"BUT IT'S HARD FOR A REFUGEE": TRANSITIONING TO POSTSECONDARY

LITERACY PRACTICES AFTER FORCED MIGRATION

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to everyone who shared their stories with me, and to the over 70.8 million people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes.

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ABSTRACT

The global refugee crisis continues to set historic records—2018 opened with 68.5 million people forcibly displaced and a 54% drop in refugee resettlement worldwide (UNHCR, 2018a). The increasingly smaller portion of displaced people who find long-term resettlement often face economic downgrading and barriers to furthering their education. Research has shown that refugees hold high levels of aspiration for continued education (Brownlees & Finch, 2010) but globally only 1% access higher education (UNHCR, 2016). Given the unique educational trajectories of students in refugee contexts, it is important to understand how students with diverse language, literacy, and formal schooling experiences transition into college-level coursework; however, this perspective is almost non-existent in current research.

The purpose of this study was to learn about the literacy practices of refugee students as they studied in a connected learning postsecondary program. Using a collective case study, I examined the academic literacy practices of students from refugee backgrounds as they navigated the literacy expectations of a competency-based online connected learning program in the United States. I used semi-structured interviews, observations, and collaborative artifact analyses with six focal students to identify and interrogate literacy events that occurred within the academic context.

The findings revealed a range of practices that participants drew on to navigate the literacy expectations of the program. In the cross-case analysis, I generated four themes regarding navigating literacy expectations: Playing the game, alternatives to

reading, advanced reading strategies, and social networks. In looking at the influence of forced migration, I generated four themes: Going fast, our way versus their way, disrupted plans and dreams, and shifting languages. Implications for developmental education, higher education, community colleges, and academic coaching are discussed.

I. INTRODUCTION

"The last thing many struggling communities need is more low-skilled migrants who may be good people but need a lot. They stress the schools and social programs while not fully integrating."

—Tucker Carlson

"The current burdens on the U.S. immigration system must be alleviated before it is again possible to resettle large number of refugees."

—U.S. State Department

"We must balance safety against just being a humanitarian. For instance, if there is a rabid dog running around your neighborhood, you're probably not going to assume something good about that dog. And you're probably going to put your children out of the way."

—Dr. Ben Carson

"These aren't people. These are animals."

—President Donald J. Trump

The global refugee crisis continues to set historic records as 2018 opened with 68.5 million people forcibly displaced and a 54% drop in refugee resettlement worldwide (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018b). Within this climate, there has been an increase in anti-refugee rhetoric in wealthier countries around the world (Berry et al., 2015). Such rhetoric portrays refugees as undereducated and illiterate, while other sources go further, portraying refugees and asylum seekers as less than human. The examples presented above described those affected by forced migration as low-skilled and burdens to society. Some go further, equating people to dogs, insects, or denying their humanity altogether (Simon, 2018). These words become even more concerning with the fact that three of the four quotations listed above are from government officials who are positioned to set policy agendas and influence public opinion. Such rhetoric fuels narratives of refugees as burdens to society and too under-skilled to participate meaningfully in education and professions. One contributing factor

to these false assumptions may be narrow perspectives about what counts as literacy (Street, 2001). Common narratives around refugees are a product of underlying assumptions about refugees as illiterate, undereducated, and helpless while fueling policies that threaten to make these assumptions self-fulfilling by restricting access to educational opportunities (Zeus, 2011). These narratives are more than deficit-oriented— they dictate who is allowed to resettle and how funds are allotted to organizations supporting refugees. In 2019, the White House released a new "Humanitarian and Responsible Approach on Refugees Fact Sheet" that foregrounded the need to return refugees to their home countries to rebuild. Yet, current policies around refugee resettlement are riddled with obstacles to pursuing a postsecondary education, which research indicates is crucial to achieving the overarching goal of preparing people to rebuild their home communities (UNHCR, 2016).

Forced displacement can lead to disruptions in formal schooling with unknown long-term effects on a student's ability to advance academically into postsecondary studies. Those who find a long-term solution through resettlement face economic downgrading resulting from an "incompatibility of educational credentials, limited transferability of job skills, and unfamiliarity with the market demands, and lack of access to job and educational networks" (Kazemipur & Halli, 2001, p. 1132). Although only one out of a hundred eligible refugees will pursue postsecondary studies (UNHCR, 2017), refugees with higher education credentials are better positioned to contribute to building peace and stability, are more self-sufficient, and are better able to contribute to the local economy wherever they settle (UNHCR, 2016). This is why the UNHCR (2017) has included expanding access to high quality, accredited, higher education programs as

part of their strategic directions for 2017-2021. Central to the UNHCR's approach to strengthening access to higher education and mitigating barriers to enrollment is to build partnerships between accredited international universities and local organizations through connected learning.

