everyday and school-

based literacy practices of adolescents like Keli can help to engage them in school-based writing activities they will find highly motivating (Moje, 2007). Unfortunately, teachers often devalue, ignore or censor adolescents' digital literacies, assuming that these literacies diminish students' writing abilities with school-based texts (Moje & Sutherland, 2003). However, if teachers develop a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes digital literacies and how they are manifested in particular discourse communities like SNSs they may be able to connect the writing students do in school with the writing they perform of their own volition and for their own purposes outside of school. Therefore the findings from this study may help educators identify pedagogies (like third space pedagogy) in order to engage learners who are often disenchanted with traditional approaches to writing instruction, and thereby improve students' facility with the literacy practices currently promoted and tested in school.

The findings from this study also show that struggling readers and writers like Shauna appear to hone their school-based writing skills as they practice putting their ideas in writing, even if those ideas are expressed through IM abbreviations and unconventional punctuation schemes. Too often struggling readers and writers are asked to focus primarily on learning discrete, technical print-based aspects of writing and are not provided with opportunities to use online digital technologies to practice writing for their own purpose and for a variety of audiences. Some literacy scholars have noted that the serious work of improving writing instruction for adolescents often overshadows the importance of play in learning; particularly the play that involves the reading and writing of interactive digital texts (Alvermann & Heron, 2001).

Some educators might view findings that demonstrate writing in SNSs can support conventional print-based writing encouraging which may reduce resistance to integrating them

into classroom-based activities. However, a singular focus on the development of conventional literacy skills will fail to prepare students with the skills, strategies and dispositions necessary to adapt to rapidly changing technologies and contexts that influence all areas of personal and professional lives (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, J. & Cammack, 2004). This leads to the third implication of this study for educators.

Some educators assume that children develop digital literacies on their own outside of school. However Jenny's case demonstrates that this is not always true. Surprisingly, this study found that good access to computers at home and strong school-based literacies skills does not necessitate the development of sophisticated forms of digital literacies in terms of valuing the new purposes and texts for writing that have emerged as result of the multimodal affordance of digital technologies. The findings from this study may help teachers assist students' like Jenny in understanding that writing in SNSs is a cultural form that builds on established rules and conventions but simply possess new textual features that include brevity, spontaneity, and conversational tone. In doing so, students might learn how different discourse communities rely on different communication conventions; an important understanding as digital technologies have increased the likelihood that individuals will experience increasing diversity in kinds of discourse communities they will encounter in online environments (Jenkins, 2009). Thus it is important that students develop an understanding that literacy practices people use in their everyday writing practices online in contexts outside of school are neither right nor wrong, but simply multiple ways to communicate for different purposes and audiences.

Finally, the findings from this study do not support the widespread perception of a crisis over adolescents diminishing abilities to produce texts that align with school-based literacy practices. In fact, the findings from this study show that the enthusiasm adolescents have for

reading and writing with SNSs outside of school might serve as a valuable resource to improve classroom writing instruction.

### **Conclusion**

To be digitally literate, individuals need to develop a range of meaning-making practices that allow them to navigate, locate and communicate in on-line and face-to-face environments (Wilber, 2008). These data suggest that some of the writing practices in SNSs relate strongly to some school-based literacy practices such as switching registers to suit a particular audience, also valuable forms of digital literacies such as the ability to attract the attention of others online. However classroom teachers unfamiliar with the digital literacies needed for effective participation in SNSs may hinder novice users like Jenny and Shauna from developing a full range of digital literacies needed for success in 21<sup>st</sup> century work, academic and social settings. These findings provide insight and guidance for educators about not just whether or not to use an SNS in the classroom, but how to use them in ways that promote best practices in adolescent literacy instruction.

Given the growing dependence on digital reading and writing for professional, community and household purposes it seems important that students and teachers develop an understanding that reading and writing alphabetic print-based texts is only one aspect of what is required to be fully literate in contemporary society (Kress, 2003; Lewis & Fabos, 2005). The findings from this study provide educators with a rich and detailed description of the naturalized literacy practices that adolescents are developing in SNSs so that they repurpose them in ways that promote the deep and deliberative reading and writing processes we want students to develop in school.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Informed Consent Document**

Title of Study: Reading Revolution

Investigators: Denise Lindstrom and Dr. Dale Niederhasuer

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study is to increase student motivation to read independently through the use of online-collaborative technologies. You are being invited to participate in this study because you have agreed to let your students participate in Reading Revolution.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for one hour a week for one full school year. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: You will be asked about your observations and perspectives of student behavior as a result of their participation in Reading Revolution. Your observations will be recorded in the researchers field notes. On occasion, the researcher may ask you to clarify some of your observations at a later date. You may decline to answer any of the researcher's questions or request that an observation not be recorded in the field notes.

#### **RISKS**

While participating in this study you may experience the following risks: there are no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study.

#### **BENEFITS**

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing teachers, educators, and K-12 teachers new pedagogies that work to produce highly motivated readers that ultimately may enable students to participate more fully in their academic, private, community, and economic lives.

