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# One Student's Use of Multiple Literacies in the 21st Century

Essence J. McFadden

*The College at Brockport*, emcfa1@brockport.student.edu

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# One Student's Use of Multiple Literacies in the 21st Century

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By Essence J. McFadden

December 2014

A thesis proposal submitted to the department of Education and Human Development of  
The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the  
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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Statement of the Problem

#### “The Blind Educators and the Literacy Lion”

A king asks several blind educators in his village to examine a new beast that has come into his possession and tell him about it. The first educator goes up to touch the Literacy Lion, and then runs back to the king shouting: “This beast is made up of whole words, yes, all sorts of words, like *the* and *captain* and *poultry* and *sure* and *wizard* and tens of thousands more!” Then the king signaled for the second educator to go up to the Literacy Lion, which she did, and after some time she returned to the king saying: “This animal isn’t made of whole words! It’s made up of sounds! All kinds of sounds! Sounds like ‘thhhh’ and ‘buh’ and ‘ahhhhh’ and ‘ayyyyy’ and ‘juh’ and many more. In fact, I counted all the sounds, and there are exactly 44! A third educator was sent to examine the beast, and he returned and exclaimed: “This creature isn’t made up of sounds or whole words. It’s constructed out of stories, and fables, and songs, and chants, and poems, and storybooks, and Big Books, and board books, and novels, and plays, and whole libraries full of living, exciting tales, and lot’s more besides!” Finally, a fourth educator was sent, and she came back saying: “They’re all wrong! This beast is made up of whole cultures, and people crying out for freedom and power, and it’s about understanding who we are and what we’re capable of, and how each of us can speak, and read, and write with our own voices, and in this way contribute to the good of all.” And with this assessment, the

educators proceeded to dispute heatedly among themselves. (Armstrong, 2003, pp. 11-12)

The parable above is talking about the different views of reading throughout the past several decades in the United States and in other parts of the world. I have learned that this difference in opinion is sometimes referred to as “The Reading Wars” (Armstrong, 2003). Literacy is a subject that comes with a range of diverse perspectives and opinions, and I believe that to teach it successfully we need to consider the components as interconnected pieces. This story really touched me because I have worked with a variety of individuals who feel that when it comes to literacy there is only one correct perspective. I believe that if we take a little of each component and utilize the resources that we have today, we will be able to connect with our students giving them the ability to create literacy experiences that will be meaningful and helpful to them.

As an educator, I believe that it is the responsibility of educators, role models, people in leadership, and all people in general to be lifelong learners, especially since we live in a society that is constantly changing and advancing. The advancement of technology that this generation is living with has truly refined what we as educators classify as literacy. The digital media that they use surpasses any kind of technology that we could have ever imagined when we were in grade school.

In this study I will be focusing on the term multiple literacies. Multiple literacies go beyond traditional reading and writing, comprising the ways information is understood through different types of media. Multiple literacies are important to focus on because they are a representation of the evolution of modern day education. What I want to do is

embrace these new literacies and develop students who are confident and inspired when it comes to their academic literacy. Making this type of connection with students gives them a better opportunity for learning.

The opening story relates to multiple literacies because they both show that education and learning can be looked at from a variety of perspectives. Even though each educator had the same goal in mind, they had different opinions on how to go about their goal and saw something different. Multiple literacies help individuals to reach common goals using different modes of technology and approaches. The goal of this study is to learn more about multiple literacies, how they can be supportive resources to education, and not to become a “blind educator”.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Teachers who utilize a multiple literacies approach to language instruction provide opportunities for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to become more successful learners (Williams, 2006). By keeping an open mind and always being willing to learn something new, educators will be able to accommodate the resources of the newer generations. How can we continue to teach our students using the same strategies and practices from decades ago? Our students today have an array of technology at their fingertips and it plays a large role in the way that they look at literacy in the classroom, as well as out of school.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the availability of technological tools has greatly increased. Who would have thought that playing a video game or sending messages through a cellular phone would have any influence on the literacy of our students? Literacy

education must foster the attitudes and abilities needed to master and use the evolving languages and technologies of the future (Cervetti, Damico, & Pearson, 2006). Not accepting these multiple literacies as "true literacy" could be detrimental to students' learning.

Multiple and digital literacies are a facet of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and are a part of our daily lives. For many youth, multiple literacies are a cultural aspect that keeps them connected to each other and the rest of the world. It is something that they enjoy and make use of on a daily basis. I feel that it is important for school systems to be able to join education with the world of multiple literacies. "If schools continue a singular focus on traditional conceptions of literacy as autonomous skills, then they will be in danger of becoming irrelevant to the construction of meaningful life pathways" (Larson, 2006, p. 319). Schools need to respond to rapidly changing literacy demands of the global economy to allow for sufficient preparation in the practices needed for authentic participation. These are the reasons that this research and case study are so significant. After completing this study, the results will be able to help enlighten educators and families on the connections between youth and multiple literacies and how to incorporate them into genuine learning experiences.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to answer the questions:

How does Ethan use multiple literacies?

What impact do multiple literacies have on Ethan's literacy practices?



Through paying close and well documented attention to the use and impact of multiple literacies on my participant, I have gained insight on how to implement these literacies in the classroom to keep students motivated and get them to strive to do better academically. By conducting this study I have a better understanding on the uses of the different types of literacies and how they are affecting students at home and within the classroom.

In school, new literacies are often shunned and seen by teachers as "the enemy". While I am in no way suggesting that students be allowed to walk around text messaging on their cell phones or playing video games during class, I think it would make a significant difference if educators were to take a closer look at the new literacies that are being used by students and see what ways they could utilize these to help students become more motivated and successful when it comes to literacy. To begin this process we need to expand on how we traditionally define literacies in the school systems.

At home, these new forms of literacy are also looked upon as having nothing to do with learning. Holidays, birthdays, and special occasions are a very popular time when some children receive many of their technological desires. They celebrate when opening up their gifts of new cell phones, tablets, laptops, eReaders, mp3 players, video game organizers, DVD players, and more. In leisure, these devices are encouraged and accepted by parents but when it comes to academics, these devices aren't necessarily top choice in most homes when speaking about the different aspects of literacy. The same implications derived from this study concerning educators can also be applied to guardians in the home who have students who make use of some of these multiple literacies. They can also learn

how students make use of these new literacies and how they affect academic literacy. To gather useful information on this topic I could observe, interact, and interview with my participant and his family members to be able to take a deeper look into the role that multiple literacies have on the life of youth in today's society.

### **Study Approach**

My research was conducted as an individual student case study. The participant of this study is named Ethan Gray (all names are pseudonyms). My relation to the participant is that he is my cousin. Ethan is a 16 year old male who attends Euphoria Wonder Arts High School. He lives in the suburbs of Euphoria, New York with his mother, father, and two younger brothers' ages 10 and 5. Through the process of observation, interviewing and email communication I have collected my data from the participant. I focused on how Ethan used and interacted with multiple literacies. I also took note of his experiences with multiple literacies and how they impacted his lifestyle. While communicating with Ethan through email, I printed, organized and coded them to add to my data collection.

I have designed this research to gain understanding on the influences of multiple literacies on youth and as a result look more into ways I could implement them within the classroom. I began my research by doing an interview with Ethan and an interview with his parents. I observed him in his home and participated in email correspondences weekly. My data collection took approximately 6 weeks. While collecting my data I did descriptive research. Descriptive research is when you provide information about events and situations that are presently happening (Shivgunde, Kulkarni, & Khan, 2012). I mainly did

this through my observations of Ethan and the annotated personal notes that I took as I observed.

### **Rationale**

This research was designed and implemented as a case study. A case study is an in-depth study of a particular student, classroom, or school with the goal of producing a description of the current cultural setting that affects education, and an account of the interactions that take place between students and other relevant persons (Shivgunde, Kulkarni, & Khan, 2012). This type of study fits perfectly for the data I collected and the research I conducted. The study also consisted of a design where I collected my data samples at different points of time. This type of design was sensible for my study since I was keeping track of my participants multiple experiences and interactions with multiple literacies at different points and times in his life. Collecting my samples all at the same time would not allow me to gauge how these literacies might have an impact on my participant.

I chose Ethan as my case study participant because at the age of 16 in his household and being the eldest of his siblings, he has a vast access to a large variety of the multiple literacies. His friends also have equal access to most of the same forms of new literacies, which will give me great information on how some of these literacies are used for communication. I also chose this participant because I have access to his home environment which will provide for adequate field notes, observations, and interviews.

What I do know about Ethan is that he is very interested in the latest forms of technology and I wanted to get a better understanding of how he used these tools and what he used them for. I looked at his literacy outside of the pencil and paper and the hardcover

book. Research on this topic was needed because multiple literacies are a response to modern life, mainly related to the technological revolution, which has changed the way we live, work, and communicate (Cervetti, Damico, & Pearson, 2006).

### **Summary**

I am very interested in technology and how it can be used to not only integrate curriculum but accelerate student literacy. As educators we must keep up with the times and the advancement of our technological society. Our students can only benefit from being given more resources and opportunities to learn. My experiences in the field of education have made me realize how passionate I am about student success. I think it will be important to learn more about youth and their experiences with these multiple literacies. This could result in a number of implications in the home and also in the classroom. This study resulted in very valuable research and data collection that helped to increase the validity of my work. I uncovered underlying themes within multiple literacies and my data and brought them together to better understand this topic.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

To complete my case study I have synthesized and assessed articles and other sources that talk about the different aspects and perspectives of multiple literacies. This includes multiple literacies within today's society, in and out of the classroom, educational theory, teacher education, and how these literacies are used by today's youth.

### **What are Multiple Literacies?**

Multiple literacies is a term that refers to people using various forms of media and technology to communicate using language. Today, literacy is made up of more than just written words; written words can be combined with sounds, pictures, videos, and the internet. Multiple literacies set themselves apart from traditional literacy because they can be accessed and used through an array of modes and technology (Cervetti, Damico, & Pearson, 2006).

Literacy can be looked upon in a variety of dimensions and forms. These multiple forms of literacy are particularly important to students and affect how they see the world (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2004). When talking about multiple literacies, there are facets of them that are being used in and out of school. Students come to school with knowledge of various multiple literacies that they learn at home and within their cultural communities (Benedict, 2012). Multiple literacies are tools that we can use to help advance student education. They provide alternative methods to help differentiate teaching and give students numerous opportunities to learn. Even having a student listen to a story digitally

using a laptop can make a difference in how they perceive the story rather than having you read it to them. Digital stories entwine sound, picture, music, voice, and narrative all into one and that represents the foundation of multiple literacies (Rule, 2010).

Introducing multiple literacies to students through personal connection has the ability to shift student thinking and the methods they use to approach literacy (Tierney, Bond, Bresler, 2006). Even though these literacies can make a large impact on students' minds, the uses of these multimodal literacies are not only limited to youth. Wolfe and Lewitt (2010) discuss the research on how parents also generally partake in many multiple and digital literacy experiences in the household. The home environment has a prominent effect on the knowledge of multiple literacies that youth bring into their classroom and share between their peers. Having these prior experiences are essential to the development of student literacy (Wolfe & Lewitt, 2010). A student having prior knowledge only helps to augment how they and what they learn. Enhancing student literacy development through multiple literacies is done by using diverse methods of visual demonstration and spatial arrangements (Knight, Dixon, Norton, & Bentley, 2004).

Throughout my review of the literature a major theme across many of the works seemed to be 'What is today's definition of Literacy?' This concept was heavily explored in the articles and texts I reviewed, challenging the norm of traditional literacy. To begin my research I reviewed the research where it talks about looking at literacy as a set of cultural practices rather than examining it as a set of skills. In doing so it is easier to see the implications of literacy in today's society instead of literacy being looked at as a collection of personal skills that an individual can obtain (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000).

One of the benefits of multiple literacies is how they have the ability to seamlessly combine the social world with the academic world. There has been a large amount of research that talks about the lack of connection that youth feel in school (Kelly, 2012). Instead of perceiving students as blank slates, we should consider the things that they have to offer and how we can learn from them. Students of all ages arrive to school with their own personal sets of prior knowledge due to past experiences in and out of school. This prior knowledge often goes unrecognized, but when they believe that this knowledge is acknowledged and incorporated into the school day the students feel a sense of empowerment and motivation (Kelly, 2012). Multiple literacies explore literacy as a set of cultural practices by building upon the social resources and cultural knowledge of students.

According to Mahmoodoghli, Harsij, Emamjomehzadeh, Forooghi, & Masoudnia (2013) it is crucial to produce the bond between “text and context” (p. 249) in order to look at literacy from a socially discursive viewpoint. When students interact with their peers and/or the rest of the world through similar types of multiple literacies they are establishing their affiliation into a social group or discourse community (Kelly. 2012). These communities are groups that unconsciously share the same types of values and rules. Multiple literacies within these socially accepted discourse communities draw upon the same accounts of understanding which help to provide useful resources and social practices (Spence, 2009). These communities help to provide collaboration between individuals and the foundation for the use of multiple literacies. Multiple literacies have a presence in many different facets of today’s society and our day to day lives.

## **Multiple Literacies in Today's World**

Multiple literacies are made up of various aspects and dimensions. They have a connection to numerous facets of our lives including social, educational, political, economic, and cultural. These components are multimodal and have the ability to be expressed through multiple literacies using forms of sound, picture, video, the internet, advertisements, the arts, and so much more.

