

Exploring the Intersection of Bi-Cultural Identity, Social Networking and a Multiliteracies

Pedagogy on English Language Learning

by

Laura Morrison

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Abstract

The aim of this qualitative research study was to examine the construction of adolescents' bi-cultural identities through an exploration of their social practices on the social networking site, Ning. Specifically, I ask: what is the impact of participating on a social networking site (SNS) on (1) the language and literacy skills of grade six English Language Learners (ELLs)?; (2) the development of ELLs' bi-cultural identities?; (3) social presence for ELLs in the classroom learning community? The collaboration witnessed in the classroom as a result of the digital tools, and the implementation of a multimodal platform for students to perform their identities and to connect with one another ultimately had a positive impact for the ELLs. These students made gains in their language and literacy skills, sense of bi-cultural identities and in their social presence in the classroom.

Keywords: multiliteracies, digital tools, English Language Learners, elementary, bi-cultural, Legitimate Peripheral Participant, literacy, Ning, social networking site, adolescents, identity

Co-Authorship Statement

This thesis is part of a SSHRC-funded project called “Adolescents, Identities and Digital Literacies” (Dr. Janette Hughes, Principal-Investigator; Dr. Anne Burke, Co-Investigator). The study detailed in this paper is a small section of this larger project and as a result reports on general findings for all 10 ELLs across the three grade six classrooms selected for this study and also on three in-depth case studies of selected students from this small group of ELLs.

The findings of this smaller study resulted in two published articles in peer-reviewed journals. With Dr. Janette Hughes, I co-authored the first article called “The Impact of Social Networking and a Multiliteracies Pedagogy on English Language Learners’ Writerly Identities”, which appeared in 2014 in *Writing and Pedagogy*, vol. 6, issue 3 (pages 607-631). I co-authored the second article with Dr. Janette Hughes and Dr. Allyson Eamer. It was titled, “Crossing Cultural Borders Through Ning” and it was published in 2014 in the *Multicultural Education Review*, vol. 6, issue 1 (pages 1-30).

Modified parts of each article’s literature reviews, findings, discussions and conclusions were incorporated into the body of this thesis.

1 Introduction

In today's globalized society, English Language Learners (ELLs) are in nearly every North American mainstream classroom (Li, 2012; Loetherington & Jenson, 2011; de Jong & Harper, 2005). Historically, ELLs have been marginalized in the classroom due to traditional pedagogical practices, restrictions in the curriculum, and a lack of knowledge on the part of mainstream teachers regarding how to tap into and build on ELLs' knowledge, experiences and backgrounds (Burke, 2013; Li, 2012; Harper & de Jong, 2004). Not surprisingly, feeling marginalized in the classroom can impact one's feeling of place in society and relationship with the dominant culture (Ng-A-Fook, 2012; de Jong & Harper, 2005). If an ELL does not feel accepted by or part of the dominant culture, s/he may not feel legitimized as a speaker of English, which can impede language use and development (Cummins, 2009; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Norton, 1997; 2013). Norton (1997; 2013) explains that an ELL must feel like s/he owns English in order to feel like a legitimate speaker and user of the language.

Granger (2004) refines the controversial concept of a "silent period" in second language learning (the period some ELLs endure before they are able to produce language or express themselves) clarifying that this period actually might be due to the psychological, cultural and linguistic transitions an ELL undergoes in the process of acculturation. It is less that the ELL cannot speak and more that s/he needs to acculturate to the new environment before s/he is comfortable speaking. Similarly, Toohey, Dagenais and Schulze (2012) observe that while ELLs progress through different oral development stages, which often include a silent period, mainstream teachers cannot assume this limited language production is congruent with a lower academic and/or cognitive ability. Loetherington and Jenson (2011) point out, "classrooms have become linguistically heterogeneous spaces where every teacher is a teacher of L2 (second language) learners" (p. 226). de Jong and Harper (2005) suggest that without an awareness of how ELLs learn – which includes drawing on their L1 resources, and an understanding of how to include them in the classroom and to increase their social presence, it is difficult to reach this demographic effectively. As a result, it is becoming increasingly necessary for mainstream teachers to understand how to reach, teach and include these students in the classroom community and what technological tools can help them do this.

Incorporating The New London Group's (1996) foundational writing on a multiliteracies pedagogy, which includes situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice and promotes the use of multimodal tools like Social Networking Sites (SNSs), video production and digital image-creation, can facilitate both the acculturation process for ELLs and the development of their language and literacy skills (Eamer & Hughes, 2013; Mitchel, 2012; Lotherington & Jenson, 2011; Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Nelson, 2006). Furthermore, Lotherington and Chow (2006) assert that a multiliteracies pedagogy can encourage meaningful engagement in the literacy development and learning process for students from multicultural and multilingual backgrounds.

By implementing a multiliteracies pedagogy in the classroom, ELLs are able to use linguistic and non-linguistic communication to connect with others and to feel success when expressing themselves and their ideas (Toohey, Dagenais and Schulze, 2012; Walker, Bean & Dillard, 2010). Furthermore, SNSs provide ELLs with the opportunity to see and use language in an authentic context, developing not only their language skills but also their social and intercultural competence. This ties into Lave and Wenger's (1991) foundational work on Legitimate Peripheral participation, which details the process newcomers or novices go through to become more central members of a community. It includes participating in low-risk or peripheral activities, which over time lead to greater involvement in the community.

Canadian researchers have explored identity construction with immigrants from kindergarten all the way through to adult ESL classes and have long recognized the role of schools in cultural production (Toohey, 2000; Hughes & Eamer, 2012; Goldstein, 1997; Eamer 2012; Norton-Peirce, 1995; 2001). Moreover, in Erikson's (1968) theory of developmental psychology, he asserts that adolescence is the time during which we create identities separate from our parents through increased social interaction with peer groups. Consequently, the matter of identity becomes increasingly complex for adolescents who are immigrants, as they have to navigate identity construction in a new culture and language. This was particularly evident in the study done by researchers Caldas and Caron-Caldas (2002), which underscored the importance of setting and adolescent identity construction in determining language preference. However, for adolescents to begin exploring and sharing their cultural identities, they first need to navigate their beliefs and values according to two cultural scripts: that of the home and of the larger community. Teachers can employ appropriate instructional tools and take an active role in assisting students to develop their bi-cultural identities and also a social presence in the

classroom community. For the purposes of this paper I will focus on place-based identity as culture is more than just the sum of one's ethnic identity. Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) touches on this in her seminal piece on intersectionality where she presents the idea that one's identity can and should not be reduced to a singular label, such as "woman" or "black" as this is one-dimensional and does not acknowledge the multiple, rich and complex elements that make up identity. Rather, identity is messy, often oozing out of pre-fabricated categories. It is the intersection of many inter-related elements such as race, gender, religion, ability and sexual orientation to name a few, and, marginalization is also found at the intersection of various and layered forms of discrimination. Similarly, in Hall's (1991) foundational work on identity, he discusses the complexity of identity saying "It is never in the same place but always positional" (p. 57) and that the categories that make up our identity "have the effect of locating us socially in multiple positions of marginality and subordination" (p. 57). In the scope of this thesis when discussing bi-cultural identity, I will be referring to place-based identity only – comparing the place the students have come from, the new place in which they have come to inhabit and the third space in between the two where a fusion of both cultures can exist and be equally honoured.

Garrison (2009) defines social presence as the "ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment and develop interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities" (p. 352). By incorporating a variety of media in the delivery of the curriculum objectives, teachers can facilitate the identity navigation and development process, which in turn can facilitate the emergence of a positive sense of self, respect for peers, and a sense of place and agency in their community of practice (Wenger, 1998; 2000). Multimodal and digital tools also provide students with an accessible entry point to the development of language and literacy practices in their L2. For instance, students are able to more thoroughly express their ideas with supplementary tools that do not depend on a precise or well-developed understanding of their L2. For example, students can express an idea using images, or a feeling using sounds or music. As a result, ELLs' ability to participate in the classroom increases, along with their confidence in the L2 and feelings of competency. It is as a result of this increased engagement through the development of students' digital literacy skills that their traditional literacy skills often simultaneously develop. With heightened engagement, comes more practice using the L2 and with increased practice, more often than not, comes increased proficiency.

In keeping with the premise that literacy can be developed through social practice and

that new social networking platforms offer educational opportunities for students to create or assume social identities beyond the traditional classroom context, we opened up this new space for learning. As important as it is for ELLs to use technologies for thinking, organizing ideas, and creating multimodal products to represent their individual understandings, it is equally important to offer them opportunities to connect with each other, build relationships with those in their learning communities, and explore their social identities. So, building community is an important priority in the learning process. However, Hung and Yuen (2010) argue that sustaining communities of practice can be challenging and that barriers like a lack of trust or isolated feelings can be barriers to learning. They also suggest that hybrid communities that combine online interaction with face-to-face interaction may be an ideal solution to this problem. As a result, this study examined the impact of using a multiliteracies pedagogy and the Social Networking Site (SNS), Ning on newly-arrived English Language Learners (ELLs) and the development of their language and literacy skills, emerging bi-cultural identities and their social presence and sense of place in the classroom learning community.

2 Literature Review

In their work on multiliteracies, Cope and Kalantzis (2000; 2009) state that students occupy different discourse worlds (in and out of school) and that they draw on these worlds to make meaning and create identities. Discourse worlds are the different environments or worlds one inhabits and the communication or discourse associated with those worlds. For English Language Learners (ELLs), the social and literacy practices they engage in as part of these discourse worlds can positively impact the development of their traditional language and literacy skills (Cummins, 2001). Students are now used to “reading texts that combine image, sound, and words, which are often found in digital spaces that are bound up in social practices” (Hughes, 2007, p. 3). They make meaning through images, sounds and movements, in addition to the printed word (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008). A multiliteracies pedagogy can encourage engagement, meaning-making and literacy skills in the classroom, especially for those students who are not part of the dominant culture, but rather from linguistically diverse and multicultural backgrounds (Loetherington & Chow, 2006).

Based on a survey of the recent literature, incorporating New Literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006), three key areas emerged: literacy skills development, identity development, and participation in learning communities. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

2.1 Literacy Skills Development

Burke (2013) and Thorne, Black and Sykes (2009) found that ELLs’ out-of-school, online literacy practices could positively influence the development of their English language and literacy skills, which in turn could positively affect their in-school literacy identities and practices. As Fernsten (2008) discovered, ELLs often saw themselves as possessing inferior writing skills, due to the labeling they may have been exposed to throughout their academic careers. Leveraging the collaboration and multimodality inherent in online spaces by including them in classroom pedagogy is one way to tap into ELLs’ out-of-school experiences and knowledge. This in turn encourages them to engage in a reconstruction of positive, literate identities within the classroom (Thorne et al., 2009; Black, 2009; Li, 2012; Burke, 2013). Thorne et al. (2009) discovered that in online interest communities, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal

Development came into play, and ELLs were able to imitate and gain assistance from more experienced others and engage in collaborative/participatory writing activities. Li (2012) reported that textual interaction helped students to develop syntax and vocabulary that is similar to findings in studies conducted by Mitchel (2012) and Blattner and Fiori (2011). In these studies, SNSs provided ELLs with the opportunity to see and use language in an authentic context, developing not only their language skills but also their social and intercultural competence.

Walker, Bean and Dillard (2010) found that multimodal tools, like video, gave students the opportunity to be successful in communicating their thoughts and ideas. In the study conducted by Toohey, Dagenais and Schulze (2012), students worked together using multimedia tools to create a video on their heritage culture and drew on a combination of literacy skills like script writing, storyboarding and oral rehearsal to communicate their message. Since the movies described an aspect of their heritage culture in English, the students were also able to draw on previous knowledge and use whatever linguistic, cultural, material, visual, and gestural resources they felt were needed in order to convey their message (Toohey et al., 2012, p.86). Similarly, in the study conducted by Ajayi (2009), where ELLs used multimodal resources to interpret a text and make meaning from it, he found that the multimodality allowed the students different ways of entering and composing text (p. 592). He also found that the multimodal structure allowed students to use a variety of resources including text, colour, typography, and other visuals (p. 592). The students were able to enter, explore and respond to texts more quickly and with more depth when the texts were not purely alphanumeric, engaging the ELLs in the classroom in a new way and granting them more immediate access into the collective learning body.

However, these studies did not address the difficulties or frustrations the ELLs may have experienced in terms of understanding the difference between formal writing conventions and what Sharma (2012) calls ‘chatspeak’ – informal language and syntax common in online social interactions. So, teachers need to be cognizant of the potential grammar learning issues that may arise and respond with targeted intervention.

2.2 Identity Development

Identity, defined by Moje, Luke, Davies & Street (2009) as (1) difference (2) sense of self (3) mind or consciousness (4) narrative and (5) position (p. 416) is fluid. In keeping with this definition of identity, studies undertaken by Ortactepe (2013); Ng-A-Fook, Radman and Ausman

(2012) and Cervatiuc (2009), outlined a process of identity re-construction that ELLs undergo in their new reality. As the ELLs became more exposed to their new culture and acculturated, their identities adapted and incorporated new ways of being in the world and values, which were more consistent with others in their new environment. Betts, Bolt, Decker, Muyskens and Marston (2009) and Cervatiuc (2009) reported that unless ELLs were able to create positive, bicultural identities for themselves (a blending of the two cultures), they were at risk of feeling perpetually displaced – neither part of their heritage culture nor their new culture. Feeling displaced may have negative implications when it comes to language-learning success. Ultimately, as an ELL develops a sense of place and identity in his/her new setting, most often, a comfort with, and desire to use and operate in English emerges (Norton, 1997; 2001).

Identity performance and social interaction are key components in the identity construction process. According to Jones and Hafner (2012) and Alvermann (2010), SNSs can assist adolescents in this process as they can use the platforms as virtual stages to act out or perform conversations with their friends and display personal preferences, interests and activities. Members populate profile pages, upload pictures, display friendships, and communicate their various likes and dislikes (Alvermann, 2010, p. 59). Having a ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 1994) that transcends identity boundaries tied to school, home or nation to present oneself and connect with others using a variety of new literacy practices was important for ELLs as discovered by Burke (2013); Ng-A-Fook, et al. (2012) and Li (2012). Unlike the physical classroom which relied on synchronous speech and alphanumerical text, in third spaces, ELLs were able to communicate through video and photo posts, brief status updates, the ‘like’ function, check-ins and more.