Connected learning programs, which combine digital learning with face-to-face support, have become increasingly common in refugee contexts (UNHCR, 2016). The goal of connected learning, particularly in refugee contexts, is to promote the "development and exchange of knowledge and ideas among students and faculty through use of information technology that enables learning not bound by geographical limitations in contexts of fragility" (Connected Learning Consortium, n.d., para. 3). These programs also increase access to accredited postsecondary credentials despite geographical barriers. The centrality of digital media makes learning more individualized thereby requiring that students learn primarily from online texts. More so than ever, students are expected to communicate through online media (Parker et al., 2011) which carries new cognitive demands including strategies and skills for navigating and reading on the internet (Coiro, 2011).

In addition to the specific demands of digital environments, students in college are tasked with reading a variety of texts, across a variety of disciplines, and are expected to engage with texts and make meaning from them in ways that mimic experts in each field (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Given the growing ubiquity of connected learning programs in refugee contexts (Wright & Plasterer, 2010), the digital nature of texts in these programs is central to understanding the literacy practices of students from refugee backgrounds.

Although opportunities for postsecondary enrollment have expanded in refugee contexts, there remains a lack of research on how refugee students learn and make meaning within these newer connected learning postsecondary programs (Crea & Sparnon, 2017; Ito et al., 2013). Yet, this research is needed to ensure that those who take advantage of these new opportunities will persist to degree completion. Academic literacies are an important area of research given that, like the broader student population in the U.S., students from refugee backgrounds will engage in a wide variety of literacy tasks while in college. Indeed, for all students, Pawan and Honeyford (2009) positioned reading and writing as pervasive at the college-level, often functioning as gatekeepers. Up to 85% of college learning requires independent reading (Simpson & Nist, 2000). In addition, students are tasked with navigating a range of literacies with distinct norms around how meaning is made and communicated (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Given the importance of literacies across academic fields, understanding the literacy strategies that refugee students use is an important foundation for understanding how they navigate postsecondary coursework.

Despite the pervasiveness of reading and writing at the postsecondary level, little is known about the long-term literacy development of students from refugee backgrounds (Blanton, 2005). Current research has indicated that refugee-background students in college navigate literacy practices common to the academic experience, often compounded with language acquisition (Hirano, 2015). Those who have experienced disrupted schooling are tasked with learning in new languages and environments while also recuperating missed years of schooling which may complicate long-term literacy development (Blanton, 2005). Narratives of education and displacement are complex and

diverse. Students who have experienced prolonged periods of displacement have often missed some or significant portions of their formal schooling (Block et al., 2014) and others have worked towards degrees only to find their credits and degrees do not transfer (Bajwa et al., 2017).

Problem Statement

Given the unique educational trajectories of students from refugee backgrounds, it is important to understand how students with diverse language, literacy, and formal schooling experiences transition into college-level coursework. This perspective, however, is almost non-existent in current research. A singular focus on the educational disruption experiences by students from refugee backgrounds would define such students in broad deficit-based terms. Although some refugees have experienced limited and disrupted formal schooling, refugee populations overall had a mean of 16.8 years of education when arriving in the U.S. and 37% of refugees arrived with college degrees (Kerwin, 2011). For others, disruptions in formal education may not lead to disrupted literacy overall. Outside of formal school structures, literacy practices are shared informally within communities, though these may deviate from practices that are valued by institutions (Farr, 2001). Understanding the literacy practices that students bring with them into postsecondary studies is essential in order to build on the linguistic repertoires of students rather than relying on deficit models that approach students by what they lack rather than valuing what they bring (Martinez et al., 2017). Asset-based pedagogies provide a contrast to deficit-based approaches by beginning with a focus on student strengths and providing personalized learning opportunities to develop new skills (Chavez et al., 2016; Lopez & Louis, 2009).