The internet is a vital part of various multiple literacies. Even resources such as school websites provide an outlet of communication between the school and home (Bloome & Enciso, 2006). The internet allows for multiple literacies to become essential for global and constant communication. It is a feature that is interconnected between several of the modes that attribute to multiple literacies. Multiple literacies through the use of the internet include internet chatting, blogs, devices that have internet access, and reading anything on the web. Having internet experience is crucial to effectively participating in 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy activities (Wolfe & Lewitt 2010). The arts are another mode that multiple literacies can be expressed through. Implementation of the arts could consist of creative writing, dance, music, visual arts, film, and theater. Teaching through the arts has the ability help students find their way through present-day culture (Jensen, 2008). Within the arts there are numerous opportunities to use multiple literacies. Educators who taught using approaches outside their preferred discipline improved upon their instruction and also increase student comprehension (Jensen, 2008).

Sound is a key element to consider when it comes to the modes of multiple literacies. The advancement of new technologies have allowed for meanings to be



communicated and interpreted through sound and music (Knight, Dixon, Norton, & Bentley, 2004). This feature of literacy has changed the way we view and interact with literacy. Special effects during video games, audio books, singing songs during lessons, and devices equipped with microphones have helped us to better delve and participate in the world of multiple literacies. Combining sounds with the foundation of literacy helps to increase student memory, motivation, and language skills (Cooper, 2010). Enhancing technology through sound and music helps to advance the effectiveness of communication and learning through the various dimensions of multiple literacies. Music and sound within multiple literacies almost has a direct connection to films and pictures. Even activities such as video production have been made almost effortless through low cost, amateur video production programs, and the fact that many electronic devices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are equipped with a camera and video recording device (Harness & Drossman, 2010). Websites such as YouTube have become classroom staples in which educators use it to find lesson based material to show the class. At home students utilize YouTube for leisure, looking up the latest music video, or even creating their own material to upload onto the website. The television is a prominent source of how individuals use multiple literacies. Television series, documentaries, advertisements, and movies are just some of the ways that information is learned and communicated. The television is a primary source of information for some youth (Harness & Drossman, 2010). These dimensions of literacy help to facilitate how our society participates in and makes sense of the world around them.

Literacy is no longer limited to being taught in the classroom, it is now a part of our daily functions, workplace, and informational world. Becoming entirely literate nowadays

could mean living as a functional and successful citizen, participating and interacting with the latest technology, or reading words written on a page (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 1992). Multiple literacies help take literacy to a higher level by breaking it up into a number of different categories and components. Multiple and digital literacies also help to give educators alternative options to reach students and access their personal funds of knowledge. Gallego and Hollingsworth (1992) believe that multiple literacies encourage collaborations among students and educators alike, which will lead to more individuals taking initiative within the different literacies.

An area of focus that I will present is focused on personal literacy. Personal literacy, as discussed in the research is about socially accepted discourses and how students unconsciously choose which communities they are a part of through their different beliefs and actions (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000). Assessing the personal literacies of my case study student will help me to evaluate the range of purposes for which he uses multiple literacies. Useful literacy is an aspect of literacy used very commonly in our society. It is the type of literacy practiced to complete actions within our social system and everyday lives. Useful literacies consist of literacy activities such as filling out tax forms, completing job applications online, reading a bus schedule or finding a terminal within the airport (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000).

One of the implications of students developing useful literacy is that they may in turn learn to be 'successful' citizens who are able to function and navigate through the actions needed to be a part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000). This kind of literacy could also require the extensive use of mental processes in order to anticipate

action through literacy such as reading directions to assemble furniture or reading a recipe to determine whether or not you need to go to the grocery store. Gallego and Hollingsworth (2000) discuss how useful literacy is not very prevalent in our schools because schools view literacy as skills that can be improved.

Another type of literacy that we utilize today is called informational literacy. Informational literacy is when we acquire information to learn something new or stay updated on current events. This kind of literacy can be achieved through reading the newspaper, watching the news, or reading self-help books (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000). Today, websites such as Google and Wiki-How are a few of the front runners when it comes to informational literacy in today's society. According to the research, informational literacy can be used for activities as small as reading a magazine to keep up with the latest celebrity gossip or keeping up with a sports team in order to join the conversation at work. Using this type of literacy can be a very social activity. This concept shows how easy it is for multiple literacies to be looked at as more of a social practice (Tierney, Bond, Bresler, 2006).

### **Multiple Intelligences Pedagogy**

The subject of this study is very closely related to the pedagogical theory of Howard Gardner. When speaking of multiple literacies the thought of multiple intelligences is not usually the first thing that comes to mind, but they are interconnected. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences is based on concept that everyone learns through different capacities (McFarlane, 2011). Multiple intelligences are vital to technologically sophisticated ways of learning (Gracious & Shyla, 2012). Being able to navigate through the

different forms of multiple literacies definitely requires the uses of the various intelligences. Using the multiple literacies daily for communication and literacy activities is a multimodal activity and calls for the use of a range of brain processes.

Gardner brings attention to the fact that intelligence isn't a one way street, but rather a combination of abilities (Armstrong, 2003). A common characteristic present in many modes of multiple literacies is that they are interactive and they allow individuals to use their hands and fingers to press, touch, and swipe. This action allows for a very bodily kinesthetic experience in relation to the multiple intelligences. The kinesthetic experience is increased when one is able to touch the words they are reading and have the aspect of interaction (Armstrong, 2003).

Multiple and digital literacies have almost a direct correlation with the visual-spatial intelligence. Visual-spatial intelligence is when one is able to cognitively create solutions from what they see visually (Mohammadi, Abidin, & Ahmad, 2012). Television, films, pictures, and even social networking use a great deal of this intelligence. The research of Armstrong (2003) discuss some of the history of hieroglyphics and how the use of pictures to represent sounds and words are some of the earliest traits of visual-spatial intelligence. The uprising of social networking in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has had a major effect on multiple literacies through their accessibility and communication. They have inherently come with their own type of language. Analogous to the concept of hieroglyphics, social networks have specific acronyms and symbols that represent their own type of meanings and expressions. The visual-spatial intelligence within multiple literacies can be represented through the

being aware that “BTW” could represent ‘by the way’ or that “.com” signifies an internet website.

It is not possible to separate literacy from its social framework (Armstrong, 2003). Multiple literacies are an ideal learning style for interpersonal learners. Individuals who have interpersonal intelligences easily understand, identify and determine the moods, feelings, motives and intelligences of others (Mohammadi, Abidin, Ahmad & 2012). This trait is connected to multiple literacies because a large component of multiple literacies is that they have the possibility to be done digitally or through electronic communication. The interpersonal intelligence goes beyond the traditional image of literacy and what it means for a person to be literate (Armstrong, 2003). Multiple intelligences (MI) are valuable assets to instructors that want to develop coursework and curriculum that have the capacity to be used with students from all kinds of different backgrounds and abilities (McFarlane, 2011).

### **Teaching Implications of Multiple Literacies**

#### **Multiple Literacies in the classroom**

There are many implications to incorporating multiple literacies in a classroom setting. They can be used as a tool to give all students an equal opportunity to learn.

By shifting the focus of the teaching and learning of literacy from an independent model to include a multiple literacies perspective, we can create authentic spaces for learning that prepare students for participation in a global communication and information economy. (Larson, 2006, p. 319)

Multiple literacies in the classroom can represent the use of technology, arts, music, and even popular culture. Communicating through different media in class helps to expand student understanding of literacy through diverse modes. New literacies have the ability to prepare students for any real world experiences that they may face. Using these literacies in the classroom is a way to give these students an upper hand when going through these experiences (Cervetti, Damico, & Pearson, 2006).

In order for schools to be able to help their educators and students keep up with the ever-changing world of multiple literacies, they must make sure that these literacies are available inside of the classroom and used properly and effectively (Larson, 2006). As important as multiple literacies are, there is not a good research based picture of what multiple literacies look like in a classroom setting (Cervetti, Damico, & Pearson, 2006). The integration of multiple literacies in more classrooms would help to increase the amount of research that is currently being done on the topic. Educators would be able to provide more developed data on the implications of multiple and digital literacies in school and classroom settings. The literacy that children learn at school is comparably different to the literacy events that may occur in their home (Larson, 2006). Veteran and first year teachers alike should have the opportunity to be more informed about multiple literacies and how to use them to reach their students.

### **Multiple Literacies in teacher education**

Some teachers have hesitations about using multiple and digital literacies because they fear their students may be more knowledgeable about them than they are (Tierney, Bond, & Bresler, 2006). There is a lack of research on the involvement of multiple literacies

within teacher education. All educators from first year teachers to very experienced teachers must be prepared for the effects that multiple literacies have on education. With the constant introduction of new technology teacher education programs should be equipped with the tools needed to become familiar and proficient with multiple literacies (Cervetti, Damico, & Pearson, 2006). If educators have a better understanding of multiple literacies then it would only help students have successful skills when having their own literacy experiences in and out of school. Teacher education programs should prepare educators to give their students a well-rounded view on multiple literacies. This view of literacy should show how it could be looked at from multiple facets and use with numerous approaches (Cervetti, Damico, & Pearson, 2006).

I believe that teacher education programs should incorporate how to teach from a multiple literacies standpoint within their curriculum. The benefits of doing this would better prepare teachers to work with the new forms of literacies and the new literacies that are yet to come. Multiple literacies are not only about technology, even though technology is a major facet, multiple literacies have the ability to teach individuals a cultural way of learning. "A multiple literacies approach fosters an atmosphere of participation that allows students to tap into the language resources and cultural knowledge of their home communities and engage in meaningful learning" (Williams, 2006, p. 346).

A key point to remember is that even though multiple literacies are growing with each new generation, every student does not have at home access to them. Learning a multiple literacies approach to teaching through teacher education programs will also help to create new and authentic literacy learning experiences for all students, including those

who may not be familiar with them. To bring in-school and out-of-school literacy together for students it is important for educators to understand how students use these new forms of literacies.

### **How Young People Use Multiple Literacies**

Educators today may not be very fluent with the types of literacies used by their students. Their experiences with multiple literacies could differ tremendously from their students depending on their backgrounds (Carter, 2006). These latest millennial generations use multiple literacies to stay connected to the world. In previous years educators had the hopes to better integrate technology into the classrooms to keep students engaged and today's youth have surpassed those hopes. According to Tierney, Bond, and Bresler (2006), students can easily work with new and upcoming literacies because they have already been exposed to so many previous types of new literacies.

Movies, texting, social networks, blogs, and video games that involve real time chat are only some of the kinds of digital literacy in and out of school. Multiple literacies have definitely escalated to a front runner of today's society. These factors are directly related to my research question and the methods that I will be using to evaluate my participant. Those different ways that youth communicate are like the framework of understanding how they perceive and react to literacy and language events in their lives (Carter 2006). Through looking more in depth at my participants' use of multiple literacies, I will be able to gauge the impact that these literacies have on his literacy practices.

A major way that youth use multiple literacies today is as a social practice to engage with the world. It is a constant system that results in continuous access to everything and



each other. One of the major impacts of multiple literacies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that the world has the ability to become easily and constantly connected. With the foundation of the internet, there has been an ease of communication locally and throughout different parts of the world. The view of multiple literacies is to understand that identities are created through nonstop interactions between individuals in multiple ways (Carter, 2006). Multiple literacies are continuous systems that are updated often and often used by youth.

Education is a large element in the way that youth use multiple literacies. This represents education within the school systems and outside of them. Students who pursue various activities with multiple literacies develop their capacity for utilizing them (Tierney, Bond, & Bresler, 2006). The more practice that youth have with multiple literacies the more they begin to expand their knowledge on various ways to use them. This factor only helps to build youths' knowledge of the new literacies through repetition and using them within their everyday lives. When youth have a constant association with new and multiple literacies, then they will continue to develop all different kinds of strategies and methods to use them with and for (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 2006).

One of the major means that youth use multiple literacies is for leisure and entertainment. Video games, eReaders, handheld electronic games, and social networks are only some of the ways that youth use multiple and digital literacies for enjoyment. Integrating multiple literacies in the classroom could be beneficial to students because they associate many forms of multiple literacies as entertainment. Youth use multiple literacies for fun activities such as interacting with friends, reading their latest book of interest, or participating in leisure activities with family members. With the knowledge of how youth

use these literacies, more information can be provided on how school systems can use them to help teach youth. Multiple literacies in the classroom have positive effects on the students. When the new literacies are challenging it could drive students to become more involved in their learning (Mifsud, Vella, & Camilleri 2013).

### **Summary**

My review of the literature has made known the different components of multiple literacies. The literature has shown how the inclusion of multiple literacies within the classroom and teacher education can have a variety of positive implications on students' education. It has also given examples of how multiple and digital literacies are used by youth and throughout our society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There was also research linking educational pedagogy into the world of multiple literacies. Reviewing this literature has led to the development of my research on multiple literacies and how they are and can be applied in the home environment. Using this information will assist me in adding to this subject of study and literature.

## **Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures**

The purpose of this study was to document and evaluate the different types of digital literacies that Ethan (all names are pseudonyms) used. After determining his most prominent uses, I then focused in on the ways he used these literacies in regard to the multiple facets of literacy and the impact that they had on him. My research questions were:

How does Ethan use multiple literacies?

What impact do multiple literacies have on Ethan's literacy practices?