It is also important to understand how adolescent ELLs’ online practices both shape and are shaped by their identities. Sharma (2012), for example, explained how the participatory culture inherent in SNSs has transformed the notion of authorship – an individual’s page was a collection of items curated by him/her, but also by others who posted comments, hyperlinks, images and videos. These constant textual and semiotic exchanges with others, and the fluid self-representation afforded by SNSs, ultimately impacted a user’s identity and the construction of his/her sense of self. Similarly, Black (2009) and Li (2012) found that the social interaction involved in fan-fiction sites – websites where fans post their own stories about characters or settings from an original work and others provide feedback – was instrumental in language learning and ultimately the construction of literate identities for ELLs. They were able to develop

identities as creators and users of English texts (Black, 2009; Li, 2012), which crossed over into the physical classroom.

For the most part, the above studies discussed the affordances of out-of-school literacies and practices on ELLs' identity construction process, however, they did not specifically address the direct effect of incorporating a social networking platform into an English language arts classroom to facilitate the development of bicultural identities for ELLs – something that may have facilitated and/or improved the acquisition of their language and literacy skills.

2.3 Participation in Learning Communities

Garrison (2009) and Cobb (2009) have found that social presence is an important part of the education and learning process. Garrison (2009) defines social presence as the “ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment and develop interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities” (p. 352). It is important for students to feel valued within their learning community, and this is especially important for ELLs who may find it difficult to contribute due to language barriers. Unfortunately, as Li (2012) and de Jong and Harper (2005) have found, mainstream teachers often are not prepared with the necessary skills to reach and teach ELLs. Burke (2013), Li (2012) and de Jong and Harper (2004) explained that this usually leaves these students feeling marginalized in the classroom, which may negatively affect the development of their language and literacy skills. Brady, Holcomb, and Smith (2010) argued that social networking sites offered great educational potential to enhance students’ “social presence.”

In their work exploring how individuals' identities affected discussions, Ke, Chavez, and Causarano (2009) concluded that identities are critical for extracting meaning from discussions and Kear (2011) pointed to the importance of beginning from “an inviting place” where “contributions should be friendly, supportive and informal” (p. 73). The students seemed to have an intuitive understanding of the social nature of learning, which was evident as they eased into their relationships through casual talk. In their study examining the use of Moodle vs. Facebook, DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehler, and Francis (2009) concluded that there was a positive correlation between social presence and active participation in online discussions and other scholars confirmed that students with a higher social presence online are often more likely to be more engaged in these conversations. Cobb (2009) argued that, “when information is presented in a way that increases social presence, it is better remembered by learners and the learning process is

considered more engaging” (p. 242). In a review of the literature surrounding relationships among social presence, motivation, and online learning, Bai (2003) stated that social presence “can enhance closeness in online learning communities, reduce feelings of isolation and detachment, encourage interactions and facilitate participation in online learning” (p. 2717).

In a recent study on the use of Facebook in university-level ELL classrooms, Rambe (2012) suggested that Facebook can be used as a tool to “overcome a learner’s sense of psychological powerlessness” (p. 297), especially for the less confident second language learning students. Rambe (2012) and Shih (2011) both reported that peer-assessment and discussion forums broke language and intercultural barriers as students were not put on the spot when responding to the teacher or peers as in lectures. Furthermore, the shift in pedagogy away from the traditional, transmission model and toward collaborative-learning altered the normal hierarchy, making room for student voices and active participation. The SNS’s various modes of communication facilitated these less stressful interactions, as students could use the ‘like’ function, comment and/or post videos or pictures to express themselves or communicate with peers. In one of Krashen’s (1982) most widely known works, he discussed what is known as affective filter hypothesis, which deals with the effect of stress on expressive language in ELLs. When stress is minimized, mental blocks that would otherwise limit comprehensible input for language acquisition are also minimized. In this work, Krashen also explained that a language learner’s motivation to learn and use the second language and his/her self-esteem also have an impact. Neuroscience supports this hypothesis. MRI studies have shown increased blood flow to the emotional part of the brain, the amygdala, during periods of high stress. Activation of this area in effect acts as a filter, having a negative effect on input and/or output for a learner (Willis, 2007).

McCarthy (2012) reported that increased interaction with peers fulfilled students’ need for social support and connectivity and ultimately led to a more positive and encouraging community of practice. Importantly, observations from various other studies indicated that these supportive online interactions decreased students’ isolation (Lim & Meier, 2012) and strengthened offline relations (Blais, Craig, Pepler, & Connolly, 2008; Desjarlais & Willoughby, 2010). Finally, Rambe (2012) discovered that SNSs made students’ learning visible through the comments and discussions posted on the sites. Teachers gained a better understanding of where confusion lay, which is especially important for ELLs who may have felt reluctant to express

misunderstandings. All of this online activity prevented feelings of isolation and encouraged ELLs' social presence in a course.

While these studies focused on the use of SNSs in the university context to create inclusive communities of practice, they did not specifically address how a social networking platform could be used in an elementary setting to do the same. SNSs clearly have the potential to alter classroom pedagogy, moving it from transmission-based to one based on collaborative and active learning. Further studies need to focus the implications of including this altered pedagogy in a mainstream classroom of first and second language learners in order to build a cohesive, supportive and participatory classroom environment.

2.4 Research Questions

This study investigated the following three research questions:

- (1) What is the impact of participating on a social networking site (SNS) on the language and literacy skills of grade six English Language Learners (ELLs)?;
- (2) What is the impact of participating on a SNS on the development of ELLs' bi-cultural identities?; and
- (3) What is the impact of participating on a SNS on social presence for ELLs in the classroom learning community?

3 Methodology

3.1 Overview

The study was a small section in Year 1 of a larger SSHRC-funded project that spanned three-years and examined the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of adolescent identities through an exploration of their social practices within a digital landscape using mobile devices and social networking platforms for learning in the classroom and in the wider spaces of their lives. The larger study sought to answer the following three research questions: (a) How do adolescents' digital literacy skills develop over time while immersed in a rich media setting? (b) How are adolescents' identities shaped and performed, as they use new media tools and affordances to present themselves to the world? (c) How does ubiquitous access to mobile devices and tablets potentially transform teaching and learning literacy practices? The study had two distinct settings of middle school students: (1) three classes in each year of the study from grades 6-10 in Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools (2) three classes in each year of the study from grades 6-8 in a middle school in an urban centre in Newfoundland, for a total of approximately 150 students. However, the scope of this paper reports on a narrow segment of the population impacted most obviously by this study – newly arrived ELLs in a grade six classroom. As a result, this paper focuses on general findings for all 10 ELLs across the three Toronto-based grade six classrooms selected for this study and also on three in-depth case studies of select ELLs from within this pool.

A qualitative case study methodology (Stake, 2000) was used in this study; as Bruce (2009) asserts case studies “provide the best articulation of adolescents’ media literacy processes, especially as much of the emergent forms of their use has not been studied” (p. 302). Furthermore, as this study was conducted over a three-month time period within the context of one Toronto-based elementary school and the social networking site, Ning, the case study approach was appropriate. Creswell (2014) defines case studies as those that are bounded by time and activity and are highly contextualized.

I used a variety of data collection tools for the purposes of methodological triangulation and to track what Bruner (1994) describes as ‘turning points’ in the students’ representation of identity and/or the development of their language and literacy skills. The tools included a pre-

survey, a post-survey, interviews, external observations, participant observation field notes and student work. Each of these will be discussed in turn in the section entitled Data Collection.

To analyze the data, I employed Berg's (2007) method of content analysis, Gee's (2011) discourse analysis, Jewitt (2008) and Hull and Katz's (2006) Multimodal Text Analysis and cross-case analysis of coded themes. Each of these will be discussed in the Data Analysis section below.

Finally, in keeping with Driscoll and Greg's (2010) assertion that online culture enables a particular kind of intimacy, I also considered the students' work through the lens of virtual ethnography. Given that the ethnographer's field/research site can now consist of both physical and online spaces, this study reflected a broader interpretation of ethnography that included multimodal and network ethnographies. Furthermore, the interactions between students on Ning, including comments on the poems written by peers, were considered to have resulted – at least in part – from the affordance provided by the digital medium.

3.2 Participants

The study took place in three grade six classrooms in an ethnically diverse Toronto-based elementary school. Of the 78 students, 10 were identified as ELLs across the three classrooms. These students were made up of five male students and five female students and they ranged in age from 10 – 11 years old. The students came from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the Philippines and were at various stages of proficiency in English, ranging from beginner (stage 1) to high-intermediate (stage 3) according to the *Stages of Second Language Acquisition* outlined by Ontario's Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2001). The students received English language support, either within their own classrooms or on a withdrawal basis. Prior to the study, none of the ELLs had experience with the social networking site, Ning.

Of the pool of 10 identified ELLs, three were purposively selected for close case study analysis – two females and one male. These students were given researcher-selected pseudonyms: Rita, Zara and Henry. Rita was from Afghanistan and was identified as stage one ELL; Zara was from Iraq and identified as stage two and Henry was from Russia and also identified as stage two. In the Findings section below I have provided an overview of my observations and analysis as they applied to the 10 ELLs in general and then I have included a close case study analysis for the three selected ELLs regarding the development of their language and literacy skills, their bi-cultural identity development and the development of their social

presence in their respective classroom learning communities. In each section, I have detailed the transition and development that occurred for each ELL at the beginning, middle and end of the study.

Four teachers were also participants in the research, three of whom were the classroom teachers for the three grade 6 classes. The fourth teacher was the ESL teacher who supported the three ELL students both within their own classrooms as well as within a separate classroom where English language skills were taught more formally. All were experienced teachers, each having over ten years' experience. All four teachers expressed having limited experience with technology in the classroom, and none self-identified as expert technology users.

3.3 Environment

The study was primarily conducted in the grade six classrooms using MacBook laptop computers, various digital programs and Ning. It was conducted through a unit on poetry that included focused study on acrostic, free verse, postcard, spoken word and limerick poetry. For each genre, the students first closely analyzed sample poems through think-pair-share activities, group/whole-class discussions and personal reflections, and then created their own poems in each of the genres using one of the digital multimodal tools. The tools were either employed in the writing process or to create the final product.

Throughout the project, the students stayed connected on Ning as they created, updated and managed their profile pages and provided and received homework help through the chat and private messaging features. The students also uploaded their poems, posted homework discussion responses and provided peer feedback and assessment. Interestingly, the students also stayed connected on Ning on the evenings and weekends – they chatted and left comments on each other's profile walls, discussion threads and special interest groups. Prior to the beginning of the study, a letter was sent home to parents (see Appendix A) indicating the digital/online nature of the study. While it was not a requirement that the students connect on Ning outside of school hours, many chose to and no student indicated to either the classroom teachers or to me that they did not have access to either the technology or hardware to access Ning. While we were using Ning in the classroom, all students were provided with a Mac laptop with which they could access Ning and all the digital tools we used to complete the various poetry activities in the study. If any student did not have access to the Internet outside of school hours, this could have been a limitation to the study. In this way, those who may have been marginalized due to

language and literacy skills may have also been marginalized in terms of their online participation – inadvertently excluded from the classroom community that was developing and flourishing outside of regular school hours. The non-school related activity on Ning was prolific and mimicked the types of social activities performed on an open social networking site, like Facebook. In addition to the above interactive activities, the students also used Ning to perform their identities and share their interests and heritage culture. They posted humorous animated videos, music videos, gifs and photos of general interest items like films, actors, favourite animals, cars, wrestlers, nature and more.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Overview of Survey Design

I conducted qualitative pre- and post-project surveys in order to gauge if any attitudinal or knowledge-based changes took place in the students over the course of the project (see Appendices B & C). The surveys were used for triangulation purposes, and the answers were compared against interview responses, student work, informal discussions with the students and their activity on Ning.

The teachers put aside a period of class (30 minutes) for the students to complete the survey, so that they did not feel under pressure to finish quickly. As the students were ages 10-11, I set up the survey so that students were presented first with a general question relating to each item to mentally prepare them for more specific questions which followed and which probed more deeply. As the study investigated in- and out-of-school literacy practices, I wanted to get a fairly accurate understanding of the students' current use of technology hardware and software, and their online activities. If only one question had been asked per item, for example, one general question or one specific question, a less accurate or rich understanding of the students' in- and out-of-school digital literacy practices would have been gained.

3.4.2 Pre-survey

The pre-survey (see Appendix B) had 28 questions and contained a combination of multiple choice, Yes/No and short answer and asked students about their social media use and activity (type, activities, duration); out-of-school technology and internet use; in-school technology and internet use and use of avatars online. This survey took the students

approximately 30 minutes to complete, and was completed during class time that their teachers set aside for this purpose.

3.4.3 Post-survey

The post-survey (see Appendix C) had 22 questions and contained a combination of multiple choice, Yes/No and short answer. It asked students how they enjoyed using technology in the classroom, if it motivated them to participate in assignments and class discussions, if they would want to use technology in future classes/assignments and if they felt the technology had an impact on their identity development.

I shortened the length of the post-project survey and included more open-ended questions, as I wanted to gain a richer understanding of how the students felt in their own words. Similar to the pre-project survey, this survey took the students approximately 30 minutes to complete, and was done in-class. As our study was based on a case study methodology, it was important to be able to compare the answers provided on the post-survey with the answers provided in their interviews for triangulation purposes.

3.4.4 Interviews

I also used face-to-face interviews in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the students' experiences, observations, attitudinal changes and/or 'turning points' (Bruner, 1994) in the representation of identity and/or the development of their language and literacy skills (see Appendix D). I asked the students a total of 10 questions and each interview lasted between five and ten minutes, depending on the student's level of English proficiency. The interviews were recorded using a video camera, and they were later transcribed, analyzed and coded for themes (Charmaz, 2006).

3.4.5 Observations & Field Notes

External observations were also used in the data collection process for triangulation purposes and to gain a more in-depth understanding of the students' work processes. External observation was an important tool in tracking any small, yet important, developments in the students' identities and/or language and literacy skills over time.

I used my laptop to take notes, the voice-recorder app on my iPhone to record important classroom discussions and sound bytes, and an HD video camera and the video app on my

iPhone to record important classroom activities, like presentations. Each day of the research project, I observed the implementation of the lessons I had created for the study, the students working in class with the various digital tools (laptops, websites and apps), the peer-teaching that occurred, the informal and formal class discussions and all Ning activity – the creation of profile pages, special interest groups, academic and social discussions that were posted, all academic work that was uploaded and the required peer feedback for that work, all chatroom activity and all uploaded and shared content (videos, photos, status updates, wall postings).