Exacerbating this lack of research is an overemphasis on cognitive aspects of learning within current notions of college readiness. Assessments and benchmarks of college readiness are often limited in scope and not only prioritize cognitive aspects but also impose ways of knowing, being, and doing of a single dominant Discourse. Such an approach encourages deficit-framings of students, particularly those who come from backgrounds that differ from those who hold the power to decide what counts as academic literacies. A sole focus on cognitive elements overlooks other essential components of learning including metacognition, self-regulation, environment, and affect (Holschuh & Aultman, 2008; Weinstein & Acee, 2018). In defining students as college-ready by such a narrow framework, college readiness research fails to capture a multitude of college-ready behaviors. In contrast, a sociocultural perspective on college readiness may better capture alternative perspectives on college readiness. Given the diversity of students from refugee backgrounds, a sociocultural perspective is particularly valuable in capturing the lived experiences of these students in order to better understand their perspectives of college literacy.

Study Overview

This study focused on the literacy practices of students who entered or resumed postsecondary studies after experiencing forced migration. The emphasis on literacy practices was built on the assumption that literacy is not something that an individual has, but rather what someone does with text and why (Perry & Homan, 2015). According to Barton and Hamilton (2000), literacy practices are "what people do with literacy" (p. 7) that involves not only interactions with text but also "people's awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense

of literacy" (p. 7). The observable aspects of literacy practices are literacy events—activities that traditionally involve text and occur within a given context—meaning that literacy practices must then be inferred from observable literacy events (Perry, 2012). More recently, the theory of multiliteracies has expanded the definition of text from primarily print-based to include other forms of representation: written, oral, visual, and audio representations among others (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).

Literacy practices are not only how people use text but how they communicate and make meaning through text as well as their values, beliefs, attitudes, and metacognitive awareness of literacies in different contexts (Gee, 1989). This understanding of literacies acknowledges the existence of multiple literacies that are differentiated by semiotic systems, cultures, or domains of life (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Literacy practices are shaped and informed by both context and community, and postsecondary academic discourses are unique from other discourses in many ways. The focus of this research was on the academic domain where students acquired academic literacies, and the ways that literacies were used, leveraged, and valued within academic communities. Because of developmental education's long history (see Stahl & King, 2018) of helping students transition into postsecondary courses, I look next at the role of developmental education in college access and how it can help to frame the present study.

Developmental Education

The field of developmental education focuses on the transition into postsecondary coursework as well as the support structures in place to help students prepare for postsecondary studies (Boylan & Bonham, 2007; Paulson & Armstrong, 2010). Developmental education is often, and inaccurately, equated with remedial education

(Casazza & Silverman, 2013). Both purport to help students who are, by some measure, considered underprepared for college by preparing them for future postsecondary coursework. A remedial perspective defines students by their academic deficiencies and assumes that they must be retaught, whereas a developmental perspective takes a more comprehensive perspective that integrates both students and their environment (Arendale, 2005). Developmental education scholars frame the field as one of access and success that scaffolds a transition into college through a combined focus on social, cognitive, metacognitive, and affective aspects (Arendale, 2005; Holschuh & Paulson, 2013).

Developmental education encompasses a range of support systems that are geared towards helping students succeed in college coursework. These supports include courses such as developmental reading, writing, and math that are provided for students who fail to meet institutional cut scores on placement exams. Developmental education also includes academic supports such as academic coaching, supplemental instruction, tutoring, and advising that provide assistance outside of courses (Casazza & Silverman, 2013). Supplemental instruction is often tied to a specific course whereas tutoring focuses on content and skill-building for specific courses. In contrast, academic coaching is different from other forms of academic supports in its scope as well as in the coach's role as liaison to other supports such as tutoring and advising (Capstick et al., 2019). Academic coaching is a collaborative relationship between student and coach with a focus on the student's personal and professional goals, building self-awareness, academic planning, and skill-building to support college completion (National Academic Advising Association, 2017). Academic coaching offers a model of academic support that is

holistic, supporting the student in courses as well as obstacles that both outside of courses and even off-campus.

As a field, developmental education scholars problematize the notion of college readiness (Arnold et al., 2012) and attempt to move away from deficit framings of students towards a view of students that includes academic performance alongside "intellectual, social, and emotional growth and development of all students" (Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support [ICSPS], n.d., para. 1). Holschuh and Paulson (2013) explained developmental education as "one route to leveling the playing field for academic success" (p. 12) in that developmental courses provide transitional spaces to students who might otherwise have been barred from higher education due to past grades and/or test scores. In the place of remediating reading and writing skills, a developmental approach to postsecondary literacy assumes a student's continued development that accounts for increasingly complex literacy tasks and addresses the importance of both language and content knowledge as well as the use of strategies for comprehension (Alexander, 2005).