### **Participant**

My case study participant is Ethan, a 16 year old African American male. He is from an upper middle class family who lives in the suburbs of Euphoria, New York. He attends the Euphoria Wonder Performing Arts Center High School where he is actively involved in choir, show choir, voice recitals, annual school plays, and 2 to 3 seasonal sports teams. He lives with his mother, father, and two younger brothers aged 5 and 10. The participant is also very socially active, hangs out with friends on weekends, enjoys hanging out at the mall, and likes to attend the latest social events.

Ethan's mother and father will also be participants in the case study, as I will be interviewing them at a certain time during the study. They have been married for over 10 years. Both of his parents work full time during the day and are home in the evening with the children. Ethan's father works at their church providing building services. His mother

attended college, then trade school, and now pursues a career as the business owner of a hair salon.

Between school and home Ethan has access to multiple forms of digital literacy. At home, there is a television in every room. He, his mother, and his father all have cell-phones which they use on a daily basis. There is also a family desktop computer and a family laptop that he has access to upon permission, an iPod mp3 player, and a few different gaming systems where he enjoys playing with friends online through live chat. At school, Ethan often works with the school iPads and computers to complete classroom assignments and projects. He has many resources available to him.

### **Context of the Study**

The context of this study took place within the home of the participant. I observed, interviewed, took field notes, and interacted with Ethan in his natural home environment. The main areas of interest were the bedroom, the living room and the kitchen, as these were the household locations where he spent the most time. There are televisions within each of these locations and an Xbox 360 video game system in the bedroom.

Most of the study was conducted in the evenings and on Saturdays when the participant spent the most time at home. Vacation days off from school were also utilized in the study. I conducted my observations and collected my data early in the evening after Ethan got home from school and after I finished my work day. At this time in the evening everyone in the household was home. His youngest brother Joshua gets dropped off from kindergarten by their grandmother and the middle brother, Alexander gets dropped off at

home by the bus. Upon arriving at the house, the boys are to do their homework, and then they have a bit of downtime before dinner is ready.

### **My Positionality as the Researcher**

As a researcher, it is imperative that I consider my positionality within this study. I am a middle class African American female. I was raised in a middle class household in the city of Rochester, New York. I completed my undergraduate work at the Buffalo State University of New York. I received a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and Reading with a concentration in American History. I am currently pursuing my masters' degree in childhood literacy at the College at Brockport State University of New York. I currently hold initial certification in Elementary Education grades one through six. I am also the cousin of the case study participant. My mother and his mother are sisters. We are a very close knit family and we spend time together very often.

I have experience teaching in grades one through six in urban and suburban schools. I currently work as an elementary teacher for the Rochester City School District. My personal philosophy of education consists of developing an equal opportunity for every student to learn. This also involves the pedagogical theory of multiple intelligences because there is no one way to teach reading and writing skills (Armstrong, 2003). This philosophy has been the drive of my teaching career and has an effect on the research that I conduct. Teacher education is also a major component of my educational philosophy because I believe that as educators in an ever-changing field, we should always remain lifelong learners.

## **Data Collection**

I collected my data through a participant interview, parent interview, observations, annotated note taking and through an email correspondence that I completed with him once to twice a week.

## **Interviews**

I began the first week of my study by conducting interviews with both Ethan and his parents. The interviews were centered on the multiple literacies that Ethan and his parents used in their home environment. I created these interview questions to get Ethan to think more about multiple literacies and to become more aware of his daily interactions with them. After the six weeks of observations and annotated note taking I referred back to this interview so that I may make reference to it and determine how his answers reflected what I had been able to observe and take notes on. I administered the interview to Ethan in his home reading him each question one by one and then recording his answers by writing down what he said. The interview is in Appendix A.

I also created a parent interview to use with Ethan's mother and father. I produced the parent interview questions to evaluate the use of multiple literacies by the family together and the kind of modeling they do in the home using multiple literacies themselves. I conducted the parent interview within the first week of the study by reading each question aloud and writing down their answers. They were interviewed together as I asked them questions at the same time. The interview is in Appendix B.

## **Observations**

Each week I took annotated notes of Ethan in his home. I remained an observer as I silently watched and took my notes. Doing my observations in this way allowed me to collect my data as an outside member of the environment. This helped me to gather as much information as I could, without interrupting the natural flow of the home and atmosphere. I observed how Ethan used multiple literacies in his home and the reasons that he used them. I took note of how often he used the different types of literacies and if he used them with friends or anyone else in the household. I also observed which form of multiple literacies that he used the most. After each observation I debriefed with Ethan about the notes I took to clarify what I had written down. I checked to see the reasons that Ethan used the multiple literacies and the purposes that they served him. My observations took place once or twice a week for the entire six weeks. They lasted for about an hour each.

## **Email Correspondence**

Twice a week I participated in email communication with Ethan. If Ethan wished to email me at another time besides our weekly conversation to discuss any new reflections or ideas that have come to him about his experiences with multiple literacies, I informed him that he was welcome to do so at any time, as many times as he wished. I emailed him speaking about his latest interest in multiple literacies. During these emails Ethan was free to write about any experiences that he had with multiple literacies and what he thought about them. Throughout these emails I asked Ethan a few follow up questions based on the answers that he gave to my interview. I also asked him to reflect on the different types of multiple literacies that he used at home and in school for that week and email me about

them and anything he had noticed about why he used them. I will made reflections of our conversations after each email conversation. I kept my reflections and our email correspondences in and electronic folder where they were dated and kept in chronological order. My observations were also be scanned so that copies of them could be kept electronically.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Interviews**

After completing the interview with Ethan, I read through his responses that I had written down and compared and contrasted them to the observations that I made throughout the course of the six weeks. This is known as the constant comparison research method, this is a method where I coded my data based on the different categories that I observed and then continuously reviewed the data to distinguish the differences and similarities. In doing this, I searched for different connections that I might have been able to find among the data (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000). I reviewed the interactions that Ethan had with other individuals as he used them. When evaluating his answers I used the information given to better understand Ethan's perceptions of multiple literacies and the role he thought that they had in his school and home life. I used the parent interview to gain a better understanding of Ethan's example of multiple literacies that were set by his parents and how he may have affected his home environment with the use of them.

I coded the interviews by taking note of any patterns or keywords that kept appearing within their answers. I continuously reread the interviews and coded them by



color, coordinating any similar groups together if I saw any signs of repetition. Towards the end of the study in week 5, Ethan and I will revisit the interview to gauge any changes that may have occurred from the beginning of the study to the end.

### **Observations**

I kept my observations of Ethan in a specific notebook meant only for my annotated notes. I reviewed them weekly to keep track of his weekly use of multiple literacies. After the completion of my observations I looked for patterns among the actions and behavior of Ethan to better evaluate my data. I also analyzed whether or not Ethan engaged in these actions by himself or if they were shared among his family members and/or friends. I wrote down my thoughts within my annotated notes as I reflected on what I had written each week. I used the same method of coding for these observations as I did for the interviews. I went through my observation notes coding them by color and separating them by looking for keywords, categorizing them through repetitions and similarities. I continuously referred to my observation notes as I coded throughout the course of the six weeks. Within my annotated observation notes I also used my analysis of my interviews and email correspondences as a means of data triangulation.

### **Email Correspondence**

To analyze Ethan's responses to my emails I printed out each correspondence between me and Ethan so that they were easier to code. I anticipated that each week, Ethan would use the family laptop to sit down and respond to my prompts or initiate a multiple literacies conversation. After each weekly email communication between Ethan and me, I evaluated them and coded them using the same procedures as for the observations and the

interviews. I also coded any extra emails sent to me by Ethan about his experiences and reflections of multiple literacies. They were categorized by themes, keywords, and ideas. I coded the information using colors and by description of what I saw happening within the data. I paid close attention to how Ethan responded to my prompts about multiple literacies. I compared and contrasted all of my coded data between the correspondences, observations, and interviews so that I may be able to substantiate my data through the coding process.

### **Procedures**

My process of data collection took six weeks to complete. This is my week to week assessment of how I went about collecting my data.

#### **Week 1**

I began collecting my data by administering my parent and student interviews. This was also the time that I explained to Ethan how we shall conduct our weekly email correspondences.

#### **Week 2**

This week I began my observations of Ethan in his home. I took two to three observations which last between 45-60 minutes each. My observation schedule depended on the availability of Ethan.

### **Week 3**

I continued with my weekly observations of Ethan. This week I began coding my data and categorizing it based on any themes or ideas that I began to notice.

### **Week 4**

This week I continued to code and analyze my data. As I analyzed the data I still participated in the weekly observations and email communication with Ethan.

### **Week 5**

This week, as I did my email correspondences and observations, I will revisited the interview between Ethan and I and asked him to reflect on his answers and to think about if anything had changed between now and when he first participated in the interview. I was checking to see if he was more aware of the multiple literacies in his life and the affect they have on him.

### **Week 6**

This was the final week for me to collect my data for my study. I finished up my last rounds of emails and observations.

### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

Even though I have a close relationship with the participant, my study was conducted in an ethical and unbiased manner. I was sure to stay objective throughout the course of the research, coding and recording my observations as they were presented. As a researcher, I presented my findings honestly and accurately. The prolonged time and

number of observations, interviews, and correspondence between the participant and I helped to add validity to my study. I used triangulation across multiple data sources to increase the accuracy of my findings: observations, participant interview, parent interview, previous research and email correspondences between Ethan and me. My research process was documented, clear, and detailed. I also participated in peer debriefing to increase the validity of my work and coded research. Upon completion of my research I used the process of member checking to review the accuracy of my findings and my process of coding the research.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Within all research there are limitations within the design of the research, data collection and data analysis. One limitation to this study could have been the familial relationship between the case study participant and me. Since he is my cousin he may have felt a bit more laid back in his responses during his email correspondences with me.

The participants may have also felt the need to give me the answers that I desired for the interviews rather than relying on what was actually happening. For that reason, I specifically told my participants to be honest and objective during the interview process so that the study could be as valid as possible. Working with only one participant could have also proven to be a limitation because my conclusions could not be generalized to any specific populations. The time frame of my study could have also made it difficult for me to be able to conclude my data and determine the impact of multiple literacies for my participant, it would have been ideal to have a longitudinal study. The period of six weeks that I collected data may not have been enough to conclude the impact of multiple literacies in Ethan's life since I was not with him collecting the data every single day. To lessen my

own interpretation from my work, I was sure to triangulate across the data to increase its credibility.

### **Summary**

Further examining the world of multiple literacies beyond my own personal use was a large and meaningful learning experience. With my research I not only planned to add to current research but to delve into new areas of the subject for research that has yet to happen. As I evaluated the use of these new literacies by my participant I gained a better understanding of how to implement these uses as an educator and advance knowledge within teacher education. The collection and coding of my data was my equipment that helped me acquire better insight on the topic.

## Chapter Four: Findings

I carried out this study so that I would be able to better identify the relationship between Ethan's literacy and the digital literacies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While observing Ethan it was apparent that these technologies played a very significant role in his personal, educational, and family lifestyle. When reviewing the email correspondences between Ethan and me, I was able to see how he was beginning to reflect on the digital and multiple literacies that surround him.

The research questions that I anticipated answering were:

How does Ethan use multiple literacies?

What impact do multiple literacies have on Ethan's literacy practices?

I collected my data through weekly email correspondences, parent and focal child interviews, and observational field notes that were taken in his home environment. The interviews were taken during the first week of my data collection and I used them as a reference a few times throughout the six weeks so that I could follow up with Ethan's answers and get him to reflect on how he felt about those answers. I observed Ethan one to two times a week as a non-active participant, meaning that I did not speak nor participate in the observation.

Ethan and I emailed each other every week during the data collection process. Within these emails I prompted Ethan with questions about the multiple literacies that he uses at school, because all of my observations were done in the home environment. Having

him reflect on the multiple literacies at school provided great insight as to how his literacy practices were being affected outside the home. This chapter will present my data analysis through which I answered both of my research questions.

## **Findings**

In this section I discuss the themes that I uncovered concerning my first question. These themes are related to different ways that Ethan uses multiple literacies. I have analyzed and coded my data to reveal Ethan's most common uses of the digital literacies. These themes are a reflection of Ethan's most reoccurring uses that were present throughout my data.

### **Question 1: How does Ethan use multiple literacies?**

While in search of the answer to my first question I was able to discover four themes. As I coded my data the four themes that stood out as the most prevalent were communication, family interactions, and assignments. When evaluating these themes I was able to see the areas of multiple and digital literacies that are most used by Ethan and the members of his household. Having an insight on these themes was a beneficial factor in answering my first question.

### **Communication**

The most evident reason that Ethan made use of these multiple literacies was for communication. The final question in my multiple literacies student interview (Appendix D) states "Are these multiple literacies an important part of your life? If so, why?" When

interviewing Ethan, he was very adamant with his answer. He stated, “Yes! Very important, they keep me connected to the world.” (Ethan Interview 1/23/14). It was at that moment that I realized how much interaction that I would see between Ethan and these different types of literacies. Multiple and digital literacies are also large components of his family life. Question number four in my parent multiple literacies interview (Appendix C) asks “Do you use multiple literacies as a form of family communication? If so, how?” His mother stated “Yes, we text each other and send emails to each other” (Parent interview 1/23/14). These findings let me know that digital literacies were very present within their household.

Throughout my observations there were several instances where Ethan was text messaging. This pattern presented itself in my data over 15 times. This would be at least twice each observation, multiple times throughout our email correspondences, and within both the parent and student interviews.