I also took into account the teachers' informal observations of the students' behaviour and changes over the course of the project. This was done in two ways: through formal post-project interviews with the teachers and through informal conversations with the teachers, which were recorded on my laptop and the notes which I sent to the teachers in an email each evening for verification.

3.4.6 Student Work

Finally, I collected student work to track the following: developments in students' language use and/or literacy skills; how the students used the multimodal tools to express aspects of their bicultural identity and to track the students' conscious construction of a bi-cultural identity (represented in their work through text, image, video and/or other semiotic tools).

3.5 Procedure/Research Design

Before the project began, the research team received informed consent from the teachers, students and their parents. This was done through two letters – one letter that was signed by the participating teachers and one that was signed by both the student and their parents (See Appendix A). Furthermore, students had the option to withdraw from the study, even if their parents allowed them to participate, though this did not happen. Similarly, the teachers were given the right to withdraw from the study at any point as well if they felt this was necessary; however, this too did not occur. The students also completed paper-based pre-project surveys the week before the study's start date and this survey took approximately thirty minutes.

Both purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used in determining the grade level and the school in which the research would be conducted. The three ELL students were chosen based on their formal identification as English language learners by the Toronto District School Board. I specifically wanted to work with the grade six students, as this age group is

generally starting to engage in the identity exploration and construction process (Erikson, 1968).

Using the social networking site, Ning and various online and offline programs that included Glogster, iMovie, Voice Recorder, Word, www.writeordie.com, www.tagxedo.com, www.wordle.net, www.youtube.com, students learned about six genres of poetry that related to identity and identity construction. In each of the six poetry genres – acrostic, free-verse, postcard, spoken word, limerick and found – students were required to read and/or listen to the poems and respond to them, analyzing their major themes involving identity and their poetic devices. They did this in informal think-pair-shares, whole class discussions and/or individual reflections posted to Ning. As a response to what they read in each genre, the students wrote their own digital and multimodal poems and shared these on Ning for peer and teacher assessment. A two-week period was allotted to the exploration of each poetry genre.

3.5.1 Acrostic Poetry

Students wrote an acrostic poem using their names and the online acrostic poetry tool on the www.readwritethink.org website. They then created a personalized barcode in Microsoft Word using line shapes and significant/meaningful numbers that represented them as individuals. A profile picture was taken with the Photo Booth tool and all three elements were combined in Word to make a personal ‘About Me’ poster. The poster was uploaded to Ning to share with peers.



Figure 1. ELL sample acrostic poem

3.5.2 Free Verse

In a table in Microsoft Word, the students brainstormed ideas for a free verse poem under the following headings: image, light, sound, question, feeling and repetition. They then put their ideas together using the online quick-writing program www.writeordie.com. In this program, when users did not write quickly enough or if they ceased to write for a short period of time, the program provided a warning and then would begin to delete words. The pressure encouraged the users to write and was meant to discourage mental blocks. Students uploaded their poems to Ning and were required to read and comment on some of their peers' poems, providing positive and/or constructive feedback.

GREEN LAND.

GREEN LAND IN THE MIDDLE OF A OCEAN
AND THERE ARE A LOTS OF ANIMALS AND
TREES.

SOUND OF A BIRDS SINGING A SONGS AND
WIND SHAKING TREES.

I FEEL HAPPY THAT I WANT TO STAY HERE
FOR EVER!

YELLOW SUN LIGHT IN THE MORNING
IN THE AFTERNOON THERE ARE ORANGE
RED AND DARK YELLOW COLOURS OF THE
SKY.

WHERE DID THIS LAND COME FROM AND
WHO LIVES HERE?

DON'T WANT TO GO HOME GO HOME
GO HOME.

Figure 2. ELL sample free verse poem

3.5.3 Postcard Poetry

Students were first provided examples of postcard poetry and prompted with questions to deconstruct the elements – for example, “what is similar about the voice in each example,” “what is common about the text placement/layout,” “what do you notice about the length restrictions and visuals and how might these add to the poetry?” The students then created their own postcard poems that included both visuals and text, using the online poster-making program www.Glogster.com and responded to the writing prompt, “Who I want to be in middle school.” As a final step, they posted their poems to Ning and commented on one another’s work.



Figure 3. ELL sample postcard poem

3.5.4 Spoken Word Poetry

Students were first shown an example of spoken word on YouTube and as a class deconstructed the poetic elements involved in this genre. As the example dealt with Canadian identity, the students also deconstructed the theme to compare their personal definition of Canadian identity to that of the spoken word artist’s and each others’. The students then created their own Spoken Word poems using iMovie, responding to the prompt “Who I Am.” Here, students explored their dual national identities as part of the process of building their bicultural

identities. They then uploaded their movies to YouTube, shared the links on Ning and commented on each other's poems.



Figure 4. ELL sample spoken word poem screencap

3.5.5 Limerick

Students were provided with four examples of limericks, which were read aloud by volunteers. As a class, the limerick structure was analyzed for content, form, rhyme scheme and other poetic devices. The students were then asked to think of a defining, yet humorous moment in their lives, and challenged to take that moment and explain it in the limerick format. Students then shared their final products on Ning and they read and commented on some of their peers' poems. Students were also asked to reflect on Ning about why this was a defining moment for them and how it might have played a part in shaping their identity.

First day at school

My first day at school was so Cool

Indoor shoes to the School

Checks are so red

School pressure on my head

Now following the rules

Figure 5. ELL sample limerick poem

3.5.6 Found Poetry

Students were first shown an example of a found poem with words taken from magazine and TV advertisements. They then created their own found poems using the words and phrases found in their classrooms followed by a class discussion regarding how people's environments can shape or influence their personalities/identities. Students then wrote another found poem using their status updates, comments and discussions from Ning and reflected on the personalities they portrayed on Ning up to that point based on what they had published. As with the other poems, the students then uploaded their work to Ning and commented on some of their peers' poems.

Social but active

Helpful but talkative

Friendly but likeable

Sometimes loud but sometimes quiet

But still happy and friendly!

When on Ning I like to chat with people

I like nice poems and Ning is fun

And I think that I do good job too

I like to join others groups too

My identity is

Son, brother, student

Soccer player and friend

My favorite sport is soccer!!!

Figure 6. ELL sample found poem

Throughout the project, I collected each piece of student work posted to Ning and any rough work produced in class. I also attended the classes every day to observe and record all important events over the course of the study, including any changes in classroom behaviour/involvement and/or any language and literacy developments. These were eventually used in the data analysis, as described in more detail in the following section.

3.6 Data Analysis

1.) What is the impact of participating in a classroom social networking site on the development of ELLs' language and literacy skills?

I conducted a content analysis (Berg, 2007) on the student poems to examine ways in which the students used the English language in the poetic form to communicate a message or meaning over the course of the study. With this, I looked for any improvements in the students' use of language and their literacy skills as a result of sharing their work — whether or not the performative element of social networking sites and/or the exposure to peers' work may have impacted the quality of work produced for classroom distribution via Ning. I looked for richer vocabulary, more complex sentence structure and less grammatical mistakes.

I also examined the formal writing the students produced on Ning in response to teacher-initiated discussion posts (student work). I tracked their use of the English language and any gains/developments made over time with regards frequency and fluency of written expression.

I used Gee's (2011) discourse analysis to examine the informal writing the students produced on Ning – in the main chatroom, the special interest groups the students created, their status updates and the comments they posted on their own and each other's profile walls (student work). While there was a potential risk of exclusionary behaviour with the special interest groups, ie. groups being set up and certain students like ELLs not being invited to join, this did not happen. What was particularly noteworthy when it came to the special interest groups was that the ELLs themselves felt the agency to set up their own groups and invite their peers – ELL or otherwise. The lack of exclusionary behaviour on Ning can be summarized in the following post-project interview excerpt regarding one ELLs' experience with the special interest groups:

Researcher: And what about the groups you created? Why did you like creating groups?

H: Its fun cause people would join it.

Researcher: And did you find you were connected with your classmates?

H: Yea.

When it came to who was invited into the groups and who accepted these invitations, across the board the entire practice seemed inclusionary from what I was able to witness. Students who would not have normally interacted in the face-to-face classroom setting were inviting each other and being invited into various groups. The new, digital environment perhaps was a factor in dissolving any previously conceived or established social barriers. With a new and unfamiliar

environment comes entirely new social rules – like an uncharted wild west open to all to be appropriated and settled.

In all of the activity on Ning, but particularly in the chatroom and informal (ie. not academic) profile wall activity (status updates, comments left to peers, non-academic discussion threads) I looked for any gains in the ELLs' understanding of colloquial English and 'turns of phrase' as a result of interacting with their native-English speaking peers over the course of the three months. I observed and took note from beginning to end how much and how frequently the ELLs (and specifically those three selected for close case study analysis) engaged in casual conversation and also adopted the language used by their peers as a result of a developed understanding of colloquial English. I used the ELLs' increased use of colloquial language as an indicator of progress in their language and literacy development as it takes a certain level of comfort in an L2 to be able to apply more casual language (ie. to know what slang words to use and the appropriate context in which to use them). Furthermore, a learner of a second language reaches a point in his/her identity development in the new language where s/he feels legitimized as a speaker of this language and s/he feels a desire to use language as a native speaker would – to play with it, alter it, essentially, to own it. If a speaker does not feel a connection, comfort or desire to connect with or in his/her new language, this use of the colloquial would not occur, which is why I chose to use this as an indicator of growth. However, one limitation of using this as an indicator is that it is not necessarily as precise a tool of growth measurement as it is open to debate as to what constitutes colloquial language exactly and to what degree of comfort or acculturation has really been reached. Conversely, an easier and more scientifically concrete way of indicating growth in the new language is through the development in academic vocabulary, sentence structure and grammatical errors. However, I feel paying attention to both the hard and soft ways of measuring growth are important to gain a full and more robust picture of the type and depth of development that has occurred in the student (ie. progress of a more ingrained feeling of *ownership* over the language).

2.) What is the impact of participating in a classroom social networking site on the development of ELLs' bicultural identities?

Using Berg's (2007) content analysis, I examined the digital and print-based texts the students produced with the theme of bi-cultural identity -- including the students' rough work and completed assignments. I did this in combination with a Multimodal Text analysis (Jewitt, 2008; Hull & Katz, 2006) of the students' activity on the Ning, looking for ways the students

represented themselves through text, image and sound over the course of the study and how this may have changed. In a chart, I coded and analyzed each participant's profile page (the visual breakdown); his/her peer interactions (through participation in group discussions or individual comments); his/her involvement in academic discussions and his/her involvement in informal chat with peers. Across each case, I analyzed the content, looking for themes and sub-themes that emerged across categories and important identity representation changes over the three-month period. In addition, using participant observation field notes, I looked for how the students chose to represent themselves at the beginning of the project, in the middle and at the end of the project. These were categorized and compared across cases.

Content analysis of detailed participant observation field notes regarding the students' face-to-face and online discussions about their various identities was also used. Here, I looked for a greater frequency of student participation in group and peer discussions.

Both content (Berg, 2007) and discourse (Gee, 2011) analysis were used to deconstruct the formal post-project interview transcripts, which centered on the topic of bi-cultural identity. I drew on the content of the students' answers regarding their identity to gain a deeper understanding of how they viewed themselves before and after the study. These answers were coded for themes (Charmaz, 2006) and the emergent themes were then compared across different cases to identify patterns in the responses (Black, 2007).

Finally, content (Berg, 2007) and discourse (Gee, 2011) analysis of the students' answers regarding their identity on the pre- and post-project surveys were used. This was done in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the students viewed themselves as learners, legitimized speakers of English, as members of the class, Canadians and/or how they viewed themselves as individuals with bicultural identities before and after the study. These answers were then compared against the answers provided in the students' interviews for triangulation purposes.

3.) What is the impact of participating in a classroom social networking site on the social presence of ELLs in the classroom learning community?

Discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) of the participant observation field notes of the students' informal or social activity on Ning -- in the main chatroom, the special interest groups the students created, the status updates the students posted and the comments they posted on their own and each other's profile walls -- was used to track any developments in their social presence (Garrison, 2009) from the beginning to the end of the study as a result of using Ning's various communication affordances.

Content (Berg, 2007) and discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) were used to analyze the amount and frequency with which the students responded to their peers' writing and the teacher-initiated discussions. Any increase in frequency and quantity over time was noted and analyzed in combination with any gains in the students' social activity in the physical classroom. This was done to determine if an increase in informal and/or formal activity on Ning was a predictor of an increase in social activity in the physical classroom.

All of the data was coded for themes and compared across categories to determine the degree to which the participants' language and literacy skills developed; their identity and their social presence over the course of the study.

4 Findings

4.1 Impact of participating in a classroom social networking site on the development of ELLs' language and literacy skills

As a result of introducing Ning in the classroom, and using it every day over the three-month period of the study (both during and after regular school hours), I noticed a marked improvement in the ELLs' use of, and confidence operating in, the English language, specifically with regards talking and writing. There was an increase in their use of academic and colloquial language which became apparent in their writing, both on Ning through peer comments and in their poetry, and also verbally in class as they began to participate more in class discussions and to speak with peers they had either never spoken to before or had spoken to only minimally. One explanation for this increased use of the English language and the ELLs' confidence in using it, was perhaps that Ning provided an informal arena for the students to witness the interactions between native speakers and the ways in which they used English – both colloquially and in more formal ways (i.e. through peer comments and teacher-initiated discussion posts).

Asynchronous participation on Ning, allowed for processing time for the ELLs, who may then have felt more comfortable using Chat in real time. Once the students had witnessed enough to participate themselves, they participated only to the degree in which they felt comfortable. It was a low-stress environment where the students had the autonomy and agency to decide when and where they felt most comfortable to participate. Ning provided the students with an opportunity to practice their formal writing, creative writing and 'chat speak'. Below are three case study examples to highlight the above findings.