#### **COSTS AND COMPENSATION**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

#### **PARTICIPANT RIGHTS**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. A pseudonym will be assigned to you for the purpose of recording field notes.

#### QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact: For further information about the study contact Denise Lindstrom at (515) 294-9997 or at [dlb123@gmail.com](mailto:dlb123@gmail.com). You may also contact Dale Niederhasuer at (515) 294-3471
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, [IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu), or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

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#### PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Participant's Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of Parent/Guardian or

(Date)

Legally Authorized Representative)

#### INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of Person Obtaining

(Date)

Informed Consent)



**APPENDIX B****Parent Letter**

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Part of our reading curriculum this year will involve the use of an online social network called Reading Revolution. Your child will use this website to read and discuss books with children from a fifth-grade class in Oakland, California. The website is a private and password protected. Only students from the two classes will have access to the website. The website will be monitored daily to ensure that appropriate communication occurs between students. Students will only use their first names to identify themselves. This is an exciting opportunity for your child to get to know children from another part of the country as well as improve their motivation to read books.

Please take a few moments to review and sign the permission slip below.

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for my child to be enrolled in the online book club Reading Revolution.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not want my child to participate in the online book club Reading Revolution.

Please check below if you will allow your child's work or picture - to be placed in the Reading Revolution website.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for my child's picture or work to be posted to the Reading Revolution website identified by their first name only.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission for my child's picture or work to be posted to the Reading Revolution website.

Parent/Guardian Name (Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Semi-structured Interview Questions

#### Keli's Interview Questions:

1. Tell me what you liked about Reading Revolution.
2. Who are some of those people you talked about and what did you learn about them?
3. Did you feel like you got to know some of the other Oakland students pretty well?
4. Anybody else maybe you talked to every once in awhile?
5. Who did you talk to more often? People you already knew in Iowa?
6. Who were those people who you talked to a lot?
7. So tell me what other things you thought were fun about Reading Revolution?
8. Can you explain to me why you like that picture?
9. Tell me some things you learned about Oakland or Oakland students.
10. Where did you learn a lot about the students? Did you learn it from the poems or from the videos?
11. So what are some things I could do to make Reading revolution better?
12. You feel like you got to talk enough to people?
13. Did you ever post messages that didn't respond to?
14. Do you have a computer at home?
15. How much time do you spend on the computer at home?
16. What kinds of things do you do when you get on the computer?
17. So did anything happen on Reading Revolution that you didn't like?
18. What about any of the music on Reading Revolution did you think it was inappropriate?
19. Is there anything else you want to tell me about Reading Revolution that you liked?

20. Do you think other teachers should use it with their students?
21. What about reading and writing do you think it helps you learn how to read and write.

**Shauna's Interview Questions:**

1. What did you like to do when you first got on Reading Revolution?
2. So who did you get to know in Oakland or who did you post messages to?  
Why did you post messages to those three and not other ones?
3. Why did you post messages to those three and not other ones?
4. What made you curious about those three?
5. Did some Oakland students post messages to you?
6. What other things did you like to do with Reading Revolution?
7. I noticed there wasn't a whole lot of talking about books. Do you wish there was more talking about books?
8. What do you think we can do to make it more about books?
9. Do you think that we should make it something else and not a book club?
10. What kinds of things would people be interested in?
11. So if another were going to do this with their class what advice would you give that teacher?
12. Did you see anything inappropriate in Reading Revolution?
13. Was there anything else that you saw that was inappropriate or anything that your parents wouldn't approve of?
14. Under normal circumstances do you get to use a computer at home?
15. What kinds of things do you use the computer for?

16. What kinds of things do you use the computer for?
17. How many times a week do you get on the computer?
18. Give me some advice on how to make Reading Revolution better next time.
19. Did you learn a lot about the Oakland students?
20. Where did you learn that stuff? From the poems or the movies they posted?
21. Did you change your background very often?
22. Why is it rose petals?
23. Did you notice other students changing their background and icons a lot?
24. Do you think that is something they should be doing?
25. Did you think it got confusing if people change their backgrounds and icons a lot?

**Jenny's Interview Questions:**

1. Do you have a computer at home?
2. Do you use it own home are you allowed to?
3. How much time a week do you use it?
4. What kinds of things do you like to do on it?
5. Do your parents have limits or do get to spend as much time as you want?
6. So did you get on Ning when you were at home?
7. Do you have a favorite page or somebody you just like to post messages to?
8. Did she change her picture a lot did you notice?
9. Why do you think they are changing it all the time?
10. Why did you decide to change your picture?
11. Why did you decide to change your background?

12. Do you think it tells people something about you?
13. Why did you decide to chose a butterfly for you icon?
14. What other kinds of things are cool about Reading Revolution?
15. What did you like about the videos did you learn anything about the Oakland students?
16. Did you like reading the poems the Oakland students posted?
17. Did any students make comments to you?
18. So if I was going to do this with another group of fifth-graders what could I do to make it more fun or interesting?
19. Were there a lot of times when you asked students questions and you didn't hear from them?
20. Is there anything that happened on Ning that your parents would not approve of?