After each observation, I did a small follow up with Ethan to confirm my observation notes and to gain clarity on what I have written. He felt comfortable enough to share who he was text messaging. I was able to separate the text messaging data into 3 different sub-categories. These categories would be: texting peers for school related purposes, texting peers for social reasons, and texting family.

### **Texting for Academic Purposes**

My first notation of Ethan texting his peers for academic reasons was during my first home observation on the evening of 01/27/14. As soon as I began the observation Ethan was in the kitchen alone texting. This continued on for a bit until his two younger brothers entered the kitchen together playing a game. After this, Ethan retreated to the living room to continue his text message conversation as his siblings seemingly became a distraction.



Ethan continued to text for the entire duration of the observation which lasted approximately 50 minutes. Since he was in the living room he had his mother's laptop and was also working on a school paper. Even though he was also working with the laptop his primary focus was on his text messaging. He stopped texting to have a conversation with his father for a few brief moments, but afterwards he was very engaged in his text message conversation. Later on in the evening after my observation was completed I proceeded to ask Ethan a few follow up questions during my post conference. He told me that he was texting a friend from school to obtain the guidelines for an English Language Arts paper that he needed to begin working on because it was due soon.

Another example of Ethan texting a peer for academic purposes was in my observation notes on the evening of 02/03/14. On this evening Ethan was texting while he was in the living room with his sibling Alexander and they were watching television together. As I was silently observing I was noticing how Ethan was continuously texting as they were watching the show. At some point as they were watching, Alexander asked Ethan to play a game with him on his tablet, and Ethan refused. They continued to watch television together until Ethan went upstairs to change for dinner.

During our post conference Ethan explained to me how when the observation first began, he was texting a few different people because he was selling a pair of sneakers that he no longer wanted. After that he was texting a female friend about a science project that they had been partnered for. They were trying to figure out who would complete the main work for the PowerPoint. I decided to ask Ethan about the convenience of texting and how it affected his schoolwork. Ethan stated that he believed that texting helps him do better in

school because if he forgets to write down an assignment or has group/partner work then being able to text someone saves his grade.

Ethan actually mentioned almost the same exact thing to me a few days later within our email correspondence on the afternoon of 02/06/14.

“I noticed that at home you like to text message a lot and that during the interview you said that your smartphone was one of the most important types of digital literacies to you, do you also text in school?” (Essence email correspondence, 2/5/14)

“I do text at school even though I’m not supposed to sometimes, but I don’t do it a lot. But I am always texting like at home and stuff. Sometimes I text my friends because I don’t keep a planner, I’m bad at that because I can usually remember but sometimes I don’t. When I don’t I ask my friends what was assigned so that I can do it.” (Ethan email correspondence, 2/6/14)

It made for great data collection that Ethan was comfortable enough to be sharing information with me. The fact that he sometimes forgot his homework assignments was very clear to me as an observer. This sometimes resulted in him handing assignments in late to his teachers. During many observations, Ethan’s mother was often complaining about his lack of planner use. I would have to say that Ethan spent roughly 20 percent of my observations texting his peers for academic reasons. This would be about 3 times out of 16. The other times that he communicated with his peers academically were through other forms of multiple literacies. Those few examples really show how useful multiple and

digital literacies can be when they are used for communication with others. If they were not able to be used in this manner then there would have been several projects, roles, and homework assignments that Ethan would have missed out on. Ethan has been able to fall back on multiple literacies and use them to find out the requirements for his school assignments.

### **Texting for Social Reasons**

Ethan having the cell phone numbers of his friends and peers at school led directly to him texting them for purposes other than academic. Another one of the most common reoccurrences throughout my data for Ethan was the use of texting for social reasons. When evaluating my coding for text messaging, I would have to say that 80% of the time he was texting his peers were for social engagement. This would be about 12 out of the 16 times that I have text messaging recorded from only my observations. Question number 3 of my multiple literacies student interview states “Do you participate in these types of literacies with your friends or family? Which ones do you use with them and for what reason?” (Appendix D). Ethan responded to the question immediately with the response “Yes, I text my friends to keep in touch with them.” During the entire course of my observations Ethan was never seen without his phone. Ethan had his cell phone by his side whether he was using it or not.

On the evening of 2/11/14 I was able to observe Ethan and his family for a little over an hour. At one point during the observation Ethan was being asked by his mother to help with dinner. This happened often during the evenings because Ethan likes to cook with his mother. As he was in the kitchen helping with different tasks, he was texting during every break that he could get. His mother repeatedly told him to put the phone

away. When he was finished in the kitchen he went into the living room to finish texting while he was simultaneously working on an individual class project. Even though he was supposed to be doing the assignment, it seemed more like he was texting and working in between. Ethan later told me that he was texting his girlfriend and that they text each other all the time and it annoys his parents. Aside from looking at this from a multiple literacies standpoint, this could very well just be the expected behavior of a teenage boy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This was also an example of Ethan using his ability to multitask.

It was quite often that I observed Ethan using the multiple literacies while working on other tasks. The most common tool that Ethan used for multiple literacies was his cell phone. Ethan would either be using his cell phone for text messaging or to update his social media while he was interacting with the other members of his household. I also noticed this habit in Ethan's brother, Alexander. Alexander would be doing an array of activities while using his tablet at the same time. This made me wonder if Ethan passed this trait down to his siblings or if this was a part of the family lifestyle. Many times when I would observe the family eating dinner the television was usually on. Since there was a television in almost every room of the house, it seemed to be an integrated piece of their home life. The television was used every day during almost any activity that they were doing.

### **Family Use**

Question number three in my parent multiple literacy interview asks "Would you consider these literacies to be a major component within your home environment? What have they affected most within your home?" (Appendix C). Within the answer his father stated "...they are resourceful, but sometimes get in the way." (Parent interview 1/23/14) When I inquired about what he meant by "get in the way" he explained to me how he loved

the multiple and digital literacies that they had in their household, but they have the tendency to become a major distraction to all family members. He complained that everyone, including himself, were always in front of some type of electronic screen and he thought it was quite pitiful.

I followed up with Ethan about his father's response to that question because I wanted his opinion on the matter. I also spoke with Ethan about this during our 2/17/14 email correspondences to see if he was aware of his father's opinion.

"Another question that I have for you concerns the interview that I completed with your parents during the first week that I began my study, your dad mentioned that multiple literacies sometimes get in the way. What do you think he meant by that?" (Essence email correspondence, 2/17/14)

"I know my dad said that because he is always complaining about us playing our game or me on my phone. It gets on his nerves and I think he just doesn't understand because he doesn't know how to use his phone all the way." (Ethan email correspondence, 2/19/14)

Ethan seemed all too familiar with his father's complaint and seemed to blame it on his father being unfamiliar with the technology. When his father complained Ethan seemed just as annoyed, especially when his father would ask for assistance with his cellphone or other digital literacies. In their household environment, this appeared to be the normal thing. There were also moments when Ethan's mother would ask for help using her cell phone or laptop which would usually result in Ethan or Alexander helping out. Ironically,

even though Ethan tried to support his parents increasing their use of digital and multiple literacies he was always aggravated when they asked for assistance with them. According to Ethan he felt annoyed because they rarely retained the information that he gave them and they would often repeatedly ask the same questions. Ethan was used to it, but he did not enjoy it.

This section really shows the importance that multiple literacies play in Ethan's life. Using these literacies for communication has enhanced Ethan's connection to his family, peers and school work. Their use of multiple literacies for communication was a very prominent piece of my data collection.

### **Family Interaction**

Aside from communication, the other most common use of multiple literacies by Ethan was when he was interacting with the family members of his household. When interviewing Ethan's parents during the first week of data collection, I proceeded with question number 2 which states "Do you use multiple literacies as a family or with your children? If so, what are the different purposes?" his mother answered "Yes, my kindergartner uses Raz Kids (Raz Kids, 2014) to read on the computer, the oldest researches and does homework and I help them" (Parent interview 1/23/14). From this statement, I was prepared to see a lot of family interaction through various types of digital literacies. Some of the patterns I noticed with this section were Ethan interacting with his

family through television, tablet, and cellphone use. I was also able to see the pattern of the use of these multiple literacies being initiated by the children of household.

### **Television Use**

Another one of the largest repetitions throughout my observation notes would be the use of the television in Ethan's home environment. The code of television watching television appeared 12 times throughout my data. There are several instances in my observations where I recorded Ethan watching television at some point with each member of the household. On the evening of February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014 I observed Ethan watching a documentary about Jerusalem with his mother. He seemed fairly attentive. I brought up the observation in our email correspondence and Ethan said that he enjoyed watching documentaries.

"I am just thinking about my observation last night where I observed you and your mother watching a documentary about Jerusalem, you seemed a little bit interested. Does that happen often? Do you and your mother watch documentaries together?" (Essence email correspondence, 2/17/14)

"As far as me and my mom watching documentaries together, I don't always watch them with her but I do like to watch them sometimes, just not the ones she likes to watch, I'd choose a different subject." (Ethan email correspondence, 2/19/14)

On that evening Ethan was in the kitchen working on an assignment until his mother called him into the living room to look at the documentary about Jerusalem. It was saying something that she thought was interesting, so she wanted to share it with Ethan. Ethan

and his family are very active members in the church that they attend. He and his mother were discussing a point that the documentary was making in relation to their congregation. Ethan actually ended up staying in the living room with his mother and completing the rest of the documentary. As they were watching it together they were really engaging in an extensive conversation surrounding different topics of the documentary. This engagement in conversation has a direct effect on Ethan's literacy, because it is causing him to further think about the information that he is learning through this modality and expand his thoughts through discussion.

Using the television to learn is a common source of education for teenagers (Harness & Drossman, 2010). When I observed Ethan watching television with his youngest sibling Joshua, the kindergartner, the programming was geared more for Joshua's age. Ethan was watching television in the living room when he was joined by Joshua. With a small bit of begging by Joshua, Ethan changed the channel to one of Joshua's favorite children's literacy programs. Even though Ethan did not appear to be that interested in the show he remained in the living room and encouraged Joshua to participate in the show. Experiences such as these are extremely important to Joshua's future literacy practices.

This is an example of how Ethan made use of the multiple literacies with his family. Ethan using the television as a means to help his brother learn helps to develop Joshua's use of multiple literacies in the home as he grows older. Helping young children learn through the use of television has many benefits because in some cases they will definitely take more interest in it rather than written text (Panayiota Kendeou, et al., 2005). Throughout my observations, there were a few instances where I witnessed a family member helping Joshua to read his leveled books from school, but there were definitely



more occurrences of him using digital literacies to read. Some examples would be Raz Kids (Raz Kids, 2014), cell phone applications, tablet games, and of course the television. Even at the young age of 5, Joshua has already taken on the multiple literacies culture of the household within his own personal literacy.

On 2/20/14 I was in the middle of my observation when Ethan was watching a basketball game with his father. I generally understand the sport so I was able to follow along for the most part. Ethan and his father were continuously discussing the different stats about the different players in order to prove the point of who was rooting for the “better” player. They were also talking about the scores of the game compared to other games going on at the time. What I found interesting about the conversations was that Ethan was learning to use the multiple literacies while utilizing them in a real life situation. Ethan and his father were comparing and contrasting the different team players/teams and stating player statistics when either one disagreed with a players ability. Ethan could easily take these skills and transfer them academically when having to use those same kinds of abilities within the school day.

I had the opportunity to do my final observation on a weekend. It was the afternoon of 2/23/14 and it was a much more relaxed environment within the home since it was a Sunday. I began my observation by watching Ethan and his middle brother, Alexander, play a war battle game on their Xbox gaming system. This was the first time that I viewed the boys playing on their game system because their mother does not allow them to play with it often during the week. The game seemed to be really intense and they were working together as a team to defeat an opposing team. From a literacy aspect, the boys were communicating with each other, reading and solving difficult missions, and chatting with

the other team. Alexander appeared to be enjoying spending time with his older brother more than anything else. This was a really great example of Ethan using multiple literacies to interact with his family members.

These examples of Ethan using the television really helped to show his family connection. The television was shown to be a crucial part of Ethan's household. There is an example of Ethan interacting with each family member through the use of the television and it was for more than entertainment purposes.

### **Multiple Literacies initiated by Children**

Through the many evenings that I sat in the wooden chair to the side of the room observing their family dynamics, I realized that the children of the family had the biggest influence on the uses of digital literacies. When looking throughout my data I noticed that there were 18 instances where the children prompted the use of digital literacies with each other or their parents. Growing up in a completely different time and generation can provide for Ethan's parents needing a bit of assistance when it comes to new types of literacies. It appeared to me that in this household, Ethan was the "go-to" guy for use of multiple literacies in the home and one of the family's biggest influences.

Often times the middle sibling, Alexander, would beg Ethan to watch a television show with him, play a game app on his tablet, or just do anything with him. A great example of this was during my observation on 2/3/14 where Alexander was eager for Ethan to play his new app he had recently downloaded on his tablet. At first he was denied by Ethan because they were watching television as Ethan was texting, but after a few persistent pleas, Ethan agreed to play only two rounds of the game with him. During this time

Alexander changed the channel of the television to a show that he was more interested in. Seeming surprised that there was no complaint from Ethan about him doing so, he asked Ethan to watch one of his favorite shows with him. Even though Ethan said no, I was able to realize Alexander's role in initiating the use of digital literacies with his parents and siblings.