4.1.1 Rita

One girl in particular, Rita, who was from Afghanistan and otherwise nearly silent in the physical classroom, instantly took to the chat feature at the beginning of the study and started chatting with peers she had never spoken to before. As the researcher it was interesting to observe how little prompting or encouragement she needed in order to begin engaging in the classroom community in a marked way. In this case, all the ELL needed was a tool with which she felt comfortable using and she instantly felt both the desire, agency and lack of self-

consciousness to begin reaching out to peers she had never interacted with previously. This is in keeping with Hung and Yuen's assertion that a hybrid face-to-face and online environment may be the ideal setting in which to learn a second language. As other students in the class engaged in conversation with Rita on Ning, I noticed this initiated a cycle whereby Rita then became more present in Ning's chatroom. She wanted to continue connecting with those who were willing to chat with her. The comfort and trust she built on Ning with peers eventually translated into a level of comfort in speaking with her peers in the physical classroom; hence, the simultaneous development of both her written and oral English language skills. I believe that using Ning allowed the ELLs, and very obviously in Rita's case, to be Legitimate Peripheral Participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the learning community, slowly acquiring language and writing skills and exercising more involvement in her learning community as she became more comfortable. This development became obvious in month two of the study. Norton-Peirce (1997) talks about acquiring a social identity and how that allows ELLs to evolve from "illegitimate speaker" to "legitimate speaker" with the right and power to "impose reception" (p. 23-24). Whereas Rita was almost silent in class prior to the introduction of Ning and did not speak with anyone other than one other student from Afghanistan, towards the end of the study, she was having basic conversations with the students in her table group and she was much more willing to express herself and her opinions/perspectives in class. Overall, there was a marked improvement in her language and writing skills, such as an increase in vocabulary and improvement in sentence structure over the three-month period. The first poem below is indicative of Rita's grasp of the English language in month one of the study:



Figure 7. Rita's poem number one

Although acrostic poetry does not typically include long sentences, Rita's sentence structure was particularly short and basic with grammatical errors and some awkwardly phrased sentences such as "Everyday I am coming at to school" and "Many people is in the school" which reflected some of her challenges with sentence structure and noun-verb agreement. However, in month two of the study, Rita began to play with longer, more complex sentences in her poetry that expressed either more than one idea or included more than one description:

I am kind and caring.

I like doing something great.

I like to keep promises.

I like to be everyone together.

I like to be nice and happy.

I like to have friends.

Figure 8. Rita poem number 2

While there are still grammatical concerns, specifically the sentence “I like to be everyone together,” she has managed to develop a consistent theme in her poetry – expressing the things that she likes – and she has developed a basic, consistent structure, beginning most sentences with “I like.” The combination of improved sentence structure, compound sentences and a sensitivity to repetition, style and the structure of her poem point to a development in her proficiency and competency in the English language. Poetry, unlike straight prose, not only requires a level of competency in the language one is using, but it also requires a certain level of comfort in order for the writer to engage in the creative process and to play with structure. Without an evolved relationship with the language, one would not possess the skills to compose poetry in a second language. That Rita has achieved this, (however basic) skill, indicated to me that while her grammar might still have not been perfect at this stage, development in her literacy skills had occurred.

Finally, in month three of the study, Rita produced the following limerick poem with no overt errors in spelling or grammar. She also managed to adhere to the style and form of limerick poetry – not an easy genre with its rigid syllabic structure and inclusion of a prescribed rhyme scheme. Rhyming can be difficult for English Language Learners who may not have the vocabulary necessary to craft rhymes easily; however, Rita was able to rise to the challenge in this last month of the study and she created a poem that not only met the expectations of the genre but which was also reflective of a noticeable development in her language and literacy skills from month one:

Me

There is a girl who likes to stay.

She knows how to write and play.

She likes to read.

She likes to lead.

She likes to hope and likes to pay.

Figure 8. Rita poem number 3

As Rita continued to improve in her poetry, experimenting with more complex sentence structure and sophisticated vocabulary, and as she received encouraging comments from her

peers, Rita was further motivated to apply herself in her writing, most likely because the work she produced took on another dimension. She was no longer simply producing work for the teacher; she was writing for a greater audience – her contemporaries who were providing her with positive and reinforcing feedback. This type of positive feedback can be seen in the screen cap below taken from Ning:

Comment 1: Melody Jdyn on March 6, 2013 at 13:09
Wow! This was really good! You found a good topic and added something new to make it unique :)

Comment 2: warrensuckla on March 6, 2013 at 18:13
love the description

Comment 3: Misha on March 6, 2013 at 18:53
Good Job Reema. Keep up the good work !!!!

Comment 4: Vaidehee Trivedi on March 6, 2013 at 19:53
wow reema u learned allot good job

Comment 5: Noha Sayed on March 6, 2013 at 23:33
I love your work, good job! Nice vocabulary and I loved your poem

Figure 9. Peer feedback on Rita’s free verse poem

In Rita’s post-study interview of the use of a SNS in the classroom to learn English, Rita explained: “...your English gonna be more when you read more than English book, so...” Rita appreciated the increased opportunities to practice using her English in real-life situations. In this way, she was able to take her theoretical understanding of the English language and apply it in low-stakes, real world settings.

4.1.2 Zara

Another ELL student in one of the other grade six classes, Zara, had a similar experience to Rita, however, what seemed to have made the largest difference for her in terms of her willingness to engage in literacy activities was the multimodality embedded in the digital tools, such as Glogster and iMovie. One teacher explained that the digital tools played a major role in engaging the students at the outset of the study and keeping them interested:

I think they really enjoyed tapping into a lot of different creative areas that they might not normally be able to do and, so, I think that it just helped motivate them,

interest them and hook them. And it reached kids, some kids in a way they may not have normally been reached.

This one teacher's observation was true across the board for the ELL students and was particularly true in Zara's case – the multimodality inherent in the type of digital poetry writing we did in the classroom, encouraged her engagement with the writing process and helped develop her English skills. In her post-study interview she explained the process like this using one genre of poetry we did in class as an example: "I liked the postcard poetry because it had, like, pictures and we could write beside the pictures and that's what I really liked about it." When Zara could not articulate a particular feeling, emotion or idea, she was easily able to supplement with a non-text-based or semiotic symbol. She went on to explain: "What I liked is Glogster and, uh, Ning. Glogster we could add things – funny things, any, like, things we like. We could add pictures, we could write, we could... we could add videos, we could add anything." In using the multimodal technology tools that combined the written word with image and sound, Zara was able to instantly engage in the writing/literacy process, alongside her native speaking peers. For the first time, she was on equal literate footing and she felt encouraged to use writing to communicate, as it was not perceived as the same daunting task it may have been in a more traditional literacy activity. Zara was free to supplement her writing with other communication modes to express meaning, emotion, identity and ideas.

In addition, providing the students with Ning, another medium for connection and communication, increased the time in which this student was able to inhabit her English-language world, both within and beyond school hours, and she was able to gain the practice necessary to accelerate her acquisition of the English language. For example, while the students did work in class, Ning was always open. As the students completed their work in class, they were permitted to chat with one another in the chatroom and/or simultaneously post things on each other's walls. This naturally increased the time spent operating in English and connecting with English-speaking peers. So in Zara's case this accelerated her comfort using English as well as her connection to the English language. Furthermore, the online time provided Zara with an additional opportunity to inhabit and develop her English-language identity and practice her English skills.

By the end of the study, she reflected in her post-project interview: "I just... I feel comfortable because I wrote, like, so much things in English, and, uh, I learned more things, more words. And, more things to write." Zara explained that her vocabulary, writing and her

overall confidence in English developed over the course of the three months as a result of Ning.

With respect to all the ELL students, one of the teachers reported that the multimodality inherent in the digital tools:

...really leveled, I think, the playing field for some of the students who are, spec. ed. students or who are ESL students because they could create fantastic pieces of work. For example, their Glogs that they did. And they don't stand out as being any... different...or, it allowed them to just do it with ease... So the struggle for them was gone...and their end products were amazing.

4.1.3 Henry

Henry was another ELL student who was very quiet at the beginning of the study. An immigrant from Russia, he struggled with English skills and, consequently, with making meaningful connections with his peers. However, over the course of the three-month study, signs of an emergent writerly ‘voice’ appeared on Ning.

Henry was able to write and share various poems that explored his life before Canada and life in Canada, and these were of a similar writing quality as his native-English speaking peers. This was, at least in part, a result of the multimodality involved in the writing tasks, which allowed the ELLs to supplement textual communication with visuals. In the post-project interview, when questioned on how he has changed as a result of the project, Henry explained that he has improved with regards “Talking in English and writing... Yea. And reading.” As multimodal poetry does not adhere to the rigid structures of formal writing that requires a close attention to proper sentence structure, this may also have been a factor in encouraging the ELLs to engage in the writing process. In addition, Henry always appeared to be motivated by the technology tools and the opportunity to share his experiences. As all the students were required to comment on their peers’ work, he also gained practice in writing simple, yet constructive, feedback to his peers regarding their poetry. This increased time spent on Ning sharing work, posting comments to peers, reading peers’ work and interacting with others in the main chatroom helped Henry gain more experience in the English language which translated into an improvement and increased comfort level using English overall.

One area Henry did not seem to excel in to the same degree as his other ELL peers was in his aural or speaking skills, at least when it came to his academic work (ie. in-class presentations and the spoken word poem) or in discussing his experiences during the project with me in the

post-project interview. Although Henry was prolific in his textual and multimodal activity/communication on Ning, the development of his speaking skills from what I could observe did not seem congruent or in line with the progress made in his writing. Spoken word is generally a challenging genre for any student, ELL or otherwise, as it requires a degree of performance and for one to perform, s/he must have a certain amount of confidence in his/her abilities and a trust that whomever s/he is performing to will not judge too harshly. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) discuss how speaking is the most anxiety provoking second language activity of them all. So, in this sense, it is not a surprise that in his spoken word recording uploaded to YouTube, Henry spoke quietly, at times inaudibly, and did not enunciate many of his words, leaving the meaning/sentences completely obscured. More than likely, the anxiety MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) reference in relation to the act of speaking for an ELL is what Henry was experiencing. He may have also been intimidated by the idea of his poem going on YouTube, which is a very public forum, even though we articulated to the three classes that the poems were being set to private and only viewable by the teachers and their peers.

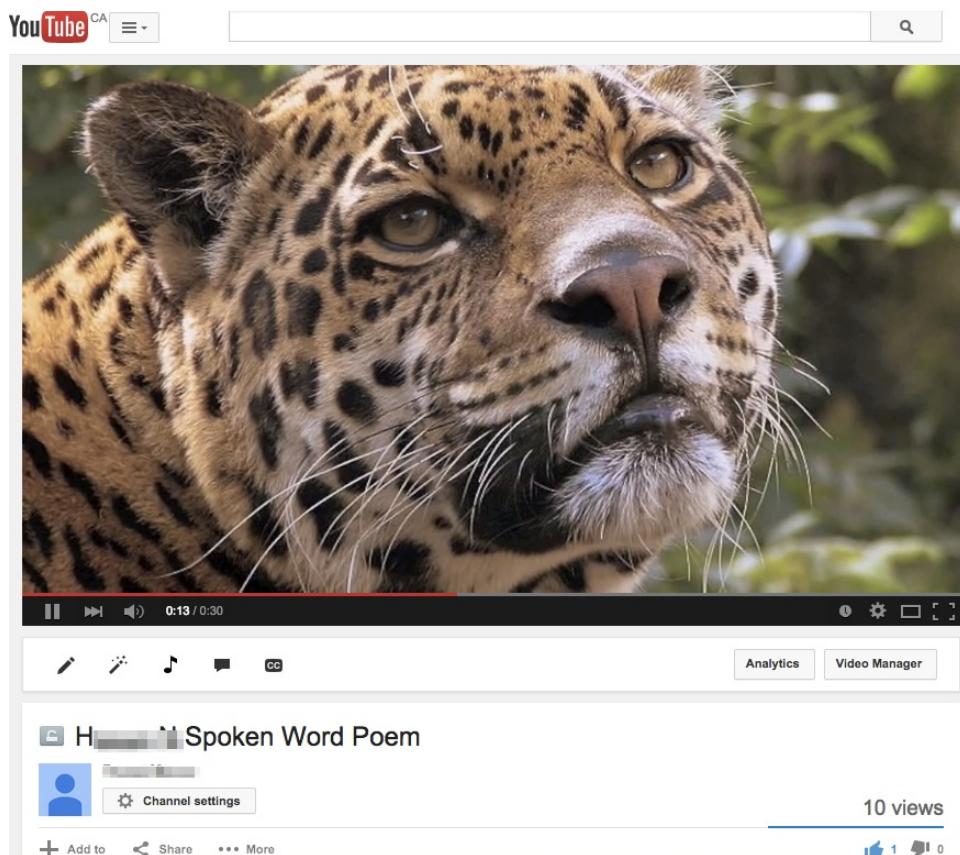


Figure 10. Henry's spoken word poem

It is easiest to see in his post-project interview, the comparison Henry drew between his persona online and his persona in the physical classroom. He was very aware that he was much more open and communicative on Ning (ie. through the written word) than in a real-time, physical setting where speaking would be required. Not only does he explain this in the interview, but he explains it using as few words as possible to get his point across. I sensed his reluctance to speak or his unease during the interview:

What kinds of things did you share?
 H: Like, sometimes I'm chatty when I'm on Ning.
OK
 H: And when I'm in class, I'm, like, quiet.
You're quiet?
 H: Yea.
So why do you chat more on Ning?
 H: The people can't see your face (said quietly)
Sorry, a bit louder...
 H: Like, it's fun.
OK, so why are you less shy on Ning, though?
 H: I can be like...talk a lot, like chat.
Do you feel like your English has gotten better?
H: Yea
How has it gotten better?
H: Like, doing poem.

Figure 11. Screencap 1 from Henry's interview transcript

While Henry certainly made advances in his written and multimodal communication during the study, it was noteworthy that the development or outwardly expression of his aural skills lagged. In the next section on bi-cultural identity development, I propose one possible reason for this. In any event, in the formal or academic writing to his peers on Ning (ie. feedback on his peers' poetry), Henry was positioned as one who was able to both produce and critique writing, which may have helped build his self-esteem and competency in this area, in addition to all the informal writing he also engaged in through the chat feature. The asynchronous nature of Ning, allowed Henry to think, craft, edit and when necessary, ask the teacher for help before posting his comments, which I believe he found more desirable and motivating than the act of speaking.

4.2 Impact of participating in a classroom social networking site on the development of ELLs' bicultural identities

In keeping with the understanding that literacy is a social practice and that new social networking platforms offer educational opportunities for students to create or assume social identities beyond the traditional classroom context, a new space for learning was opened up. As important as it is for students to use technologies for thinking, organizing ideas, creating multimodal products to represent their understandings, it is equally important to offer them opportunities to connect with each other, build relationships with the people in their learning communities, and explore their emerging identities.