A developmental education perspective is particularly relevant when looking at a population that is traditionally assumed to be underprepared for college. Students from refugee backgrounds may face numerous obstacles within the transition into postsecondary education, including culture, language, and incongruous educational experiences. As a field, developmental education, and developmental literacy more specifically, is well aligned to address questions around the transition of students from refugee backgrounds into postsecondary literacy. Developmental literacy, with a focus on postsecondary literacy practices, implicates the role of language in this transition in

prioritizing the ways in which students use language to make meaning. Historically, students whose linguistic repertoires did not align with the dominant language of instruction have been labeled underprepared for college coursework, often resulting in placement into developmental courses (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015). Although, traditionally, research in developmental literacy has focused on monolingual students, the reality is that linguistically diverse students are often registered into developmental literacy courses to facilitate the transition into college (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015).

Several decades ago, Cross (1976) described the mission of developmental education as giving "attention to the fullest possible development of talent and to develop strengths as well as to correct weaknesses" (p. 31). Language and literacy practices are often overlooked when they are misaligned with disciplinary expectations. Despite calls for more research on linguistically diverse students in developmental education, within the field, the focus remains on primarily monolingual students. There is a further lack of research with refugees and asylum seekers. To address this gap in the field, I look next at how the intersections between language, literacy, and culture are also pertinent to college access and the experiences of students entering postsecondary programs.

Language, Literacy, and Culture

Rueda (2010) argued that both "reading and literacy are cultural inventions" (p. 84) and thus are inextricably linked. Although literacy scholars have examined the link between school and home language patterns, such patterns may be the result of language socialization (Gee, 2012; Heath, 1990), but may also be the result of a different home language altogether (Rueda, 2010). To make too strict of a distinction between language acquisition and language socialization is to ignore that both are needed for students to

make meaning within academic disciplines. Despite the overlap of language acquisition and literacies at the postsecondary level, research is lacking on the experiences and performance of linguistically diverse students in colleges and universities (Almon, 2015; Kanno & Cromley, 2013).

Increasing access to postsecondary education for students from refugee backgrounds is incomplete without providing targeted and adequate supports to help them prepare and adapt to new academic demands. Despite the importance of literacy at the postsecondary level, little is known about the long-term literacy development of students from refugee backgrounds (Blanton, 2005). Given the unique academic trajectories of these students, the transition into postsecondary coursework is complex. In isolation, current research in both the fields of developmental education and second language acquisition is insufficient to fully capture the experience of refugee students in transition, but drawing from both fields can build a more nuanced understanding of how students use languages and literacies as resources in the transition to postsecondary studies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to learn about the literacy practices of students from refugee backgrounds as they studied in a connected learning postsecondary program. Using a collective case study, I examined the academic literacy practices of six students from refugee backgrounds as they navigated the literacy expectations of a connected learning program in the U.S.

The research site was a connected learning program in the eastern U.S. that enrolled students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. In the connected learning

program, students were enrolled in a competency-based online degree program and received simultaneous in-person academic coaching and community meetings with their peers. To look at literacy practices, I used semi-structured interviews and collaborative artifact analysis to gather data (Merriam, 1998). Then, I used a constant comparative method to identify and interrogate literacy events that occurred within the academic context (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Research Questions

To understand the literacy practices of students from refugee backgrounds as they progressed through postsecondary coursework, my study addressed the following questions:

1. How do students from refugee backgrounds navigate the literacy practices of an American competency-based connected learning college program?

   a. In what ways, if any, do students draw upon linguistic resources to navigate these literacy practices?

   b. In what ways, if any, do students draw upon social networks while navigating these literacy practices?

2. How does the experience of forced migration inform the language and literacy practices that students use in the program?

Significance of the Study

A study of the literacy practices of students from refugee backgrounds at the postsecondary level is significant for many reasons. First, this study addresses the limited research available for understanding the literacy practices of a population that is almost nonexistent in research—students from refugee backgrounds. Current research is largely

focused on children or adults with limited literacy instruction resulting in a paucity of literature on the academic literacies of students from refugee backgrounds as they engage in postsecondary studies. In addition, the growth in popularity of connected learning programs in refugee contexts has not been reflected in research. This means that the growth of similar programs internationally is happening without a sturdy foundation of research-based best practices. In the absence of relevant and targeted research, what information is guiding curriculum design, pedagogy, and student support? This study also addressed a need for research on the literacy practices of refugee students in digital spaces. A greater understanding of these literacy practices can expand the current knowledge base of transitional literacies in academic spaces, particularly for linguistically diverse students.