In my parent multiple literacies interview (Appendix C) my final question asks "What kind of impact do multiple literacies have on your family literacy experiences? Can you please provide any examples?" Ethan's mother replied "They help our youngest to read and our children to improve their literacy skills. We read on the tablet using electronic library cards" (Parent interview 1/23/14). Before then, I was unaware of the process of borrowing books from the library electronically. It wasn't until Joshua asked for assistance from Ethan with the tablet on 2/20/14 did I see how it worked. As I was just arriving to their house Alexander was helping Joshua to complete his daily homework of reading for 10 minutes a day. It was toward the end of my observation and Ethan had just finished watching a basketball game with his father. Joshua asked permission from his mother to use Alexander's tablet to read the children's library books that their mother borrowed for him. During a follow up conversation with Ethan, he informed me that they use the system to borrow books from Sky City (pseudonym), a city that was several hours away, because they had a larger selection of text for all ages. Joshua really enjoyed reading books on the tablet, so he would often initiate the readings by taking use of the tablet and asking any available family members to read to him.

On the evening of 1/28/14 Ethan and Alexander were trying to convince their mother to download a new game onto her phone. Alexander talked about how much he

likes to play the game on his tablet and how he played it all the time. Ethan was telling her how she would love the app because it was a word association game and she liked games like that. After a few minutes of the boys talking about it, she decided to give the game a try. After downloading the game they played the first few rounds together. They were really enjoying the game together, thinking hard to figure out the words. As they played a final round, Ethan's mother said that it would be a great game for her to play whenever she has downtime at her shop (hair salon). Being able to observe this activity made for an excellent example of the children prompting the use of digital literacies with the parent.

Another occurrence of a parent being prompted to use digital literacies by a child was in my observation on the evening 2/11/14. Ethan and his mother had just finished watching a documentary together and she needed his assistance with cooking dinner. As mentioned in a previous section, on this evening Ethan was constantly texting and was made to put his phone away as he was helping. As he was preparing and cleaning potatoes his mother was talking about how she wanted to do something different with the potatoes for dinner, but she wasn't sure what to do. In this instance, I knew that Ethan would have a suggestion for her that involved some form of multiple literacies, and I was correct. At that moment Ethan grabbed the tablet and downloaded a new app for her called Pinterest (Pinterest, 2014). Ethan told his mother how this app consisted of information for almost anything, especially recipes. He demonstrated how to navigate the app and how she could find a variety of suggestions. Usually when the boys introduced a new multiple literacy to their parents, their mother and father they are not easily convinced about the necessity of that new literacy. In this case Ethan's mother was really interested in this suggestion. After dinner was completed Ethan went to the living room and she remained in the kitchen

exploring the app and acquiring all different types of ideas for recipes and other subjects. The parents were slowly but surely developing their own relationship with the culture of multiple and digital literacies within their home environment.

These examples of using multiple literacies for the purpose of family interaction occur many times in the data. The children initiated the use of these literacies through a variety of sources. The use of the family tablet, watching television together, and interacting together through games on the cell phone were the most common ways that the use of multiple literacies were initiated by the children. The children of the household really utilized these different literacies to interact with their parents and each other.

### **Academic Assignments**

Another primary use of multiple literacies for Ethan was to carry out tasks that are assigned to him, primarily from school. When analyzing my data I was able to distinguish this as a pattern. Ethan using multiple literacies to work on, check the progress, or complete school work was noted through each form of data.

During my observation on the evening of February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014, I have it recorded within my observation notes that Ethan was emailing his teacher concerning missing schoolwork. When the observation was finished, I followed up with Ethan inquiring as to why he was emailing his teacher. He informed me that for this particular class, the students and parents have the ability to check their classroom progress and to hand in any late or missing work electronically. This could also be placed in the category of communication, but the uses of multiple literacies have the ability to be interchangeable and the process of

emailing is essentially one. Despite Ethan's lack of organization skills, he was not missing more than one or two assignments. He claimed that one of the missing assignments was already handed in to the teacher, but it wasn't recorded electronically. I asked Ethan how often he utilized this aspect of digital literacies. He informed me that he checked almost every other week because if his grades slip then his mother would no longer allow him to play on the school's basketball team, and for an aspiring basketball scholarship recipient that was not an option. I asked if his parents ever used this as an opportunity to keep track of his grades for that class, but he informed me that he tried to show them a few times but they never remember how to access it, so he stopped trying.

In the third week into my data collection, as part of our email correspondences Ethan mentioned a project that he was working on in his technology class. For this project he used computer technology to virtually create an ankle brace. We shared messages concerning the project for a few weeks. I was a little unfamiliar with this type of project, so I made sure to keep track of it in order to gain a better understanding.

"I also used the computers in tech class we are doing a project about body braces so I used those literacies." (Ethan email correspondence, 1/29/14)

"This week in school I'm still doing my brace project for tech, I'm making an ankle brace because I play basketball so I thought it would make sense and be cool." (Ethan email correspondence, 2/6/14)

“So I’m pretty interested in your technology project, you’re making an ankle brace? Is it a program, are you actually going to create it?” (Essence email correspondence, 2/12/14)

“For the ankle brace I don’t get to actually create, we’re just sort of researching how they are made and what it takes to make them. I do get to draw a model of it though.” (Ethan email correspondence, 2/12/14)

I also made inquiries concerning this project while we were corresponding because I thought that this project was an excellent example of how Ethan was using technology to complete an academic assignment. Technology class is the perfect opportunity to link technology to education through the use of multiple and digital literacies. Just as in this case where a research project can be done, other methods such as graphic design projects, video recording activities, and computer/ internet navigation lessons could also be used to facilitate student learning. These activities can increase student literacy through the reading and writing that it would take to complete the task. Completing reading and writing through these non-traditional forms would help to motivate students with their own literacy practices.

During my observation on 1/27/14, Ethan was using his mother’s laptop to complete a homework assignment where he was required to type a paper. He was telling his father that he would have to wait to wash the dishes because he had a paper that was due soon and he really needed to get started on it because he had yet to begin. After a stern talking to, Ethan’s father took the chore for him. I observed Ethan a bit more closely to see how familiar he was with this type of technology and to see his typing skills. Ethan

maneuvered the word processing program in such a way that one could tell that he was very acquainted with the process. In the right column of my observation notes titled 'Reflective Notes' I have it recorded that Ethan was typing very fluently, using both hands, and was able to look away from the keyboard while typing. I also observed how he was able to easily navigate the word processing program. I asked Ethan how often he used this word processing program (Microsoft Word) when working on school assignments. He said he used it every other week at the least because he always has to type a paper for one of his classes.

During my observation on 2/11/14 Ethan was completing an assignment where he had to write a paper comparing any book that he's read to a movie. I thought this specifically pertained to my study because it incorporated both "traditional literacy" and multiple literacy. Ethan chose the novel *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 2009) because he had just finished helping his brother, Alexander, finish reading it and they had the DVD in the house. Alexander was trying to help with the project since he had also seen the movie and read the novel. He was trying to help Ethan think of some similarities and differences for the task. To complete this assignment, Ethan was skipping through the scenes of the movie using the DVD player and also trying to see if some of the comparisons were available online. After listing the comparisons, Ethan would have to type his findings up into a formal paper.

This observation was important because it was an example of Ethan completing a school assignment through the use of the DVD player. This was a bit different from what I usually saw him using throughout the rest of my observations. Reading through the scenes on the DVD player and researching the movie online showed me a different side of Ethan's



literacy practices at home. Being able to compare the movie and the book helped to engage Ethan because he was able to integrate the use of a traditional literacy with a non-traditional literacy. This project also engaged Ethan because he was able to see the literary similarities between the book and the movie, even though they are two different forms of text. In this case these two types of text convey the same message in different ways. Ethan using these different texts and incorporating them into the assignment was an example of him improving his literacy practices. Even though the DVD and the book are two different types of literacies they are still closely related to one another. These literacies are woven together through the notion of intertextuality. Intertextuality is the relation between different types of literature and the way that they influence each other (Ott & Walter, 2000). In this case, these multiple literacies are linked to this concept because they are both helping to support Ethan with his assignment. Both literacies are connected through the same subjects, settings, and characters but differ in the way the story is presented. Intertextuality and multiple literacies go hand in hand because multiple literacies share such a variety of ways that the same information can be accessed. Students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as Ethan have definitely benefitted from the intertextuality of multiple literacies, especially academically.

Multiple and digital literacies have supported Ethan's academics in several different ways. Ethan was able to bring together different types of literacies and use them for the same purpose. His literacy practices were affected by the relationship between these different forms of text. The use of more than one form of literacy helped to give Ethan a well-rounded perspective when it came to multiple literacies. He was able to distinguish their connections and when one form would be more useful than the other. His academics

were also supported through the use of email, text messaging, internet use on the laptop, and computer technology class. These key themes were used by Ethan the most throughout my observations. These examples within my data collection have shown how these literacies help to facilitate Ethan's personal literacy practices at home and at school.

### **Question 2: What impact do multiple literacies have on Ethan's literacy practices?**

In this section of chapter four I discuss the themes that I have uncovered during my study concerning my second question. These themes are related to the impact that multiple and digital literacies have on Ethan's literacy. When discussing these themes, I write about how these multiple literacies have an impact on how Ethan goes about his daily literacy practices and how they influence the choices that he makes.

### **Dependence**

One of the overarching themes that I uncovered in my data collection concerning Ethan's literacy practices was his dependence on the multiple literacies. Multiple and digital literacies are existent in each aspect of Ethan's home environment and very present at school. Dependency in this study does not necessarily represent a negative perspective; it signifies that Ethan's life is packed with multiple literacies opportunities.

As mentioned previously, when Ethan answered the final question on the student multiple literacies interview he placed a great deal of emphasis on how important the multiple literacies were in his life. It was almost as if he couldn't live without them. This

theme has the possibility of being integrated with the other themes reported in this chapter. These themes help to provide the answer to question number two of my research. In the following sections I will highlight the aspects of dependence that have entwined with the themes that I have uncovered in order to answer the second question of my study.

### **Immediate Fulfilment**

One advantage of living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with multiple literacies is speed. Any question that we cannot figure out goes straight to Internet search engines and within seconds we have an answer. As I observed Ethan throughout my study, a recurring pattern with him was to use digital or multiple literacies if he couldn't figure something out or to fall back on for an answer to an unknown question. Wherever he went he was at least 5 feet away from a multiple or digital literacy source, including his cell phone, which went everywhere with him. In this section, I point out the examples of Ethan using multiple and digital literacies to assist with work, finding difficult answers, or as reinforcement.

As previously noted, my observation on the evening of January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014 was where Ethan was using multiple literacies with his mother and brother. He was trying to help them play a word game on her smartphone. There was a question that left all three of them stumped. After a little time of trying to figure out the answer and not succeeding, Ethan used his smartphone to retrieve the answer to the question. After my observation time was over I asked Ethan why using digital literacies was the first strategy that he used when he was unable to figure something out. He told me that using the literacies was the quickest and most convenient. It was at that point that I began analyzing my data to look

for the same situation in other parts of my observations and email correspondences. When Ethan used the word, 'quick', I really began to formulate this theme. Society has come a long way technologically, so having things be able to come quickly is definitely a major accomplishment. The downfall to this is that a society in an age of convenience is unquestionably full of individuals dependent on the technology around them. What is happening in this household is that Ethan and his family are using the multiple literacies as tools. These tools are affecting and changing the way that they go about their daily activities. Tasks that did not previously require technological tools now do. This is in direct relation to Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development which talks about humans using the tools around them to gain different benefits and change the way they do things (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995). Whether they noticed or not, Ethan and his family allowed the tools to facilitate their actions.

During my observation on 01/28/14 Ethan was in the living room working on his math homework. He was using his cellphone as a calculator because he had a scientific calculator app downloaded on to it. When he began to struggle with some of the problems he asked his father to help him, but his father didn't quite understand the curricular methods that the teacher was using to teach the concepts. His attempt to solve the questions resulted in him trying to type the equation into Google to see if it would tell him the correct answer. When this attempt failed, he was a bit upset. He said that whenever he struggled with a homework problem he could usually Google it but with this evening's assignment Google couldn't help him because the algebra had too many variables in the problems.

This was an example that shows how Ethan is used to receiving immediate results because of working so much with the different digital literacies. The fact that he often uses Internet search engines to complete his homework shows his dependence on this modality. I think Ethan using the search engine as an alternative when he is at a loss is resourceful, but this could also be seen as harmful because he may also be using the multiple literacies as a “way out” when things get too difficult instead of trying harder. This could also decrease Ethan’s initiative to figure things out on his own. Since these literacies are constantly and readily available, Ethan has become accustomed to using them to complete daily tasks. This is an example of the multiple literacies mediating Ethan’s actions. This revolves back to Vygotsky’s theory of how the tools around us mediate what we do. These tools also have the ability to change our thinking through our use of them. The use of these tools helped Ethan to develop different techniques to carry out his learning and literacy practices (Alex, 2002).