The digital tools opened a new space for the students to start exploring their emerging bi-cultural identities. In informal class discussions many students self-identified as neither exclusively Canadian nor as a hyphenated Canadian, but rather as members of the culture associated with their countries of origin. This was especially evident in the students' digital work at the project's outset. As one teacher explained:

...a lot of the work—I was surprised at how it was, you know, flags of their countries, images of their countries, like, that's who they see themselves as. Even if they were born here just shortly after their parents arrived, they still see themselves as that other cultural group and when you think about it that makes sense because they're...that's where they are most of the time. I mean we only have them 5 hours a day for 194 days of the year so it makes sense but you don't realize how strong their identity or their connection with that culture is and it kind of maybe explains some of the things that you see.

The emergence of one's awareness of multiple group memberships is witnessed in the words of an Afghani boy in the study who noted, "First I thought I only had one identity, but then when we did the poems and stuff, I feel like I'm more than one person." Interestingly, this revelation occurred for many of the students through both the poetry writing activities and the reflective communication they engaged in with their peers on Ning. One girl articulated her new understanding of the possibility of a hybridized identity like this: "I think I learned that there's quite a difference between two cultures and then also like you could also blend them together..."

The digital media enabled students to easily share details about their cultural heritage, values and life experiences, opening lines of communication and bringing an acute awareness to the diversity in the class. For example, one boy from Afghanistan wrote about witnessing the devastation of war in his country before coming to Canada. A fellow student had this to say about his classmate's experience of war: "Before he had shared this poem on Ning, I never realized how much hurt he got. There was a poem called 'Where I've Come From' and he wrote about the things that happened in Afghanistan, and he said that there's a lot of war and terror..." All students were encouraged to write about their cultural heritage in their poetry, share it on Ning and leave positive comments for some of their peers. As a result, every student's experience was validated, not only by the teacher but also by his/her peers. Said one teacher, "They appreciated being valued for who they were and what they brought to [the project]." Another teacher went on to describe what the students learned about each other:

...they realized I think that they were different, that they had different identities and that was ok, but also that it was kind of like they were the same. There was a lot of things that were the same about them so I think they became more empathetic towards each other because a lot of the students... wrote about war and the atrocities that they had seen in their homeland...I don't think they realized what that person was carrying with them and that there was more to them sometimes than just what they were seeing in the person who sat across from them.

4.2.1 Rita

Over the course of the three months, Rita's disposition in the classroom changed significantly. It was as though the more she was given the opportunity to explore and perform her bicultural identity, the more open, friendly and communicative she became in class with both her English-speaking peers and her teacher. In the post-project interview, Rita explained that when she first came to Canada she was shy and stand-offish with her peers: "I like acting like I'm not here." This was most likely due to Rita's lack of a solid sense of identity at that point in her new environment. Identity is fluid and context-dependent, so when one is re-located, it can be disorienting. The individual must re-define him/herself against new norms and within a new community and this transnationalism can be problematic. It comes with its own set of issues, which may include conflicts that arise when an individual's out-of-home values conflict with the at-home values for example; however, I am working from the premise that developing a hybrid identity is the healthy and desired outcome of transnationalism (Hall, 1991).

Rita also explained that "the first time I came here I was, like, mean." This is an understandable defense mechanism for someone who is uncomfortable or unsure of his/her identity, values and sense of place in his/her new community. However, Rita continued to explain that as she had greater contact with her peers on Ning and through the various digital activities exploring identity, she became more comfortable. She explained that through this project, "the people were... they talk to me more." When asked if she felt more comfortable now speaking or writing in English -- essentially I wanted to gauge whether or not she had started to feel like a legitimate user of the English language -- she responded positively saying "Yea. Because when you like write something or copy something and so you know this one means this..." As a result of Ning and her increased exposure to and use of English, she developed a certain amount of confidence in her ability to write in English and to understand text she was

reading and writing in class. This reflected a level of competency that was simultaneously developed as her bi-cultural identity, connection to her learning community and sense of legitimacy as an English speaker was developed. Furthermore, the connection with her peers perpetuated a cycle of acculturation where the more she constructed and embodied her new identity, the more connected she became to her classroom community and the more connected she became to this community, the more acculturated she became in terms of adopting Canadian norms, social practices and using English more frequently and with greater confidence. Rita's classroom teacher observed the following about all students in the study from different cultural backgrounds who were given this opportunity to explore their various identities using the multimodal tools, and I think it is particularly true for Rita:

I think it really helped them. It really honoured their own search for identities. So the whole unit was built around a search for identity: who are we, where do we come from. And I think this honours their journey that they're trying to figure out themselves and many of them come from so many different areas that this project really helped them discover.

4.2.2 Zara

Zara struggled with finding her place and voice in her new culture and language. Ning was instrumental in helping her in her acculturation process. She explained that through Ning, "I learned by my friends because they told me a lot about Canada and different types of things." Through the special interest groups she joined online and the chat she witnessed in the main chatroom at the beginning of the project, Zara was exposed to another line of information about Canadian identity and culture. Like Lave and Wenger's (1991) Legitimate Peripheral Participant, Zara was able to witness what it meant to be Canadian – ways of interacting online and what Canadians value and hold as symbols of Canadian culture. She explained how Ning helped her to figure out her own identity and values over the course of the three months and make new connections with her peers through her text-based interactions on Ning: "I think...when I post things that I think they're right, it's right, so [my peers] comment and I see what they think and we could like know each other better 'cause I know what they think and they know what I think." This performance of her opinions was important as it allowed her to see what other people thought about them and re-negotiate her beliefs/values within this new cultural context. Another important finding with Zara, and many of the ELL students, was that by the end of the

study she had come to a more richer understanding of her hyphenated identity: “I learned... I learned more about my Iraqi identity. And I learned about Canadian... my Canadian identity too. I learned more things than I had.” This identity exploration would have been difficult using traditional literacy practices due to a deficit of English language and writing skills. To this effect, she expressed that she “liked the postcard poetry because it had, like, pictures and we could write beside the pictures and that’s what I really liked about it.”



Figure 12. Zara postcard poem.

This multimodal postcard poem of Zara's communicated who she wanted to be, what identity she wanted to have, going into grade 7. She represented her goals primarily with images and included short sentences and words to elaborate on what some of the images represented. In this way, Zara was able to actively construct and present the identity she hoped to embody by her next year of school and in this identity were elements that reflected her new culture. Two items that stood out to me were her images of sports and also recycling/being eco-friendly. These are two interests I understand she has adopted since coming to Canada as her school is very sports-focused – I observed an equal vested interest in male/female sports and her school was also very environmentally conscious and active which was observed in their student-run recycling program

and fundraisers. In this small way, the emergence of Zara's bi-cultural identity was made visible through the multimodal activity.

4.2.3 Henry

The different modes of communicating seemed to encourage the students to express emotions and experiences that had been previously been unshared. One teacher explained, "I found out from one student in particular the hardships that he had gone through in his home country...I didn't understand until he wrote the poem how hard it was for him." At the outset of the study, Henry was very shy and not particularly communicative regarding his values or experiences. This quote from his teacher, however, affirmed my beliefs that schools could play a more active role in helping immigrant students negotiate a hybrid identity in their new homeland. Successful development of a bi-cultural identity has been described using a number of different models (Hutnik, 1986 and Olshtain & Kotik, 2000 for example), but each one strives to avoid or minimize the host of social problems (including the inter-group, inter-generational and interpersonal conflicts) that result from an individual's inability to navigate between different identities in different contexts.

One item that stood out for me in terms of Henry's bi-cultural identity development was that for all the progress Henry made in his written and multimodal communication on Ning, he seemed to not make the same progress as the other two ELLs in his aural skills (relative to his written progress). Henry spoke minimally and quietly during his post-project interview (at times, inaudibly) and his body language, which was closed and angled away from me slightly, communicated his discomfort, which seemed to have been due to a lack of confidence, speaking in English. Of all the interviews I conducted with the ELLs, he was the only individual to indicate by the end of the study that he still felt primarily aligned with his home country. This can be seen in the following transcript excerpt:

OK, so what's your first country?
 H: Russia
So you're Russian-Canadian?
 H: Yea.
And did you learn anything about your Russian-Canadian identity from the project?
 H: A little bit.
OK, what might you have learned? Do you feel like you're Canadian or do you feel like you're more Russian? Which one?
 H: I feel like I'm more Russian.
More Russian?
 H: Yep.
But, do you feel Canadian at all?
 H: Yea, maybe a little bit.

Figure 13. Screencap 2 from Henry's interview transcript

What this communicated to me was that he still had some ground to make up in the acculturation process in terms of accepting his new reality as a Russo-Canadian and developing his bi-cultural identity. I believe Ning and the multimodal tools greatly motivated him to engage with the English language in a low-stress context, but in order for him to have made a stronger progress all around in his language and literacy skills, he would have needed more focused time exploring and developing his bi-cultural identity – that third space between his Russian and Canadian selves.

The importance of navigating and negotiating one's bi-cultural identity is articulated below by one teacher:

This unit was, I think, very effective in having the students become very aware of their identities. I saw more so towards the end where they were becoming more comfortable, more open about where they came from, and how coming to Canada, for example, was such a juxtaposition from where they came. And it... they really opened up... And, it's allowed them to realize that it's ok to be that and to be Canadian and to be the mix that's in the middle of whatever that is and I think they valued that.

From his post-project interview, it seems Henry had just started to become open to this new Canadian element to his identity by the end of the project, as he agreed that he had started to feel more Canadian, "Yea, maybe a little."

Based on the data available, primarily Henry's coded post-study interview where he is reserved in his body language, hesitant to provide answers to the interview questions and unsure

of the gains made in his language skills, the emphasis on his Russian identity in his spoken word video and my coded participant researcher observation notes that describe Henry's disposition in class over the course of the study as consistently withdrawn, I drew the conclusion that Henry was still conflicted about his identity. Across the data, Henry appeared to resist the notion of a new bi-cultural identity in his new environment both from his proclamations, the content of his poetry and from his physical presence and involvement in the classroom, unlike Rita and Zara who appeared to actively engage in this process. I compared the progress of the other ELLs to Henry's experiences and progress in order to add validation to these conclusions.

4.3 Impact of participating in a classroom social networking site on the social presence of ELLs in the classroom learning community

The research team, teachers and students all witnessed the creation of a more inclusive learning community as a result of the collaboration required to learn to use the digital tools. This collaboration also extended to their actual assignments since students were required to post and comment on one another's poems. One teacher explained, "They were very willing to help each other and to ask each other for help...I found them going to each other more." Another teacher agreed with this change in behavior: "I could take my hands off. [T]here's a kid who can understand and [that] kid explains it to the other kid and the kid accepts it." The classroom transformed into a place where the students were "learners who [were] teaching themselves and [were] taking responsibility for that," which made the classroom a democratic place for teaching and learning. One Canadian-born student explained it like this: "I think having the social network in our class kind of built a bond between some of us, like, some people talked to people that they didn't think they would usually talk to. You know, make new friends and stuff." This was facilitated not only by the formal interaction the students were required to have in the classroom and online when commenting on their peers' work, but also through the informal chat sessions the students had on Ning while at home. Effectively, Ning extended the time the students were able to come into contact with one another. In the past, students who only had contact with each other in school, were now able, through Ning, to continue their conversations from home. This allowed for their country-of-origin identities to overlap with their school identities, which may have facilitated a greater level of comfort for the ELLs in terms of sharing their identities and exerting their social presence.

4.3.1 Rita

For Rita the classroom social networking site was a platform to exert her social presence on her terms. It seems to have been a non-threatening arena for her and one that she was extremely motivated to use. It was as if she had been waiting for something like this, some non-verbal tool with asynchronous capabilities, to be able to share herself and her interests with others and to connect with others in her learning community. The speed with which she inhabited her place on Ning was remarkable and she was one of approximately five students across all three classrooms who used Ning consistently (used the chatroom, posted to her page and others' pages) over the course of the three months. Unlike many of the other students, her interest in using Ning as a learning tool and as a tool to connect with peers and exert social presence never waned. An analogy that could highlight the transformation witnessed – it was like gaining access to the emotional landscape of one in a previously catatonic state. Her classroom teacher and her peers all of a sudden gained access to this individual who was previously inaccessible. Of the chat feature, Rita explained: "When you chat, the people know who you are." When asked in the post-project interview what else she did on Ning for people to get to know her better, she explained how the multimodal poems helped her articulate her identity to her peers and share herself with them: "We write a poem and then they read it and then they know us more." In effect, this process of work and identity sharing helped her exert her social presence in the classroom and take up space, literally, in this virtual environment. She was able to leave her mark in the poetry she produced and also in the comments she left for her peers on their poems. Rita felt such a sense of agency through this process that it spilled over into her other activities on Ning and she started exerting her social presence in other ways that can be seen in the following screen cap of her profile wall – a newsfeed-like feature that tracked her activity over a period of time:

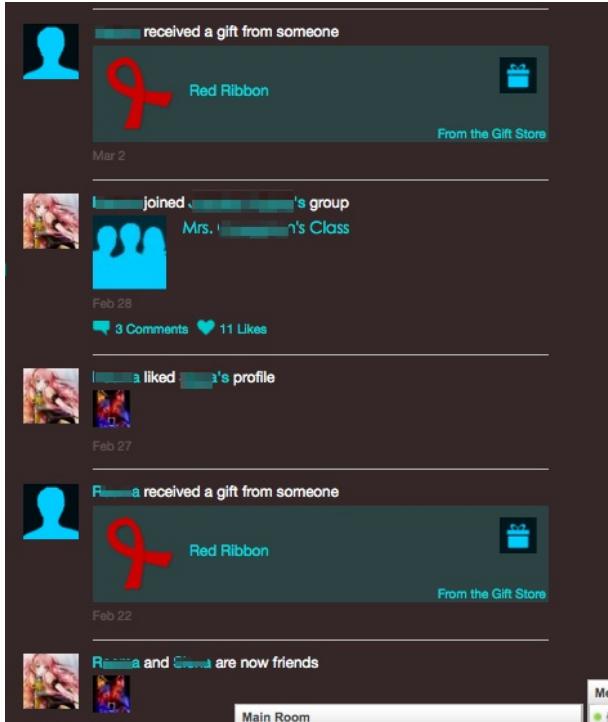


Figure 14. Sample of Rita's online activity/involvement on Ning

Rita joined special interest groups, “friended” classmates and also gave and received gifts online. It was interesting to compare Rita’s social activity and involvement online with her presence in the physical classroom. At the project’s outset, Rita was very active on Ning, but it took approximately one month for this online activity and social presence to then translate over into a greater social presence in the physical classroom. Once this became obvious through increased involvement in class discussions and increased social interaction with peers, the process took off exponentially. When asked about her involvement on Ning and why she thinks it may have helped her connect more with her peers, Rita explained “Because when you talk more with people and then other people know you, when you get outside and then you talking to her, that girl talk to you more. Like, ‘oh you did very well at Ning and you talk more,’ so you can be friends.” Rita was very aware of how this new tool could help her build connections with her peers not only in that context, but she also understood the value of the tool in terms of how it could – and was – helping her develop those connections offline as well. One of the classroom teacher’s articulated in the post-project interview:

...[i]n my class, at the beginning, Ning was this thing, this place, they couldn’t wait to get to and all of the chatting, and it remained more of a social place to come and

have a conversation after school or in the evening or on the weekend and lots of kids loved that. Some of the kids that we've never seen as sort of chatty students became very boisterous online...and then Ning became this place for other students to show their very creative side.

