

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THAI EFL ONLINE DIARIES: LITERACY PRACTICE AND SELF-EXPRESSION

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This dissertation aims to expand the definition of literacy beyond its usual text and school-based practice. It studies the online diary as a sociocultural and literacy practice that allows people from various languages and cultures to share their personal experiences and values. The participants are five Thai English as foreign language (EFL) learners who voluntarily join in the English-oriented online diary community in order to gain exposure to an implicit language learning environment. In this environment, meaning is drawn from textual, audio and visual tools within specific contexts and social groups.

The results of the study reveal that all five participants become apprentices of the English literate community by conforming to the social norms and constructing their identity for the purpose of being socially recognized by other members. At the same time, they also maintain traditional values within self and bring these values into the new community as one part of their identity. Due to its culturally diverse community, the online diary provides EFL learners the opportunity to interact with authentic readers from different cultures, including both native and non-native

speakers of English. Students become aware of how people from different parts of the world write their personal stories and what they value in life and in their culture.

The fact that the online diary community provides diarists with freedom from obligation, freedom of choice of topic and style, and freedom from judgment, means that they can more easily overcome the constraints that come from themselves and other's criticisms, which are often central in the classroom. The frequent writing and continual engagement in the community enhance the diarists' English proficiency. This, in turn, empowers them to write more reflective and longer entries. When language proficiency and confidence increase, EFL diarists show that they can both write on topics beyond the narrative of self and in different genres using a more standard style, if needed.

This study concludes with a discussion on why literacies should be viewed as socioculturally situated activity and how this might affect EFL pedagogy. The implications of the online diary, for EFL teaching and its challenges are also discussed.