In my observation completed on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014, I recorded that Ethan was made by his mother to assist his younger brother Alexander, the fifth grader, with a writing assignment for school. As Ethan was helping him he relied on Alexander’s tablet several times when he couldn’t think of the correct words to use. He would often refer to Google, or different dictionary websites so that he would be able to find correct synonyms or similar words that sounded grade appropriate for his brother Alexander to use. As Alexander was typing, Ethan held the tablet in his hand, using it to locate the words that he wanted to use. After the observation he stated that he knew the words he wanted to use, he just used the tablet to ensure that he was right. This is an example of Ethan being dependent on multiple literacies as reinforcement, just as many of us do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for his work.

Alexander was completing the homework assignment using his mother's laptop. Since Ethan had a lot of experience using Microsoft Word he had to help his brother as demanded by his mother. Alexander's paper was about different animals in the rain forest and it was based on a book that they were reading during English Language Arts in his classroom.

Another strategy Ethan used which displayed his dependence on using digital literacies for instant gratification was his use of the 'synonym' option within Microsoft Word. The synonym option is a feature in the word processing program where you type in a word and you have the opportunity locate the list of alternative words that may be helpful with your writing piece. Ethan showed Alexander how to use it and he informed him that it would help his paper because it would give him better words and it would help to impress his teacher. Through this advice, Ethan was showing Alexander to also become a dependent on the multiple literacies opportunities around him. Alex followed the advice and I can only infer that he would use this strategy with future assignments that he is given where he was to use Microsoft word. This leads right into the following section which highlights examples of Ethan acting as a role model in his home for digital and multiple literacies.

This section of my study was important because it helped to outline the occurrences in my data where Ethan relied on multiple literacies within his daily literacy practices. At times these literacies served as instant gratification when something became difficult for him. My data has shown how this reliance could have both positive and negative effects on Ethan's habits.

## **Role Model**

With Ethan being 17 years old in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the eldest of the three children, he is put in a position where he is one of the lead influences for his 5 and 10 year old brothers when it comes to using multiple literacies. The boys spend a great deal of time together in the house and this is something that I was able to easily observe. They appear to have a fairly close relationship. Several of my observation notes contain Ethan helping his brothers use various forms of multiple literacies such as the television, tablet, and computer.

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014 I observed Ethan help his 5 year old brother, Joshua, download an app on his mother's phone so that he could play a kindergarten level reading game. Their grandmother had recently bought Joshua some first grade level workbooks to complete and he enjoyed working on them with anyone who was willing. He finished up the second workbook and was a little upset because he then became bored. Ethan looked at the publishing company of the workbook and used his mother's phone to look up the publishing company, checking for any children's games. After the download, Ethan proceeded to briefly help Joshua play the game and show him what to do. Joshua was able to catch on pretty quickly since the app was directed toward his age level. It also showed Ethan's dependence on this form of digital literacy because he used it to find age appropriate educational games for Joshua.

At this point, Ethan was really being a role model for Joshua and demonstrating how to use multiple literacies. This was a good example of Ethan encouraging Joshua to learn through the use of digital tools. Ethan was being a role model to Joshua by showing him

these different types of literacy practices. Just by Joshua, and even Alexander, watching Ethan around the house, they were able to pick up on numerous skills and strategies for using multiple literacies. When children have role models in the home who display and interact with them through different multiple literacies it gives them the opportunity to acquire more developed literacy practices (Wolfe & Flewitt, 2010). I was able to tell that Ethan was the role model for multiple literacies within the household because his literacy actions were often emulated by his younger brother and sometimes even his parents. They all looked to him for guidance and examples on how to use the many different forms of literacies that were in the home.

During our email correspondences Ethan mentioned that he does a lot of his reading digitally at school and I believe this is a direct connection to Ethan's choice to introduce Joshua to digital reading games. As the eldest sibling and role model to his brother, it's possible that Ethan would feel responsible to be the one who would acquaint Joshua with the same types of reading strategies that he uses himself. Since the brothers have such a close relationship, Ethan usually took charge as the oldest taking care of his brothers and showing them the way.

"Do you have any experiences reading electronically in school?" (Essence email correspondence, 2/17/14)

"I read electronically in school all the time if texting counts then that's one way too..." (Ethan email correspondence, 2/19/14)

Joshua was so excited, but only wanted to play if Ethan would play with him. This was a prime example of Ethan taking the lead exposing his sibling to multiple literacies and



showing him how to operate the app. Joshua only wanting to play with Ethan shows how much influence Ethan has over his literacy practices and choices. This is a perfect example of multiple literacies being used for the sake of social interaction. Social experiences are an important part of the development of a student's personal literacy. A positive social experience during the use of multiple and digital literacies will only help to encourage later participation in those same activities. There is also another example of multiple literacies being used as a means of social interaction with Ethan's other sibling, Alexander.

The tablet was a hot commodity in Ethan's household. It showed up in almost each observation and within the email correspondences. The tablet belonged to the 10 year old brother, Alexander, and he would continually approach different members of the household asking them to participate in playing various games or activities on it with him. This is another example of Ethan's siblings using technology as a means to initiate social interaction. Even though the tablet belonged to Alexander, he usually did not want to use it alone. He asked everyone in the household daily if they would participate in a tablet activity with him. When Ethan agreed, he usually took the lead in whatever the activity was, beating Alexander's score or teaching him something new. He is setting an example for Alexander when it comes to him playing with the tablet on his own. Playing on Alexander's tablet with him is reinforcement for Alexander to rely on multiple literacies as a source of entertainment.

My observation on the evening of 2/11/14 began by Alexander being excited about changing his avatar on the website that his teacher used for class management called Class Dojo. Alexander said he wanted to change his avatar because another student in his class

had the same one and he wanted to be different. What stood out to me is that Alexander only really wanted the opinion of Ethan when it came to choosing a new avatar that looked “cool”. As usual, Ethan seemed a little annoyed and agreed with anything that Alexander said. After Alexander became noticeably upset, Ethan helped him pick out an acceptable avatar so that he could have the best one. Alexander spent a considerable amount of time on the laptop. As he searched through each of the avatars he seemed quite concerned with picking the perfect one. Even though Ethan felt that it was not necessarily important, Alexander wanted to be sure that he picked an avatar that truly represented him. As Ethan questioned Alexander about his reasoning to choose another avatar, Alexander told him that his teacher encouraged students with internet access at home to go into the program and explore it with their parents. This was so that parents would be able to be kept updated with their student’s classroom behavior. Alexander went on to talk about his best friend from school and how he switched his avatar to one that was “really cool” so he wanted to do the same so that he could show everybody at school the next day. This is another instance of one of Ethan’s siblings looking for social interaction through multiple literacies. It could be also looked at as Alexander looking for social acceptance among his peers by using the same multiple literacies at home and at school.

For me, this occurrence was in direct relation to my previously stated observation from February where Joshua only wanted to use the reading app if Ethan would join him in the fun. These examples show strong confirmation of Ethan being a lead role model in his younger siblings’ literacy choices. They also show the importance of social interaction and how it is represented through the use of multiple literacies.

My observation served as an opportunity for me to observe Ethan using multiple literacies to work with both Alexander and Joshua at the same time. This observation is dated 2/7/14 and they were preparing to present at their church's' Biannual Black History Month Program. For their presentation they were working together to create a PowerPoint comprised of different family pictures and facts. Ethan was doing most of the work because he was the oldest and in charge of the project. Alexander was helping with the pictures that they were going to use and they occasionally asked Joshua for his opinion just so that he could feel involved. As they were working with the laptop Ethan made sure to let his siblings know that he was in charge so he would do most of the PowerPoint. Alexander did not particularly like the sound of that because he wanted to participate, too. When it came to the pictures that they chose to include, he was able to scan them and let Joshua push the button so that he felt involved. They were using these digital literacies interchangeably, taking turns for the most part and keeping the arguments at a minimum so that they would not get in trouble by their mother. Even though Joshua was not able to participate in the tasks that were difficult for him, I could tell that he was enjoying the experience of using the multiple and digital literacies with his brothers. It was like they were setting an example for him.

Ethan's parents were in close proximity as the boys were working; periodically checking in to make sure that their work was acceptable and presentable. They often made comments and directed the boys to make some changes. I thought it was great that the parents were slightly involved in the project even if it was from a distance. Even though Ethan was "in charge" of the project, the entire household held some form of participation.

After my observation I asked Alexander about the amount of experience that he has with creating PowerPoints. He said that his teacher uses them to teach her lessons from time to time, but he doesn't really know everything about the process. He also said he watches Ethan do them for school a lot so he knows some of the buttons and how to add pictures. That is an example of Ethan being a role model solely through his actions. He is often being watched by his brothers and they look up to him, imitating many of the actions they see him do. Even though Joshua was not able to participate as much because he was the youngest, he was still watching very attentively and paying attention to all that Alexander and Ethan were doing. There was much laughter, especially when looking at the old family pictures. They were deciding which ones to use and the captions that they would write underneath.

There were several instances in which I was able to observe Ethan being a role model and interacting with his family through multiple literacies. I observed Ethan being a lead influence to his household through playing games on a phone or tablet, the use of the family laptop, and multimedia projects that were completed as a family. Ethan being a role model for his family helps to continue the use of multiple literacies within his household.

### **Summary**

While analyzing my data I uncovered several key themes. In efforts to answer my two research questions I have come across these themes by recognizing different patterns. The themes are communication, family interaction, immediate fulfillment, and being a role model. All of these themes are linked together in my research and have assisted me in answering my research questions. These themes have also helped me to take a closer look

into Ethan's lifestyle and see how he uses multiple literacies and how they affect his literary practices.

When coming into this study I was already aware that communication would be a large part of my research. As the study progressed I was able to see how much multiple literacies provided Ethan with the opportunity to not only communicate with his peers and others, but also his family. As I communicated with Ethan through the email correspondence it was easy for him to relay how often he communicated with his peers on a social and academic level. I was pleased that Ethan was open with me about his different uses of multiple literacies at school. As I observed Ethan and his household on a weekly basis I recognized how much they communicated with each other through these different types of literacies. Even though they all lived together it was amazing to see how much they interacted through multiple literacies.

Family interaction was a very important theme within this study. While uncovering this theme I got to take a look at their family dynamics. I was very interested in how having many different types of literacies around the house affected the choices that they made and how they spent time with one another. I often noted that the children of the household often spent time with each other through the use of multiple literacies. This actually happened more than I expected. Tools such as the television, cell phones, tablets, laptops, and gaming systems were a very large component of any long period of time that the boys spent together. My research was very similar when observing any of the boys spending time with their parents or when the family was together as a whole. If nothing else, the television was always on and being watched by the family in whatever room they were in.

As I took note of a television being in almost every room of the house, I realized how much multiple literacies were integrated into this family.

With Ethan having so much access to multiple literacies at almost all times and home and in school I uncovered the theme of immediate fulfillment. Like many people today, Ethan had the luxury of having multiple literacies readily available to him. Since Ethan was so used to this multiple literacies lifestyle, if he ever needed any assistance then multiple literacies would be his first choice. Throughout my observations of Ethan I began to notice how much emphasis he and his family members put on these literacies. The literacies were definitely affecting the choices that Ethan made. Whenever he was stumped on a question or searching for a new idea, his first decision was to look to multiple literacies for assistance. They have definitely shaped how does his daily activities and the choices he makes during his literacy practices.

As I observed Ethan make these choices concerning multiple literacies, he was also being watched by his family members. As Ethan interacted with literacies around the house he was also influencing the choices of his younger siblings and sometimes even his parents. I loved observing this family dynamic because it really displayed the role of Ethan being a teenager in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Everything Ethan did, his brothers wanted to do. They spent a lot of time with him, looked up to him, and fashioned their choices after his. As Ethan was working on a school project, texting, or watching certain television shows, his brothers were always being very observant of his interactions with multiple literacies. Ethan's parents, who have not have much experience with these new literacies, also looked to Ethan as a role model when it came to the choices that they made surrounding multiple

literacies. Most of what they have learned about these new literacies has come from Ethan, especially since they do not have much experience with them in either one of their work fields. This was one of my favorite things to see within my research because it showed that multiple literacies can be learned and valued at any age and that you do not have to be an adult to teach and lead the way for others.

After my six weeks of observing and corresponding with Ethan for my study I was happy with the role I played as an inactive observer. Being able to see the impact of multiple literacies inside of the home was a great experience. I have also helped Ethan to reflect a little more on the contributions that multiple literacies have in his life and hope that he will be more conscious about the choices he makes concerning his literacy practices. I know that Ethan still has a long way to go in the constantly evolving world of multiple literacies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was for me to be able to monitor, evaluate, and reflect on how my participant, Ethan, interacted with, and used multiple literacies. I wanted to see how Ethan used these literacies individually and/or with others such as family members or peers. In completing this study I answered my research questions.

The research questions that I answered were:

How does Ethan use multiple literacies?

What impact do multiple literacies have on Ethan's literacy practices?

In this chapter I will be discussing my conclusions that I have made based on my findings in chapter 4. I will also be discussing the implications for student learning and the implications for future teaching that I have realized after evaluating my data. I shall end this chapter with my recommendations for future research and final thoughts.

### **Conclusions**

#### **Ethan was a Guide for his Family's use of Multiple Literacies Learning**

Having the chance to observe Ethan and his family throughout this time period really gave me some great insight on the specific relationship that multiple and digital literacies have with learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These literacies also gave Ethan the experience to teach and be an example for his family members when it came to their use of multiple and digital literacies.