Based on the available data – I compared Rita's increased social activity on the Ning through “friending”, frequency of gift-giving and the time spent in the group chatroom, with my participant researcher observation field notes that detailed her increased social interactions with peers in the classroom to track growth. In this way, I was able to compare the frequency with which she reached out to others on Ning with the frequency with which she began to connect with others in the classroom in informal or academic discussions. I then compared this with Rita's coded interview transcript to confirm, from her perspective, whether or not she felt like Ning had helped her connect more with her peers.

4.3.2 Zara

Zara admitted to not being as verbal and open in person, relating that “I'm shy, like, but, like, on Ning I talk a lot and all that.” Interestingly, this translated to an increase in face-to-face interactions in the classroom. Zara explained of her peers “...because we talked on Ning and then sometimes we talk in person.” She also cited one specific example: “I didn't talk to, like, Sally... she's my friend...like, we're friends now. I didn't talk to her before, but then we talk on Ning and we talk right now.”

For Zara, Ning was a means of negotiating her values and beliefs in this new setting in relation to Canadian values and Canadian cultural identity. It was also a tool to connect her to her peers, allowing her to be a Legitimate Peripheral Participant and to practice her English through the chat and discussion features. It helped her become more outgoing when interacting with her peers as Ning was a relatively stress-free environment. The casual chats and discussions online ultimately translated into face-to-face connections, which helped her to feel more connected to her learning community.

As Zara became more comfortable on Ning, she exerted her social presence more by becoming more active in the general Ning chatroom and in joining more of the special interest groups other students had created. The screen capture below represents the plethora and variety of groups she joined:



Figure 15. Zara's involvement in special interest groups on Ning

Based on the data available – firstly, her initial increased online participation over the course of the study in combination with my coded participant researcher observation notes that detailed Zara's increased participation in classroom activities over the course of the study and finally, Zara's coded interview answers that discussed her identity development process during the time Ning was used in the classroom, I concluded that for Zara, the Ning was the catalyst that drove her focused exploration and construction of identity. The Ning afforded her the low-stress space to begin reaching out to peers, chatting with them more, practicing her English and negotiating her beliefs. Once she had developed some social presence on the Ning by joining groups and having discussions with peers, she became more open and talkative in the physical classroom. I concluded that the safety and connection or community she had begun to develop on the Ning ultimately lay the groundwork for her increased participation in the classroom. This was confirmed for me when I sat down with Zara for her formal exit interview where she explicitly described not only how the Ning helped her negotiate her values in this new environment in Canada but also how it facilitated new friendships for her in the classroom.

4.3.3 Henry

Henry immediately took to Ning platform, personalizing his online space and often using Ning's chat feature to connect with friends and new acquaintances. The following is a screencap of Henry's profile page on Ning, which he used to display his passion for soccer. Interestingly, it was after some of his non-ELL peers discovered his passion for soccer on Ning that they invited him to join in on their soccer games at recess.

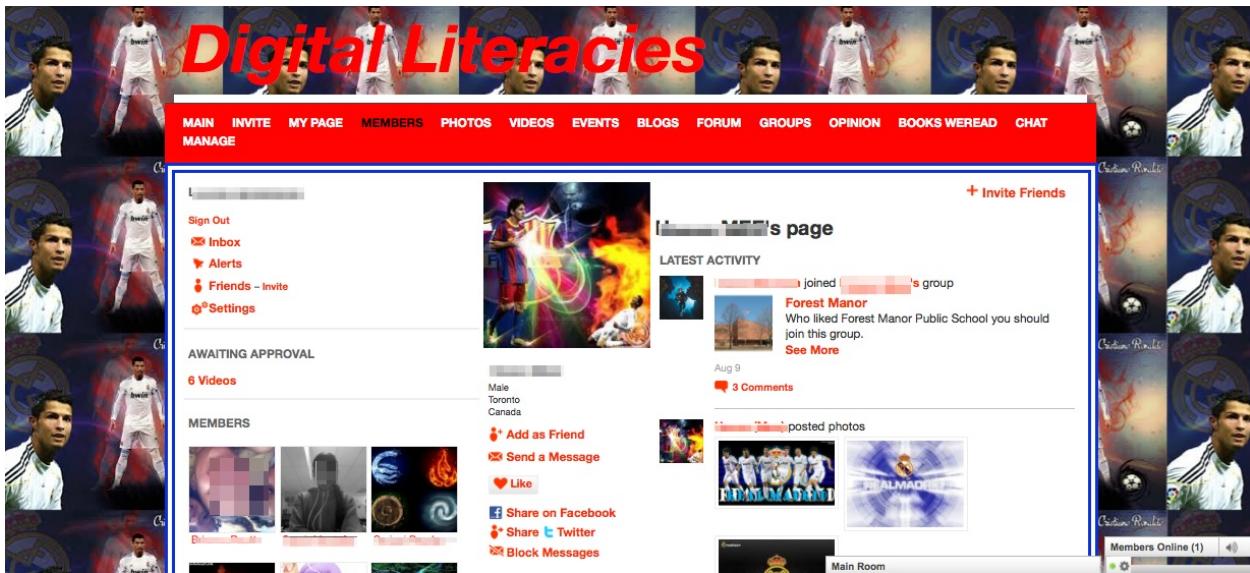


Figure 16. Henry's profile page on Ning

Henry's ability to exert his social presence in this multimodal way allowed him to position himself in the classroom community, to take up space and present his identity, using a medium that was motivating for him and one where he felt in control and comfortable doing so.

In the post-project interview, Henry explained why he felt more comfortable initiating social interactions on Ning (exerting his social presence) saying: “the people can't see your face...I can be like...talk a lot, like chat.” Without the pressures of a verbal face-to-face interaction, Henry felt freer to engage in conversation with his peers which allowed him to further practice his English language and writing skills.

Where he was once nearly silent in class, Henry began reaching out to his classmates. When asked in his interview to elaborate on how he felt a greater sense of ‘belonging’ in Canada as a result of the project: “Talking in English and writing...and reading.” Norton (1997) explains that an ELL must feel like s/he owns English in order to feel like a legitimate speaker. In this case, the student demonstrated that he felt legitimized as a speaker of English. Interestingly, one of the teachers reported the following observation of Henry’s transformation:

He's been struggling as a newcomer trying to find the language, trying to find friends, and on Ning he was in all— every chat wanting to talk to people and people are now including him in their games, in the activities in the classroom and starting conversations with him so he's now smiling more and he's become more comfortable in the classroom.

The inclusivity that was generated in the classroom as a result of Ning was undeniable.

5 Discussion

5.1 Incorporating a Multiliteracies pedagogy

At the centre of this research is a pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) with its four components, which I discuss here as I reflect further on the findings of this study. The first component is *situated practice*. Here, it is necessary to consider students' backgrounds, the experiences they bring to the classroom and how these can be leveraged and included in the learning community. I felt it was important to draw on the ELLs out-of-school identities (national identities, home identities), their literacy practices (in their first language and in English), their interests (sports, arts and other online or digital interests) and their life experiences (both positive and negative) in order to engage them in the writing activities and facilitate the development of their social presence and connection with their peers. Ultimately, I felt that incorporating the ELLs' backgrounds in this way assisted them in moving away from peripheral participation in the classroom writing activities to more central participatory roles. Regarding *overt instruction* in a multiliteracies pedagogy, the research has been helpful in identifying where teachers can scaffold writing activities to allow ELLs to build their vocabulary and their understandings of writing conventions. I discovered that it may have been beneficial for the resource teacher, who was present during most classes, to have provided concentrated and immediate feedback to the ELLs before they posted any formal-writing to Ning. It may have been helpful for the ELLs had he done this. This was done occasionally, but it was not a regular part of the classroom practice. A focus on this could have increased the gains the ELLs made in their syntax and vocabulary. Implementing assistive technology devices and apps in the classroom could have also been beneficial in the context of this study. For example, the predictive word software, Word Q, could have been installed on all the MacBooks to better assist not only the ELLs, but other students who may have had difficulty spelling (further building an inclusive classroom). The software floats on top of any word-processing program and makes recommendations for words it predicts the user is attempting to spell. The other benefit of this program is that it reads words and sentences back to the user, exposing him/her to proper pronunciation. So, this program could have provided the ELLs not only with important scaffolding but also a deeper sense of agency as they could operate in their own learning space

with the necessary language support and not visually stand out in the classroom. Where a teacher's direct support would have also been beneficial, the visual of a teacher constantly at the side of an ELL could affect feelings of agency. Furthermore, going into the study with a better understanding of the ELLs first languages (written and oral) and what types of keyboards they use at home may have provided us with a better context and starting point to understand the transitions and gains these students may have made in our study as they developed their English language skills and identity. It may have better helped us trace their progress and answer the how and why questions pertaining to their individual learning/development processes. Finally, while the teachers did eventually address how to appropriately and positively use Ning, we felt this should have been one of the first items addressed before the students began using and interacting with one another in this virtual space. While most students were respectful of one another at the beginning, there were a few students who exhibited inappropriate behaviour and used inappropriate language. It was at this point that appropriate-use was addressed, however, we realized that this needs to be addressed at the outset of using any "third space" like Ning in order to encourage productive, inclusive and positive interactions – especially as our goal was to encourage the participation of the ELLs and to make sure they felt safe interacting with their peers online.

The third component of a multiliteracies pedagogy, *critical framing*, presented us with some challenges. While the multimodal tools allowed a space for the ELLs to express themselves, there were obvious gaps in the ELLs' understanding of the communication implications of the tools' various features. For example, when creating their spoken word iMovies, oftentimes the images on the screen did not match the words or message. An emphasis on reflective practice here is important for ensuring a high quality of work. When students are guided through a process of critical reflection of their own work, they can gain a deeper understanding of what makes a well-crafted digital product that is thoughtful and effective for its purposes.

The final component of a multiliteracies pedagogy is *transformed practice*. New literacies should be considered as a means to empower people who have traditionally been excluded; in this way, the poetry unit was restructured to include a SNS, which is inherently connectivist and democratic and lends to the co-construction of content, knowledge and identity. In this online world, the students were encouraged to share their experiences, expertise and knowledge, connect with one another and to provide feedback on their peers' work. As a result,

we witnessed a noticeable shift in the classroom pedagogy – away from the transmission model and toward a learner-centred, transformational model, wherein the teachers were no longer the sole knowledge-authority and the students were active participants in their learning.

It is important to note that the positive interactions that transpired between the students, along with the collaborative community of practice that emerged as a result, was possible due to the controlled and deliberative activities in which the students were required to engage. This aligns with the last element in Allport's (1954) foundational *contact hypothesis* theory, which requires an authority to support the process of intercultural exchange. In this study, the teachers acted as the authority, directing and facilitating this process. They established ground rules for online communication and discussed online 'netiquette' which laid the foundation for respectful and effective peer collaboration. As one teacher said:

I think the teacher initially initiated it and encouraged it and then they took off with it, uh, because they could see that no one was biting anybody and was getting along here, so let's just play this game 'cause it's cool. I think that it was encouraged because they may be reluctant and the kid who's receiving the help would be even more reluctant to accept the help so...the more encouragement you give to this process the better everybody feels about it and there's no harm done by somebody you've never talked to or hate, actually hate, coming over to help you with something. All of a sudden the...this emotion you felt from a stranger dissolves. So I saw that happen.

Overall, one of the most important take-aways I observed from implementing a multiliteracies pedagogy that included a social networking site, is that the use of multimodal and digital tools in the language arts classroom can accelerate or maximize language learning for ELLs. The tools not only provide them with the motivation to engage in the language acquisition process but they also provide learners with the necessary input and low-stakes environment that facilitate language acquisition. In particular, Ning provides a platform for ELLs to engage in meaningful and not overly monitored or formal communication. This shifts the language acquisition process away from an active attempt to *learn* a language in the traditional sense (with an emphasis on structure, grammar and language production) and toward a low-stress way of *acquiring* a language where an individual loses him/her self in a highly motivating activity that involves meaningful communication.

5.2 Considerations

Two major considerations became obvious during our study regarding the implementation of a social networking site in the classroom, especially with younger students who may not have experience operating and interacting with one another in a virtual environment. The first consideration was that some students found existing in the digital environment very foreign, which resulted in a relatively disembodied experience when compared to the others who did not find it unnatural to exist synchronously and asynchronously with their peers in a non-physical environment. The second consideration was the necessity of introducing the digital citizenship piece prior to getting all the students on Ning in order to preemptively diffuse potential issues of negative or non-constructive behaviour. In the post-project interviews, one teacher reflected:

I found it interesting when [you] put the chat room up and they didn't know what to do with it and they were completely at a loss... I don't know if they felt comfortable there or... kids just don't converse. They're much more concrete. So when a kid talks, they have an environment— they talk about it, they're in it. When you're online and you're abstracted and remote, that's an adult thing, that's a more mature thing. And an awareness of yourself as an electronic being [inaud] is something that they're not there yet as an 11 year old, I don't think. Your identity isn't that strong, so when you're immediately able to contact your friend it's still way more meaningful than having a conversation on some screen. No matter whether they talk about it and whether they think it's mature or cool, they still don't know what to do with it.