Given the focus of the developmental literacy field on understanding and addressing the challenges that beginning college students face around language and literacy, research on linguistically diverse students with diverse and cross-cultural backgrounds enriches the knowledge base of the field. Indeed, this study addressed de Kleine and Lawton's (2015) concern that "success of linguistically diverse students at the college level is an understudied area that warrants more research and attention" (p. 2). Research is essential to inform programs, educators, policies, and support services. Building an understanding of the unique linguistic resources of students from refugee backgrounds, as well as how they leverage these resources as they navigate postsecondary courses, promotes linguistic awareness at the institutional level by adding more nuance to the many experiences often subsumed into labels around language-learner status and college-readiness. Furthermore, enhanced linguistic awareness of

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educators and learning support practitioners can help to combat deficit orientations by focusing on what students bring rather than what they lack.

In addition to adding to research on linguistic diversity in developmental education, my intent was to counter narratives of refugees as "dependent, hungry, helpless and uprooted persons" (Zeus, 2011, p. 267) by highlighting the diverse practices that they have cultivated through participation in a range of Discourse communities, varied education systems, and through communication across cultures. In doing so, this research addressed Uptin et al.'s (2016) call for more research on students from refugee backgrounds in order to prevent inaccurately positioning these students only in deficit terms. Examining the academic literacy practices of students from refugee backgrounds through a sociocultural perspective begins to counter deficit views of linguistically diverse students by looking at academic literacies in practice rather than defining students by practices that they have yet to cultivate (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

Ethical Considerations

Working with participants from refugee backgrounds requires additional ethical considerations above and beyond institutional review boards (Gillam, 2013). Therefore, in addition to gaining permission through institutional review boards, there are three specific issues to be addressed in research studies with refugees: vulnerability, power, and the relationship of research with advocacy (Block et al., 2013). Coleman (2009) identified three types of vulnerability in research: consent-based vulnerability, risk-based vulnerability, and justice-based vulnerability. Given my role as a researcher and outsider in this context as well as my positionality as a White, female, American citizen who speaks English as a first language and attended postsecondary education primarily in her

home country, I have made efforts to ensure that my theoretical framework provides a critical lens to problematize my position of power and privilege in the study by incorporating variety of theoretical perspectives on literacy, education, and privilege.

Terminology

The label "refugee" can be problematic given the tendency to reduce individuals to their legal immigration status (I have used quotation marks to reference labels used by others and italics to introduce terms and definition used in this study). The term also carries with it narratives of helplessness and dependency that do not accurately portray the lived experiences of all people in refugee contexts (Shapiro, 2014; Uptin et al., 2016). I use the term *refugee* to remain consistent with current literature and to honor the specific legal status that the term connotes. Refugee as a legal status carries with it access to certain resources and rights that may not be accessible by immigrants and asylum seekers, particularly in the context of the U.S. The UNHCR (2017) defined refugees as people who have fled their country of nationality due to a well-founded fear of persecution. Refugees hold an international status that differs from both people who are referred to in the literature as "asylum seekers" and people who have experienced internal displacement. *Internal displacement* refers to people who have experienced displacement but remain in their country of nationality. The distinction between internally displaced populations and both refugees and asylum seekers is the crossing of a national border, rendering those who have been forcibly displaced stateless (Voutira & Dona, 2007). In a discussion on the rights of others, Benhabib (2004) often referred to refugees and asylees in tandem, both having left their country of nationality and been hosted in another country. The distinction between these two labels is the international recognition of a fear

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of persecution that is granted with the refugee label (McDowell, 2013). The status of refugee is unique in opening up access to aid, protections, and resettlement opportunities that are not available to asylum seekers.

In the U.S., the refugee label is often used to refer to people who have been granted that status internationally prior to arrival in the country. "Asylum seekers", or "asylees," are labels ascribed to people who enter the country to apply for asylum or "protection from persecution" (American Immigration Council [AIC], 2018b). The distinction between refugee and asylees is the location where the claim is made; the same standards govern both appeals (Kerwin, 2011). Notably, this distinction does not include the experience of people who were forced to migrate because of severe poverty or famine and therefore are not represented in the official refugee designation. That is why I decide to refer to both asylum seekers and refugees under the same designation, as this would allow me to include a wider variety of lived experiences of forced migration.