When looking at Ethan's parents, there were many times where they struggled with confusion or lack of knowledge on how to utilize the multiple literacies that Ethan was so familiar with. Ethan's parents grew up during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century where learning was far more different than it is today. They did not have as much access to the variety of technologies that students use today on a daily basis. Ethan's parents have to realize that literacy is being defined in a much different way than it was before; it has completely evolved (Cervetti, Damico & Pearson, 2006). It was easy to see how their experiences with multiple literacies were a bit perplexing since the use of them does not come naturally. They also have to apprehend that literacy has become more of a social practice than anything in today's generation (Cervetti, Damico & Pearson, 2006). For his parents, Ethan is a gateway into modern learning, helping to provide for them some of basic skills necessary to maneuver through the technology that he is accustomed to. Ethan is a gateway for his parents because he is the source of a majority of their multiple literacy learning. He helps to expose them to the variety of literacies around them and shows them how to use it.

On the opposite side of the spectrum there are Ethan's two younger siblings, Alexander and Joshua. At the ages of 5 and 10 years old, they are in the primary stages of learning and have obtained most of the key skills needed to operate a variety of multiple literacies. Having access to this kind of knowledge at such young ages is an advantage to their literacy (Heath, et al., 2014). To his siblings, Ethan presented as a facilitator of their 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. He is more of a facilitator for his brothers because they are growing up with these advanced types of technologies and literacies that they practice using at school and at home. Ethan is more of a guide for his brothers because he's helping them utilize the types of multiple literacies that they have experience with. Alexander and Joshua

used Ethan as a model for their use of digital and multiple literacies. At school they are exposed to many different methods and approaches to learning using some form of technology. In their home environment Alex and Joshua loved to participate in the use of multiple literacies together, especially when Ethan was willing to join. Making this connection is essential to their literacy development (Kelly, 2012). They often had a great deal of fun when taking part in these activities and these positive experiences are what help Ethan to facilitate their role in modern learning using the multiple literacies as a link.

It was great to see Ethan interacting with all the members of his family. He definitely guided his family through the various types of multiple literacies. I was very interested in the way that they received his guidance and implemented what he showed them. There were examples in my research where Ethan was both a guide and facilitator for all of the members of the household. I was also able to observe how he engaged in these multiple literacies with his family members and how those interactions helped his literacy development. It greatly displayed how he was supporting the learning of multiple literacies within the household.

### **Ethan has a Large Dependence on Technology**

Technology plays a major contribution in almost every aspect of our modern lifestyles. Because of this, our society has developed a dependence on the technology around us. New tools are always created, used, and then replaced over time. The increasing shifts in technology are slowly taking the place of certain tools that we used to use (Holland & Holland, 2014). Throughout the study I began to realize how much Ethan and the members of his household used multiple literacies and the reasons why they used them.

Some of those reasons seemed like everyday tasks that did not require the use of technology but they had to use them. Why did they use them? They became so used to technology being a part of their everyday lives. They did not seem to notice that they did not need to use it for most situations. They were slowly but surely developing a dependency on multiple literacies. There has been a complete digital shift in our everyday life and communication (Holland & Holland, 2014). The completion of this study showed me the amount of time that the household spent using technology.

Even though there is a growing dependence on technology, it is not all seen in a negative manner. The developing reliance on technology could be simply looked at as a matter of adaptation. As our society begins to become more advanced, we have to be able to keep up with its fast paced movement and this is done through the evolution of technology. These new technologies can be useful and can also help to create multimodal fields of learning (Sharkey & O'Connor, 2013). Technology helps us to stay connected and also gives us the ability to have entertainment on demand, which was something that was not always possible. Although this increasing reliance has its positive attributes, there are also points where the reliance can become a bit excessive. This is where I think that Ethan and his family fit in.

After analyzing the data I was able to track how often I observed my focal child, Ethan, in his household environment and see how much time he and his family spent in front of a technological screen. These types of screens include cell phones, tablets, television, laptops, and computer screens. The mobility of this technology is an advantage because this is where individuals have the ability to gain access to tools wherever they are

and take it with them if needed (Holland & Holland, 2014). I believe the disadvantage to the mobility of technology is that there is rarely a moment where Ethan did not have technology with him. Not a day went by within my observation where there were not at least two to three of the household members sitting in front of a screen. This screen time is directly affected by home environment and parental styles (Veldhuis, van Grieken, Renders, HiraSing, & Raat, 2014). Even during dinner I observed a great deal of television and cell phone use. These kinds of behaviors were a part of the household lifestyle and considered normal actions for the family. I feel that there was a bit of an over reliance on the technologies that Ethan and his family used on a daily basis.

### **Ethan and his Family's Use of Multiple Literacies as Facilitators**

One of the most significant observations from my study would be the realization of Ethan and his family members using multiple literacies to guide their actions. As mentioned in chapter four, this conclusion is directly associated with Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, using tools as mediation. The use of these literacies as facilitating tools can help to foster interpersonal relationships (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995). This was surely the case in Ethan's household. Multiple literacies definitely affected many of their decisions when interacting with each other. Ethan used a great deal of multiple literacies independently, but there were many moments where he used multiple literacies with his family members. An example during my study of Ethan using technological tools to mediate his actions was when Ethan was watching a documentary with his mother. When the documentary about Jerusalem caught his mother's attention, she called Ethan into the

living room and it sparked a very in depth discussion between the two. In this scenario, the multiple literacies directed their thoughts and choice of conversation.

Ethan often used multiple literacies to interact with his environment. Using these tools helps to introduce individuals to a learning experience on a higher level (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995). Being able to combine technology with the world around him could have a significant impact on Ethan. An example of Ethan using multiple literacies to interact with the world around him was during my observation when he taught his mother about the Pinterest phone application. She was searching for a new recipe to cook for dinner that night and Ethan was trying to help her find one by using the app. The fact that Ethan used these tools with his peers or family members only heightened his learning ability. The social experiences that Ethan shared using these literacies were an integral part of his literacy practices. As with participation in discussion, simply using these literacies with others helps to effectively develop learning at home and in the classroom (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Using multiple literacies with others is a big connection into social interaction. Social interaction helps to give individuals authentic experiences during learning, which help to make things more memorable. This factors into Ethan using multiple literacies with others at home and school because he is able to learn from the individuals that he is using the multiple literacies with. Using multiple literacies with others also helps Ethan learn at home and in the classroom because he is able to transfer those skills that he has learned from home to school, or vice versa.

In the classroom he is more likely to incorporate techniques and knowledge that he's learned from home on a social level. This can happen in a variety of ways. If there is an

app that one of Ethan's peers is using and Ethan has used that same app at home, he could use that connection as a way to generate conversation with his peer. He might even be able to give his peers tips or suggestions on how to use the app, especially if they are having difficulties with it. Another example is if there is a computer program that Ethan uses at home that is also used in the classroom, then Ethan would be better equipped with the skills to use the program if he was placed with a partner or in a group.

Ethan used multiple literacies as tools within authentic context. This is a very prominent piece of his literacy practices because he was learning how to use these literacies while using them at the same time. Being able to practice multiple literacies in real life situations was the best practice for Ethan. According to research, using the technological tools in this manner puts increased demand on cognitive ability (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995). Ethan constantly using multiple literacies with peers and family members in and out of school provided him the necessary practice to successfully navigate these tools. He used multiple literacies to facilitate his learning and deeper thinking. This theoretical example ties into my study because there were instances where Ethan was using multiple literacies in real life situations and it caused him to think harder about what he was doing. One occurrence of this is the example where Ethan was watching sports with his father on the television and they began to discuss some different athletes. While watching the television and engaging in discussion with his father, Ethan had to think a bit harder throughout their discussion because he had to remember the different player information and statistics that he has grown to learn through viewing sports with different types of multiple literacies.

These conclusions were based on my findings from chapter four. I was able to easily take a look at Ethan and his household's intricate relationship with multiple literacies. From these conclusions I have gathered that Ethan not only uses multiple literacies as a guide for his life, but he also provides his family members with some of the necessary skills and information so that they will also have success using multiple literacies. As a teenager in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ethan developed an essential need to incorporate multiple literacies into many aspects of his lifestyle and literacy practices.

### **Implications for Student Learning**

#### **Multiple Literacies help to Enhance Student Learning**

Students who use multiple literacies at home often have an advantage over those who do not (Holland & Holland, 2014). When I communicated with Ethan through email correspondence we often spoke about his school and academic life. Some of the same types of multiple literacies that he used at home were similar, if not the same, types of literacies he used at school. This put Ethan at an advantage over others who may not have the ability to use the same types of literacies at home as they do in school.

Research suggests that giving students the ability to work individually or collaboratively with multiple literacies they are familiar with, can lead to positive outcomes (Kelly, 2012). They would have to opportunity to be a guide for other students who may not be accustomed to the technology. Students who have the opportunity to do so already have an upper hand in their academic life because they are familiar with the multiple

literacies that the teacher is having them use. This definitely enhances student learning because they are able to easily navigate through the technology and become prepared for future assignments that they may have at school or even in their future job or career.

Students who are unable to familiarize themselves with these literacies that are being used in school have the possibility of being unprepared for the different demands and expectations given by educators. Through research I have come across the term 'opportunity gap' and how it has a direct effect on student achievement (Kelly, 2012). Not having the opportunity to work with the different digital and multiple literacies can possibly be a setback to students. When looking at student learning from a 21<sup>st</sup> century standpoint, I was able to recognize the importance that multiple literacies played in Ethan's life. In today's society teaching and learning and have come a long way through different methods, techniques, and practices. Larson discusses the importance of looking at the classroom through a multiple literacies lens and being able to weave it into instruction and curriculum for the students (Larson, 2006). That strategy is key when working to enhance student learning inside of the classroom.

### **Ethan expands his Thoughts about Multiple Literacies through Discussion**

When using multiple literacies it is very easy to spend long periods of time using them without even noticing. As I observed Ethan within this study it was an even split between how much he used these literacies individually, or with a family member. What I noticed about Ethan using multiple literacies with someone else is that they usually engaged in discussion surrounding whichever literacy was being used. This is a powerful learning implication because this discussion allowed Ethan to look at the literacy from



different perspectives (Biluc, Ellis, Goodyear, & Piggott, 2010). Ethan and his family members all look at multiple literacies through different experiences and different perspectives.

Another advantage of Ethan engaging in discussion while using multiple literacies is that it helps him to do more self-reflection (Biluc, Ellis, Goodyear, & Piggott, 2010). The point in my observations where Ethan is watching a documentary with his mother is an excellent example of this. As they were watching the documentary about Jerusalem they were engaged in conversation several times. Each time the documentary mentioned an interesting fact or piece of history, Ethan had an opinion or question for his mother.

If Ethan would have watched this alone, his questions may not have been answered and he wouldn't have anyone to bounce his ideas around with. Having this interaction with his mother helped to improve his literacy skills and practices (Wolfe & Flewitt, 2010). Having a dialogue while using multiple literacies helps to create a meaningful learning experience and improve understanding (Biluc, Ellis, Goodyear, & Piggott, 2010). As a student, learning and developing thought through discussion can encourage more questioning in an academic setting. What makes such interactions so powerful when it comes to student learning is that it helps to build relationships between individuals which can be helpful when learning. It also helps to build critical thinking skills through engaging in conversation. This is a beneficial implication because when working with multiple literacies it is important to have the ability to learn how to work with the technology as opposed to just learning how to use it (Tierney, Bond, Bresler, 2006). Having the support

of interaction and conversation is a powerful advantage when it comes to multiple literacies because it helps to assist communication and thinking.

### **Social Media can help to Encourage Academic Use of Multiple Literacies**

Technology can be used for a great variety of purposes. Social networking has taken over society with its readily available information and constant connection with the world. This could seem overbearing, but using social media to make academic gains could have a positive outcome. There were numerous times throughout my research where Ethan was using social media in order to obtain academic information. Catching up on homework assignments was Ethan's primary use of multiple literacies in this manner but there are plenty of ways this can be utilized.

Students can participate in video chat to collaborate on school projects, email documents to each other when working on reports, and even text each other with homework or classwork information. A way that social networking can be utilized academically is for student research when students need to complete surveys or create a group for an assignment so that everyone is able to communicate with each other. These are excellent ways for students to take multiple literacies to a higher level academically.

The social use of multiple literacies give students an excellent resource for making connections. These connections are what help students build upon their social and cultural backgrounds in life (Kelly, 2012). If students are able to connect their cultural lives to what they are doing academically, then they have the chance of becoming more interested in what they are doing in school. Using multiple and digital literacies from a social aspect assists students by making these literacies more multifaceted. Reaching students' cultural

backgrounds through teaching is beneficial for both students and educators. Research suggests that instruction that incorporates cultural relevance calls out the attention of students (Kelly, 2012). This could include a variety of activities such as learning a science rap to help remember vocabulary for a test to using the students' favorite dance as a means to help work on mathematical equations. This could also be quite useful to struggling students because presenting academic work to a student through the means of social relevance could help to motivate them. This could help students become more interested in their academics if they are able to relate to their academics in a social and more enjoyable manner.