This teacher's observation was echoed in a post-project interview with two of the non-ELL students who had not previously had extensive experience operating in and connecting with others in a virtual environment. When asked, "And are there certain students on Ning that you talked to that you wouldn't normally talk to?" One student explained: "I would talk to the same people...[but] For me it seems easier in person." While for many of the ELLs, it was easier for them to talk to and connect with their classmates online, for a select few of the non-ELL students, having to interact in an "abstracted and remote" environment (as defined by the teacher in the quote above), it was more of a challenge. Another non-ELL student described this of her

experience: "...just when you try to talk to someone it's kinda hard to talk to them cause they can't really hear you or really see you. It's a little hard to communicate." The same student went on to explain some of her frustrations in getting adjusted to the asynchronous nature of Ning, "...cause maybe you want to talk to someone but they're not there. Or someone wants to talk to you but you're not there." The immediacy, synchronous nature and physicality of interacting in-person, which often involves reading gesture, tone of voice, context and facial expression – essentially non-verbal cues -- in addition to what is communicated verbally, is lost or rather, it is removed.

Furthermore, other than the required peer comments, the replies to teacher-initiated discussion posts, and the general chatroom, the students did not seem to know how to have meaningful conversations in this online environment. For example, even though the students created a variety of special interest groups on Ning, laying the foundations for like-minded students to congregate and discuss the group's topics, limited critical discussion was observed. In addition to the above teacher's observation that "the kids just don't converse" one non-ELL student also remarked on the special interest groups she joined: "There was no discussions there..." Therefore, based on the fact that the only meaningful discussions were observed in the formal discussion posts and in the peer comments on student work, it appears as though younger students need to have a framework to work within, usually initiated by a perceived authority figure, before meaningful discussion will unfold. They appear to require a leader of sorts to start off the discussion, set the stage and provide the parameters for how the discussion should unfold or "look." This absence of these boundaries seems to discourage critical engagement and conversation. This is not to say that the students do not have the capacity or capabilities to engage in meaningful discussion online in the absence of a perceived authority setting the guidelines, however, it could be reflective of the developmental stage they are in where they may not feel the confidence to inhabit that type of leadership role. At this stage of adolescent development, often students are most concerned with fitting in, as opposed to standing out, and they have generally not yet begun to challenge authority or their perceived roles/places in the classroom and/or society.

One of the most significant gains from the study was how the students learned how to respectfully interact with one another online – an important part of any digital citizenship training. At the start of the study, the students were not adequately versed in digital/online etiquette, otherwise known as netiquette. As a result, when some of them first got on Ning and

were “set free” in the main chatroom, they conducted themselves as disembodied users with little personal responsibility or respect for the fact that those they were interacting with were real human beings with emotions and feelings beyond the screen. We quickly realized it was necessary to interject and sensitize the students to this fact through a discussion on the negative effects of online bullying and personal responsibility. The researchers and classroom teachers also devised a rough “monitoring” schedule whereby we rotated being a presence in the main chatroom. While we did not specifically exert our presence by chatting with the students in the chatroom, the students knew an adult was always present and monitoring the chatroom’s activity. This I believe caused the students to first check themselves and to reflect on and then perhaps revise what they chose to say in the chatroom. One teacher observed of this process:

But I found that on the other hand, now they know about this [netiquette] and we’ve talked about how to behave on [Ning] so they have some ground rules for future chat rooms and so on. I think they’re going to be, um, better prepared for that because we actually went and taught them....So, I think that was very useful.

While Big Brother type monitoring may not have been the perfect solution to the inappropriate behaviour we witnessed at the beginning of the study, it certainly caused the students to pause and think about their behaviour, which I believe had the positive effect of causing the students to reflect on their actions before simply acting without thinking. This meta-cognitive process, this slowing down and thinking about the effect of their actions, had a positive effect on the students’ behaviour – in an educational setting, the students had the opportunity to practice what positive online behaviour looks like and why it is important. These students had the added benefit of becoming sensitized to how their online actions actually have an effect on others in the real world. Whatever the students did or said online to one another had immediate, or near-immediate, observable ramifications in the flesh. It was impossible for a student to, for example, bully another student online and then for him or her not to see the effects in the classroom.

5.3 Limitations

Unfortunately, due to time constraints and the teachers’ need to continue with EQAO preparation (the yearly Ontario Standardized test) some of the lessons were rushed – the critical thinking pieces and thoughtful reflections were at times glossed over, as a result. Also, proper instruction regarding each digital tool’s affordances and constraints was lacking, which affected the

outcomes of some of the final products – particularly the spoken word videos. Some students did not make full use of the communication features inherent in the video medium, which would have greatly improved the quality of their videos.

In addition to the aforementioned limitations, some of the interview questions at times may have been leading due to the language barrier between the interviewer and the ELL students. The interviewer felt it was necessary to use simplified Yes/No questions when more open-ended ones were found to be more difficult to answer. It was noticeably difficult for the students to formulate coherent answers to more openly phrased questions, or to find the right words with which to answer. This problem was also noted on the surveys so perhaps having a bilingual peer or teacher to consult in order to get the most accurate understanding of the students' answers would have benefited the project.

6 Conclusions

From this research, I conclude that a multiliteracies pedagogy that includes the use of a SNS can help develop ELLs language and literacy skills; bi-cultural identity development and their social presence in the classroom.

Ning afforded the students the ability to be with peers in a low-stress environment. Importantly, the students were able to experiment with competent writerly identities, which encouraged them to reach out and connect with people they had never talked to before. As this “third space” defies the normal boundaries of school, home and nation, the students were given the freedom to construct versions of themselves, not tied to the usual labels (either positive or negative) from these other discourse worlds. Finally, they were able to collaborate with those in their learning community to co-construct knowledge, specifically through peer-teaching, and to exert their social presence through identity performance on their profile pages, in special interest groups, in the chat room and through comments on peers’ formal and informal discussion posts.

It is clear that employing a multiliteracies pedagogy was instrumental in sufficiently engaging the students so that the necessary climate of an inclusive learning community could be established, wherein bi-cultural identities could be explored and developed. The digital tools were also essential in facilitating low-stakes/low-stress exchanges between students of differing cultural backgrounds as they contained multimodal communication functions that extended beyond traditional verbal and written communication. The tools greatly aided the students in the exploration and development of their bi-cultural identities and helped to create a cohesive community of practice in the classroom where students not only tolerated one another, but were actively involved in collaboration.

The study demonstrates that bi-cultural identities are co-constructed, and that this can take place in both the online and physical world. As adolescents interact with one another and become exposed to new ideas, cultures and values, they begin to renegotiate their group memberships allowing for multiple overlaps and identity claims. When a safe common space is created (via Ning in this case) cultural borders become more porous, which establishes the climate for the exploration of new (hybrid/bi-cultural) identities. Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1994) recognizes the value of moving away from singular conceptualizations of

national and cultural identification. In the process of migrating, “Bhabha would say one agrees to inhabit the in-between spaces, the grey areas and the border terrain” (Eamer, 2008). As a result, one no longer has the luxury of inherently and without question knowing where one belongs. However, the ability to reposition oneself with a degree of comfort and fluidity and to adopt new identifiers, without compromising old ones, is gained.

Another insight gleaned from this study is that when adolescents from seemingly disparate backgrounds are given a common goal and asked to collaborate, for example, in learning to use new technology or in peer-editing one another’s work, the potential to build a cohesive community arises. However, during the study it was also clear that in order to bring about these positive outcomes, it is necessary for an authority to be present in order to ensure the interactions remain positive. This is done through deliberative community building activities and intervention/conflict resolution when necessary.

In moving forward, teachers must willingly embrace their roles as models and overseers of positive online communication so that students are well prepared for online interactions and collaborations, which will increasingly become the source of their sense of community and belonging. Teachers must then recognize that they can capitalize on both the face-to-face, as well as the virtual, learning communities created with and for their students as the space wherein identity negotiation for immigrant adolescents can occur. Therefore, teachers can assist in the development of this space through overt and explicit curriculum objectives.

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Appendix A

Adolescents, Identity and Digital Literacy: Consent Letter/Form

LETTER OF INFORMATION – Parents/Students

We are teachers and researchers at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT). With the approval of the UOIT Research Ethics Board (REB #11-107) and the TDSB and working with your child's classroom teacher, we are about to embark on a project designed to learn more about the relationship between the use of digital media as teaching/learning tools and the development of adolescent digital literacy and identity. We anticipate using this information in the development of digital literacy projects that honour students' out-of-school literacies (i.e. their participation in online spaces). Data results may also be published in journals and presented at conferences.

We are asking for both your consent and that of your son/daughter to participate in this study. Data will be collected from students in the class at various times during the school year. This Digital Media Unit will be a part of the regular classroom program. Students will study a variety of texts, some of which will be print-based and some of which will be digital. Some of the topics that will be discussed will include body image, cyberbullying, and the role of media in adolescents' lives. The culminating project will be student presentations of a variety of texts they authored using digital media. Data will be collected using the following methods:

- A survey will be administered at least a week before the Unit to capture information such as students' attitudes towards using technology as well as their current use of web-based tools such as social networking sites. An analysis of student responses will be conducted to identify themes that emerge. The findings will be summarized and presented to the students in the first class of the Unit, for discussion and further elaboration. This data will be used as a baseline for tracking how students' views of technology and their digital literacy skills change and/or develop over the course of the project.
- The researcher and research assistant(s) will observe classroom activities and interactions and collect data using observation notes, audiotaping and videotaping of selected classroom proceedings.
- Selected students will be interviewed at key points of the unit to gain more in-depth perspective of noteworthy classroom events identified through observation. The digital texts created by the students will also be analysed and may be viewed during the interviews to explore the design choices they made in creating the texts.
- In the last class of the Unit, students will revisit their responses in the survey administered prior to the Unit, record any changes that might have occurred, and discuss these in small

groups and in a whole class setting.

A sample set of questions for the discussion is attached for your information.

Your child may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and can choose not to answer specific questions. The information your child provides will be anonymous and will be combined with the responses of other students into a summary report. The tapes and transcripts of classroom proceedings, as well as any other data collected, will be stored securely at UOIT under the lead researcher's supervision and will be destroyed after five years.

Your signature on the consent form indicates that you have read this letter, understand its contents, and authorize the participation of your son/daughter in this research project. Please note that your child's signature is also required. If you have questions about this project, feel free to call Dr. Janette Hughes at (905) 409-9800, or the UOIT Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, who can provide answers to pertinent questions about the research participants' rights (compliance@uoit.ca (905)721-8668, ext. 3693). Thank you for considering your child's participation in this research study.

Dr. Janette Hughes, Faculty of Education, UOIT

Laura Morrison, UOIT (Research Assistant)

Adolescents, Identity and Digital Literacy

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information relating to the above-titled project, I understand the proposed research and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw my son/daughter from the study at any time. I understand my child has the right to withdraw from the study at any time and I understand that the information collected is for research purposes only.

Student Name (please print): _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Pre-survey Questions

1. Do you use any social networking sites? **Yes/No**

2. If yes, please check the sites you use:

<input type="checkbox"/> Facebook <input type="checkbox"/> Twitter <input type="checkbox"/> Google Plus <input type="checkbox"/> My Space <input type="checkbox"/> Instagram	<input type="checkbox"/> Ning <input type="checkbox"/> Edmodo <input type="checkbox"/> MyFakeWall <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
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3. For what do you use the sites you just checked in Question 2?

<input type="checkbox"/> Posting photos <input type="checkbox"/> Commenting on others' photos <input type="checkbox"/> 'Liking' others' photos, status updates, links <input type="checkbox"/> Writing status updates	<input type="checkbox"/> Participating in groups <input type="checkbox"/> Messaging friends <input type="checkbox"/> Chatting with friends <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
--	--

4. How much time per week do you spend using *social networking sites*?

Less than 1 hour 1 – 5 hours 5 – 10 hours 10 – 15 hours More than 15 hours

5. How much time do you spend per week using the *Internet* (*total time – including the time you spend using social networking sites, email, websites etc*)?

Less than 1 hour 1 – 5 hours 5 – 10 hours 10 – 15 hours More than 15 hours

6. What types of technology do you personally own or have regular access to? Please check the items you use:

<input type="checkbox"/> Tablet (iPad, PlayBook etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Video game console (Xbox, wii, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Mp3 Player (iPod, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Handheld video game
<input type="checkbox"/> Smart Phone (iPhone, Android, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Digital camera (still images)
<input type="checkbox"/> Laptop computer	<input type="checkbox"/> Digital Camera (video)
<input type="checkbox"/> Desktop computer	<input type="checkbox"/> Voice recorder
<input type="checkbox"/> Kobo reader	
<input type="checkbox"/> Kindle reader	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____

7. How much time do you spend per week using this personal technology?

Less than 1 hour **1 – 5 hours** **5 – 10 hours** **10 – 15 hours** **More than 15 hours**

8. Of the tech. items you have access to on a regular basis, for what do you normally use them?

Please check the items that apply to you:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Listening to music<input type="checkbox"/> Watching movies/TV shows<input type="checkbox"/> Reading (newspapers/magazines/books)<input type="checkbox"/> Surfing the internet (for fun or research)<input type="checkbox"/> Email (school, personal)<input type="checkbox"/> Social networking/online chat<input type="checkbox"/> Playing single-player games<input type="checkbox"/> Blogging (Blogger, Tumblr, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Posting to Instagram<input type="checkbox"/> Playing multi-player games<input type="checkbox"/> Word-processing<input type="checkbox"/> Recording sound bytes/music<input type="checkbox"/> Recording video<input type="checkbox"/> Taking still images<input type="checkbox"/> Creating visual art <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____
---	---

9. Check off the things you do in your free time/at school and tell us the digital programs you use. For example,

Short stories: I use Microsoft Word or Recording video: I use an iPhone

- Short stories: _____
- Presentations: _____
- Recording video: _____
- Editing movies: _____
- Recording music: _____
- Taking photos: _____
- Recording songs: _____
- Creating posters/greeting cards: _____
- Creating visual art: _____

10. How many hours per week do you use technology in class/school?

Less than 1 hour 1 – 5 hours 5 – 10 hours 10 – 15 hours More than 15 hours

11. Do you enjoy using technology to create school assignments? **Yes/No**

12. What kinds of personal technology items are you allowed to use in class? Please check all items that apply to your class:

<input type="checkbox"/> Digital tablet (iPad, Playbook etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Mp3 Player (iPod etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Smart phone (iPhone, Android, etc) <input type="checkbox"/> Laptop computer <input type="checkbox"/> Desktop computer <input type="checkbox"/> Kobo reader	<input type="checkbox"/> Kindle reader <input type="checkbox"/> Digital camera (still images) <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Camera (video) <input type="checkbox"/> Voice recorder <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____
--	---

13. Do you enjoy using personal tech. items for educational purposes? For example, do you enjoy using your iPhone to record videos or to take pictures? If you do enjoy this, please explain why.