### **Implications for Teaching**

#### **Multiple Literacies can Help Improve Classroom Instruction**

The uses for multiple literacies as a part of classroom instruction are endless. Multiple literacies within instruction can be as small as using the classroom computer to search for an unknown word definition to student groups using iPads to develop their own classroom presentations. An advantage of incorporating multiple literacies into instruction is to help prepare students for the advance in society which is revolving around the evolution of technology. This will also keep students up to date with some of the more modern ways to find any information that they may need. Looking at multiple literacies from an educator's perspective is the key to supporting student learning. Teaching with multiple literacies in mind also helps to keep educators relevant within present-day society (Larson, 2006). Multiple literacies should definitely be a part of classroom instruction because they help teachers to foster a more engaging environment for students. Presenting

information to students through a variety of different literacies encourages critical thinking within students (Hansen, 2009). This means that students will deeply think about information if they receive it in different forms. This could transfer into the classroom through the example of presenting a science lesson through having the students use a textbook to practice note taking, watching a video on the same subject, and putting the students in groups to create a song, poem, or rap about the topic. This will not only help the students efficiently learn the topic, but it will also motivate them to critically think about what they are learning because you have helped to make it multifaceted.

Another advantage would be the ability to cater to the different learning needs in the classroom. Multiple literacies provide a variety of classroom resources to help give every student an equal opportunity to learn and enjoy learning if it falls within their preferred learning style. These literacies have changed the way we think about learning and education so they would be beneficial to those students who struggle to learn through what we think of as the traditional manner (Cervetti, Damico & Pearson, 2006). Giving students a choice in assignments through multiple literacies is a good example of using these literacies to cater to different learning styles. After completing a book there could be a list of options for book reviews. Creating a project, making a video, writing a paper, or recording a character interview are some of the ways multiple literacies can be used in the classroom while at the same time addressing the needs of different types of learners. Using multiple literacies can also help to increase student motivation and help make learning fun. Of course it is important not to solely rely on multiple and digital literacies in instruction but they can definitely be used through integration.

In order to for educators to make these possible changes within their classrooms they should know to keep an open mind. Throughout my research I witnessed a few multiple literacy practices by Ethan that one may have deemed unnecessary but to Ethan it was enjoyment and he was still learning at the same time. For teachers to integrate multiple literacies into their instruction, they should be mindful that there are a variety of ways in which this can happen. The research has given me a constant reminder that multiple literacies does not solely mean technology based practices. Multiple literacies can range anywhere from using a laptop to incorporating the music arts (Cervetti, Damico & Pearson, 2006). Even simply finding a comic style book on a particular history subject and using it during a social studies lesson is considered use of multiple literacies. If educators were to keep this in mind when developing instruction then they would have a plethora of resources to use.

### **Educators Should Use the Kinds of Literacies that Students Use Outside of School**

Ethan's continuous use of multiple literacies has definitely created an advantage for him. For Ethan, there was an extensive use of these literacies at home and in school. This consistency of use for Ethan at home, helped to prepare him with the necessary background knowledge that he could bring to school. When students go to school already prepared or have had a little practice in the realm of multiple literacies, it helps to facilitate their learning.

Teachers should do their best to make learning relevant in their classroom instruction. To help create successful student learners, teachers should explore the media used by their students (Cervetti, Damico & Pearson, 2006). It would also help to foster a

more positive teacher to student relationship because teachers would be able to more easily relate to their students. Multiple literacies have now become an important part of our society and lifestyles. Overlooking these literacies in the classroom takes away from student opportunity and ability to be able to participate in the constantly evolving 21<sup>st</sup> century society. While planning a lesson, an educator should keep in mind the types of literacies that students have access to at home. Finding out what these literacies are can be done through class surveys, parent contact, or simply asking the students through conversation. Knowing what types of multiple literacies students have access to at home, and using those same literacies in class could help students to reinforce the information that they are learning. Drawing upon this knowledge during a lesson would benefit both teacher and student.

As an educator, it would be beneficial to draw upon this knowledge, especially as an educator in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where technology competes for student attention. A constructive approach would be to take those same technologies and gear them toward educational purposes. The use of a student's technological background knowledge has the ability to give students a chance to work within real world situations and prepare them for the future workforce (Tierney, Bond, Bresler, 2006). This research suggests that using the same types of literacies in class that students use at home allows for the opportunity of authentic learning experiences. Since students would already have the experience working with the literacies they would be able to easily catch on to lessons.

While this cannot be done with all forms of digital and multiple literacies, a majority of them can be modified and focused on academic achievements. Research suggests that

drawing on this student background knowledge incorporates the opportunity for more differentiation within lessons and provides for more student centered instruction (Tierney, Bond, Bresler, 2006). An important aspect to remember about this implication is the integration of multiple and digital literacies with the “traditional” forms of literacy including textbooks and written print. Using all of these elements with students will be beneficial to their social and academic skills.

### **Family use of Multiple Literacies can help to Foster Student Learning**

As a result of this study, I have realized the importance of family participation in academic activities in order to reinforce a concept for students. Being able to observe Ethan and his family and their family dynamics allowed me to see how he and his two younger siblings benefited from the multiple literacy experiences that they shared with each other and their parents. I noticed that after sharing an enjoyable multiple or digital literacy experience with family members, they always wanted to complete the behavior or activity again. Even though encouraging family use of multiple literacies can be beneficial, it is also important to caution families to not focus their entire quality time around these technologies. Some research has noted an increasing amount of parent restriction on digital literacy activities such as computer and TV time so that students are not spending too much time doing so (Wolfe & Flewitt, 2010). Students must also be able to realize the other alternatives and benefits to multiple literacies that do not revolve around technology. One example of using multiple literacies without technology could be teaching a class to use journals while participating in a nature study. This can be done across the different content areas and helps students to think more critically about their surroundings and

what is around them. Interacting with nature and documenting observations in a journal is a type of multiple literacy that helps transform a students' literacy development and all without the use of digital technology (McMillan & Wilhelm, 2007). This kind of activity could even be done at home with families. It would help to support student learning through multiple literacies without the necessity for many materials or technology.

This education based implication has inspired me to think of ways to encourage and motivate families to participate in multiple literacies together. Students who have less access to these literacies would also have to be accommodated. They might need to engage in more conversation or be able to take some resources home in order to gain more experience or family interactions with multiple literacies. Students who may have difficulty learning or limited access to multiple literacies at home might need extra opportunities to gain a better understanding of information (Paul & Wang, 2006). This could help students to increase the amount of family interaction they receive regarding their academics through multiple literacies. This research also (Ott & Walter, 2000) discusses the importance of every student being able to have some kind of access to multiple both in and out of school which for some students is simple but could prove difficult for other students (Paul & Wang, 2006). Being able to access multiple literacies outside of school and being able to use it whole engaging with family or parents is important.

When working with younger students, such as Ethan's youngest 5 year old brother, it is important to remember that parents and family are children's first teachers and will help to determine their success with formal schooling (Heath, et al., 2014). Even though my focal child was much older I observed that he was still able to benefit from the literacy



experiences that he shared with the members of his household. One of the largest components of this implication would be the influence of the parents on the student. Parents who set high expectations for their children regarding these literacies and their at home learning may have more success with their children in school (Heath, et al., 2014). Students take those same principles and apply them to their school setting.

This is considered an implication for teaching because as an educator it is important to encourage parent/ family involvement for your students. The more positive parent/ family activities and experiences you can foster using multiple literacies, the better. These experiences will help students to gain the appropriate knowledge needed to strengthen their learning. If students do not have such forms of technology in the home then activities can be held in class where parents are invited into the classroom so that they have an opportunity to participate in these activities with their student.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

### **Be an Active Participant**

Throughout this study I remained a non-active participant, meaning that I did not speak nor interfere during observations. I saved any questions I had until after the observation was complete. Being an inactive participant helps to make observations as natural as possible (Cooper, Lewis, & Urquhart, 2004). It made the observation natural because I was able to quietly see the daily interactions that Ethan shared with his family as if I was not there at all. Being an inactive participant works exceptionally well if the

participant(s) truly act as usual. This would allow for more authentic data from observations.

An advantage of being an inactive participant during my study was the opportunity to have Ethan naturally show how these literacies helped to facilitate his learning, academically and socially. Although there were many benefits to observing in this manner, I think that being able to ask a question or participate in an activity as it was happening might have sparked some interesting results or new information. For future research I recommend being an active participant within at least a few of the observation sessions because it might contribute to data collection.

Having the chance to ask questions during a few of the observations would have perhaps helped to clarify my observations. It could have also slightly altered my data making it more accurate, rather than my inferences of what I was watching. Increasing the time of the observation might also be more beneficial for future research. Observing for a longer period of time would allot time to observe more interactions with multiple literacies and the chance to see more of how they have an effect on Ethan's literacy developments.

### **In-school Observation**

In this study I was not able to observe my participant in his academic setting. I recommend that for future research the facilitator try to observe participants at least a few times in their school settings. The benefit to this type of observation would help future research. Future researchers would be able to gain a better perspective of the digital and multiple literacies being used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Increase Number of Participants**

This study was formatted as a case study where I focused on one focal child. I recommend that for future research, a larger pool of participants are used. Increasing the number of participants might affect the results of the study. With more participants I would have the opportunity to have more accuracy within my results. Having more participants would allow me to look at individuals of different ages and see how they use multiple literacies differently. I would also be able to have participants who live in a range of different environments such as suburban, urban, and rural. I would be able to see if they living in these different areas would have an effect on the amount of multiple literacy resources that my participants would have access to. Acquiring more participants for this study would have given me a more in depth look on the effects that multiple literacies have on students.

## **Final Thoughts**

When reflecting back on my research process I definitely think that my study was beneficial to both myself and my focal participant, Ethan. I believe that it had an effect on Ethan because it has caused him to become more reflective on the multiple literacies around him and the different ways that he utilizes them whether it be academically or socially. He could use this experience to teach others or help them to become more aware of the ways they use multiple and digital literacies and the importance that they have in this 21<sup>st</sup> century society. From this study, I understand how multiple literacies have an effect on student life and the ways that I can incorporate those literacies into a classroom. I was also able to take a closer look at Ethan's family dynamics. Even though this was just an

example of one family, I can use them as model when thinking of ways to get students educationally motivated through family participation. This study has made an impact and large contribution to my career as an educator and hopefully to other current and future educators.

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Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the department of Education and Human Development at The College at Brockport, SUNY. I am conducting a research case study about the use of different technology and forms of literacy. The purpose of this research is to understand how these different uses have an impact on youths' literacy practices. As part of my study, with your consent, I will observe your child to understand how he interacts with multiple literacies in his home environment. I will also communicate through email and interview your child to gain insight on his personal reflections and experiences with multiple literacies.

If you grant consent for your child to participate in this study, I will observe him during the evenings in your home. My observations will focus on your child's use of the multiple literacies and the impact they have on his literacy experiences. I will interview him at the beginning of the study. The interview questions will focus on his opinions and uses of different types of literacies at home and in school.

I will be collecting data through the use of note taking, emails, and the interview. I will collect this data on a weekly basis time for approximately six weeks.

The enclosed consent forms include information about your child's rights as a study participant, including how I will protect his privacy. Please read the forms carefully. If you are willing to allow your child's participation, please indicate your consent by signing the attached statements and returning them to me.

My study will also require your participation. I will interview both of you at the same time about the use of multiple literacies in your household and how they affect your family lifestyle. I have also enclosed an informed consent form regarding your rights as participants and how I will protect your privacy. If you are willing to participate, please indicate your consent by signing the attached statements and also returning them to me.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Essence J. McFadden  
Graduate Student  
The College at Brockport, SUNY  
emcfa1@u.brockport.edu  
585-820-9873

Dr. Sue Robb  
Thesis Advisor  
The College at Brockport, SUNY  
[srobb@brockport.edu](mailto:srobb@brockport.edu)  
585-395-5935

**Protocol for Observation Notes**

Observation Date and Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of Observation: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Use of Multiple Literacies

| <u>Description of Activities</u> | <u>Reflective notes</u> |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                  |                         |

## **Parent Multiple Literacies Interview**

Opening: Hello, thank you for participating in this interview. This interview will help me better understand how you use multiple literacies in your home environment and the impact they have on your lifestyle. Please be sure to answer every question honestly and objectively and don't be afraid to share your thoughts. You may stop at any time during the interview if you feel uncomfortable with answering any of the questions.

1. Do you use multiple or digital literacies in your home? For what different purposes do you use multiple literacies?

2. Do you use multiple literacies as a family or with your children? If so, what are the different purposes?

3. Would you consider these literacies to be a major component within your home environment? What have they affected the most within your home?

4. Do you use multiple literacies as a form of family communication? If so, how?

5. What kind of impact do multiple literacies have on your family literacy experiences? Can you please provide any examples?

End: Thank you for your participation; I will use this information objectively as a part of the research for my study. I will be sure to keep your identity confidential.

## **Multiple Literacies Student Interview**

Opening: Hello, thank you for participating in this interview. This interview will help me better understand how you use multiple literacies in your home environment and the impact they have on your lifestyle. Please be sure to answer every question honestly and objectively and don't be afraid to share your thoughts. You may stop at any time during the interview if you feel uncomfortable with answering any of the questions.

1. When I say the word 'literacy' what comes to your mind? Why do you think of that?
2. What are some of your favorite types of digital literacy? What makes these your favorite?
3. Do you participate in these types of literacies with your friends or family? Which ones do you use with them and for what reasons?
4. What types of multiple literacies do you use in school? How and why do you use them?
5. Do you use more than one form of multiple literacies at once? Give examples of how you use them at the same time.

6. Are these multiple literacies an important part of your life? If so, why?

End: Thank you for your participation; I will use this information objectively as a part of the research for my study. We will later revisit this interview to reflect on the answers you have given me. I will be sure to keep your identity confidential.