14. When you get to use technology for a school assignment, do you feel more motivated (more excited) to do the assignment? Do you also feel more motivated to do a good job on the assignment? If yes, please explain.

15. Please check any of the following programs you have previously used in school:

<input type="checkbox"/> Voice Thread <input type="checkbox"/> Bitstrips <input type="checkbox"/> iMovie <input type="checkbox"/> Garage Band	<input type="checkbox"/> Comic Life <input type="checkbox"/> Wordle <input type="checkbox"/> Scrapblog <input type="checkbox"/> PhotoStory
--	---

<input type="checkbox"/> Audacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Prezi
<input type="checkbox"/> Photoshop	<input type="checkbox"/> Glogster
<input type="checkbox"/> Power Point	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please list) _____

16. How does your activity online (on Facebook/Twitter/Instagram, in discussion groups or online chatting) help you express who you are and what you like/dislike, to other people?

17. Do you think social networking sites, like Facebook, can help students create an online identity that is different from who they are in person? **Yes/No**

If yes, how?

18. Do you use an avatar? **Yes/No**

19. Is it the same one all the time or does it change? **Stays the same/Changes**

20. List the avatars that you use and where you use them:

Avatars:	Where you use them:

21. On a scale of 1 – 10 (one being of little importance, 10 being of great importance) how important are the following social issues to you. Circle your answer for each question:

Cyber Bullying: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Eating Disorders: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Youth Violence: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Drug/alcohol Abuse: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Depression: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

23. Are there any issues NOT identified in Question 16 that concern you? If so, please list: _____

24. On a scale of 1 – 10 (again, one being of little importance, 10 being of great importance) - how important to you is raising awareness of the previously mentioned social issues (ie. raising awareness in your school, in the community, in the online world/the world at-large).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

25. Does creating a digital project to raise awareness of these social issues interest you? For example, editing an iMovie and sharing it on YouTube; recording a song and sharing it on Facebook; creating a digital poster and sharing it on a blogsite? **Yes/No**

26. Please explain why this would or would not interest you:

27. Do you think social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter should be used to raise awareness for youth issues like depression, cyberbullying, school violence? If yes, why?

28. Do you have any additional comments, concerns, questions? If yes, please explain in the space below:

Appendix C

Post-project Survey Questions

1. Did you enjoy using Ning?

Yes/No

2. Do you think Ning was helpful for exploring your identity?

Yes/No

3. If yes, how was it helpful in terms of exploring your identity and/or sharing your work with your peers?

4. Will you continue using the social networking sites to explore your identity and connect with peers outside the classroom?

Yes/No

5. Do you see yourself using the internet/technology (computers/tablets/MP3 players/Smart phones) more or less after the project? Please check the category that applies to you:

- I will use the internet/technology (computers/tablets/MP3 players/Smart phones) more now.
- I will use the internet/technology (computers/tablets/MP3 players/Smart phones) the same amount.
- I will use the internet/technology (computers/tablets/MP3 players/Smart phones) less now.

6. If you see yourself using the internet/technology (computers/tablets/MP3 players/Smart phones) more now, what do you see yourself using this for (school projects, personal projects, social activism projects). Please briefly explain:

7. What types of technology do you see yourself using more after the project? Please check the items you would like to use more of:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tablet (iPad, PlayBook etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Kindle reader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mp3 Player (iPod, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Digital camera (still images) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Smart Phone (iPhone, Android, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Camera (video) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laptop computer | <input type="checkbox"/> Voice recorder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Desktop computer | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kobo reader | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____ |
-

8. Of the tech. items you want to use more of on a regular basis, for what would you use them? Please check the items that apply to you:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to music | <input type="checkbox"/> Word-processing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watching movies/TV shows | <input type="checkbox"/> Recording sound bytes/music |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading (newspapers/magazines/books) | <input type="checkbox"/> Recording video |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surfing the internet (for fun or research) | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking still images |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Email (school, work, personal) | <input type="checkbox"/> Creating visual art |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social networking/online chat | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____ |
-

9. If you checked any of the items on the right-hand side of the previous question, what kinds of things would you *create* with this technology?

If you checked 'Word-processing' – would you use Microsoft Word to write short-stories or Power Point to create digital presentations?

If you checked, 'Recording video' – what kinds of things would you record? How-to videos for YouTube; short clips for a personal blogsite; projects for class; documentaries, etc.

If you checked 'Taking still images' – what kinds of things would you take photos of – friends/family; artistic shots; images for a personal blogsite, etc.

If you checked 'Recording sound bytes/music' – would you record spoken word poetry, songs, etc.?

If you checked 'Creating visual art' – would you use Glogster or Word to make posters, greeting cards, etc.?

10. How many hours per week do you now hope to use technology in your class/school?

Less than 1 hour 1 – 5 hours 5 – 10 hours 10 – 15 hours More than 15 hours

11. Do you still enjoy using technology to create school assignments? **Yes/No**

12. If you did enjoy using items such as android phones, tablets, recording devices etc., did you feel more motivated to start the project/finish it/do a good job on it? If yes, please explain.

13. Please check off the following programs/platforms you enjoyed using during the project:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ReadWriteThink.org | <input type="checkbox"/> Ning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wordle | <input type="checkbox"/> Write or Die |
| <input type="checkbox"/> iMovie | <input type="checkbox"/> Power Point |
| <input type="checkbox"/> YouTube | <input type="checkbox"/> Glogster |
-

14. Please briefly explain why you enjoyed using these programs the most?

15. Do you now feel technology can help students develop their sense of identity? If so, how?

16. How has your activity online (on Ning, for example) help you express who you are and what you are like, to others?

17. Do you feel social networking sites like FaceBook, Twitter or Ning can help you develop online identities that helps you grow personally? If yes, please explain:

18. What do you now think is important when making an avatar (profil pic/online identity)?

19. Do you know about the meanings associated with your avatar (profil pic/online identity)?

20. Are these important or not important to you?

21. What do you want others to understand about you through your choice of avatar?

22. Do you have any additional comments, concerns, questions? If yes, please explain in the space below:

Appendix D

Student Interview Questions

- 1.) What did you like/dislike most about the project in general? Ning?
- 2.) Do you feel you learned something about your identity through this project?
- 3.) Did you learn something new about your friends and peers as a result of hearing their poetry or interacting with them on Ning?
- 4.) What was your favourite poetry genre and why?
- 5.) Do you think it's important to learn about identity in school? If yes, why?
- 6.) Do you think social networking sites can help students develop their identities?

Why?

- 7.) Do you think technology can help students develop their identities?
- 8.) What was your activity on Ning? For example, what groups did you create and/or join? Did you make use of the Blog feature?
- 9.) Did you like having a social networking site for your class? Why?
- 10.) Do you like using technology in school? Why?
- 11.) Did your interest on Ning ever wane? If yes, why?
- 12.) Do you think your identity is shaped by those around you and if so, how? Can you provide an example?

Appendix E



**RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD
OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES**

Date: June 29th, 2012

To: Janette Hughes (PI), Anne Burke (Co-PI), Stephanie Thompson (Co-PI)

From: Shawn Bullock, REB vice Chair

REB File #: 11-107

Project Title: Adolescents, Identity and Digital Literacy

DECISION: APPROVED

START DATE: June 29th, 2012

EXPIRY: June 29th, 2013

The University Of Ontario Institute Of Technology Research Ethics Board has reviewed and approved the above research proposal. The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and the UOIT Research Ethics Policy and Procedures.

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and approved by the REB.

Always quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

Please familiarize yourself with the following forms as they may become of use to you.

- **Change Request Form:** any changes or modifications (i.e. adding a Co-PI or a change in methodology) must be approved by the REB through the completion of a change request form before implemented.
- **Adverse or unexpected Events Form:** events must be reported to the REB within 72 hours after the event occurred with an indication of how these events affect (in the view of the Principal Investigator) the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol. (I.e. unanticipated or un-mitigated physical, social or psychological harm to a participant).
- **Research Project Completion Form:** must be completed when the research study has completed.
- **Renewal Request Form:** any project that exceeds the original approval period must receive approval by the REB through the completion of a Renewal Request Form before the expiry date has passed.

All Forms can be found at http://research.uoit.ca/EN/main/231307/Research_Forms.html.

REB vice Chair Dr. Shawn Bullock, EDU shawn.bullock@uoit.ca	Ethics and Compliance Officer compliance@uoit.ca
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Appendix F

Adolescent Identity & Literacy Development	
Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quieter students came out of their shells with the Ning (using the chat feature in particular): "A third highlight was how it gave some kids confidence... They might be shyer in person but they were less shy using, uh, social media." <p style="margin-top: 10px;">"Some of the kids that we've never seen as sort of chatty students became very boisterous online."</p> - Teachers gained access to some of the students' past lives in war-torn countries and how the situations in these countries affected their families and their identities: "Um, I got to know them better. Especially the poetry. Um, all kinds of interesting stuff comes out. Um, I've known some of their battle wound stories, but I've never heard them. I imagine what they used to live through, but then I actually read some of their poems about bombs going off, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sites like Glogster and Wordle didn't work at times and these were the main foci of a few lessons: "Uh, you may find certain sites aren't working or that when you have too many people on a particular site, things happen: it crashes, we may have the latest update of let's say iMovie, but a particular laptop's not able to access certain things, so kids loose their projects. So basically it's hardware and software issues..." - Spamming in the chat feature and inappropriate language were common issues that had to be monitored: "...we had a few issues with...spamming and, uh, saying some nasty things but, um, so that kinda shocked me at the level of, um, it was almost like hysteria being able to do this." - At times, it was challenging to
<p style="margin-bottom: 0;">so..."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A breaking down of invisible boundaries... - ESL/non-ESL students: "...there's a little boy in Grace's class who's new to Canada. He's been struggling as a new comer trying to find the language, trying to find friends and on Ning, he was in all— every chat wanting to talk to people and people are now including him in their games, in the, the activities in the classroom and starting conversations with him so he's now smiling more and he's become, um, more comfortable in the classroom." 	<p style="margin-bottom: 0;">much deeper with the identity piece for the students to understand it better. We remained at a certain depth throughout the project due to time limitations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adapting the lessons so the students really grasped the more challenging concepts being introduced: "I watched you change a lot of things just cause, just cause, just cause. And, and, 'OK that was too high, that was too high, that one...' You went too high, you maybe felt that 'the next class would be more useful if I did this.' And, 'more useful if I did this...'"

Appendix G

ESL Student Interview	Codes
<p>1.) Rita:</p> <p><i>So what did you like most about the poetry project?</i> U: I liked the found poem R: And I liked, too, the found poem.</p> <p><i>What did you like about the whole poetry project – not only the poems, but the websites we used...</i> R: I liked the Ning. <i>OK, and why?</i> R: When you chat, the people know who are you... and, yea... U: I also liked the Ning because people got to know me better. <i>OK, how did they get to know you better?</i> U: By chatting <i>What else did you do on Ning that people got to know you better?</i> U: They read our poems so... and they also commented on there. R: We write a poem and then they read it and then they know us more. <i>Were your poems personal? Is that why they got to know you more?</i> Both: Yea. <i>What kind of things did you write in your poems?</i> R: We wrote, like, we are in grade six and we're from Afghanistan and, um, write about <u>ourselves</u> like we're in somewhere, so... <i>So what was your favourite computer program or website that we used?</i> U: I liked Glogster because it was creative. And, I also like art, that's why. R: I like it too. <i>OK, and did you find using the images easier to communicate?</i> R: Yea. <i>And why did you find it easier? Also, iMovie – remember you used iMovie and music and that kind of thing, so why might those be easier to communicate with?</i> R: Because when you put your pictures and you talk about yourself and it's <u>gonna</u> be easier. <i>So maybe because it's not just words?</i> R: Yea. <i>What did you learn about yourself from the project? So</i></p>	<p>Enjoying the poetry</p> <p>Enjoying the SNS</p> <p>Chatting and connecting with peers</p> <p>Establishing social presence</p> <p>Expressing identity through discourse</p> <p>Connecting through asynchronous discussion</p> <p>Sharing home identity</p> <p>Using multimodalities to express herself</p>

Appendix H

Student	Profile Page: A Visual Breakdown	Peer Interaction: Groups/Comments	Academic Discussion	Chat
Rita	<p>1.) Muted colours (dark purple) with delicate pastel flowers</p> <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The contrast evident in Rita's profile page reflected the juxtaposition of her online and offline identities – the combination of the dark, heavy and muted colours representing her muted or subdued in-class persona (shy) against the delicate, pastel-coloured flowers representing her social and light persona on Ning. Her profile was one way of establishing her social presence online and therefore this 	<p>1.) Artefact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gift giving <p>Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Free red-ribbons available as gifts to give other users on Ning <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It appears as though gift-giving was one way to connect with peers in a non-verbal format – she was able to reach out to others in a low-stress gesture and to establish positive connections as she was offering something – perhaps 	<p>Artefact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer feedback on poetry <p>Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rita left primarily positive comments on her peers' poetry <p>Keywords:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - items like "Good job" <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I imagine it's more difficult for ELLs to compose constructive and/or critical feedback when operating in the L2 in the first or second stage of language development, hence the primarily positive feedback left for peers - I also imagine Rita did not want to stand out with negative 	<p>How it was used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Casual chat in main chat room with peers <p>Frequency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rita was in the chatroom daily both in class during the language arts time block & then after class at home as well - There were times when it was just her and one other student in the chatroom after school <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - While there were times when she was one of the only individuals in the chatroom, I imagine this was because she was still motivated to exert her social presence in the chatroom (as she had received positive reinforcement for this directly and indirectly)

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Janette Hughes for all her guidance and patience in helping me develop this thesis focus over the past two years. Her expertise and approach to feedback was always extremely helpful, insightful and ultimately empowering.

Thank you also to the classroom teachers who invited us into their classrooms and supported us in our research work. Without their openness and willingness to incorporate some new and sometimes temperamental technologies we would not have been able to witness such wonderful transformations in these students who too often remain on the periphery of the classroom community.