Glossary

Assumed schema – foundational knowledge that a student is presumed to have in order to read and understand an assignment or text within a school setting. In this paper, I make a contrast between schema (the prior knowledge that a student already holds) and the assumed schema (foundational knowledge that a student needs to make sense of a topic and/or assignment). Anderson (2013) explained that "When prior knowledge is required, it is assumed to be knowledge common to children from every subculture" (p. 486). Likewise, the assumed schema discussed within this study refers to the prior knowledge that the assignment creator and/or grader assumed was common to all students.

Connected Learning – the research site was a connected learning program, which is the combination of online learning with face-to-face learning support. The Connected Learning Consortium (n.d.) defined connected learning as "the development and exchange of knowledge and ideas among students and faculty through use of information technology that enables learning not bound by geographical limitations in contexts of fragility" (para. 3). This program combined a competency-based education model delivered fully online with in-person intensive academic support. Competency-based education is an approach to educational design that foregrounds mastery of pre-determined skills, knowledge, and values (Cañado, 2013). Competency-based education is outcome-based, meaning that instruction and assessment are designed to measure and support student progress as students work on a specific competency until it is mastered. This is contrary to more traditional course designs in which students work on shared objectives and are assessed on the extent to which they learn the content (Gervais, 2016). In more traditional designs, students can master a skill at 60% and move on, whereas the competency-based approach used by the research site focuses on instruction until the student masters the target skill at 100%, thus creating a personalized pacing.

Culture – The combination of "complex human practices of signification and representation, of organization, and attribution, which are internally driven by conflicting narratives" (Benhabib, 2002, p. ix). Rather than existing as a definitive entity, Benhabib (2002) added that cultures are "a constant creation, recreation, and negotiation of imaginary boundaries" (p. 8). This definition frames culture as negotiated and flexible rather than rigid. Individuals create narratives of their unique life story that is informed

by established narratives of a culture; these narratives also inform interactions and literacy.

Discourse – the social languages (speech, action, beliefs, etc.) that people acquire within distinct social groups (Gee, 2013). Discourse with a capital D refers to the values, attitudes, and beliefs within distinct Discourse communities, and how interactions are shaped by the social norms of each community. Discourse is distinct from small-d discourses which is language in use more broadly (Gee, 2013).

Literacy Practices – the ways that people use language and text to make meaning in different contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Literacy practices focus on the inner workings behind the observable interactions of text to include the norms, beliefs, and values that inform literacy uses in different contexts and domains.

Refugee – an individual who has experienced forced migration from their home country. The term "refugee" also connotes a legal recognition by international agents that the person has a justified fear of persecution if they remain in their country of origin. In the U.S., the term "refugee" is often given to individuals who arrived with refugee status, distinguished from asylum seekers who arrive prior to justifying their fear of persecution (Cepla, 2018). According to HIAS (formerly the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, n.d.) "an asylum seeker, like a refugee, faces well-founded fears of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, and membership in a particular social group" (para. 2). Given that both classifications are governed by the same standards (Kerwin, 2011), in this study, I made no distinction between the location of the determination. Instead, I use the term *refugee*, or *forced migrant*, to refer to individuals who left their

country to seek asylum, regardless of whether or not they had received the status prior to their arrival in the U.S.

Schema – an "organized knowledge of the world" (Anderson, 2013 p. 476) that combines various forms of information and prior knowledge that helps people comprehend new information more efficiently (Rueda, 2010). This can include foundational knowledge about a topic as well as cultural knowledge that a reader brings to the comprehension of a specific text.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the background, problem, and purpose of my research study. First, I introduced the state of higher education for international refugee populations including current trends and practices. Second, I described the importance of literacy practices in accessing and pursuing higher education and highlighted the role that the field of developmental education can play in understanding the literacy practices of students from refugee backgrounds as they transition into postsecondary programs. Next, I presented the research questions followed by the study's significance, ethical issues, and a glossary of key terms.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I review literature that informed this research. First, I provide an overview of the various theories that framed this study and informed my understandings of literacies, languages, and education. I present a sociocultural view of literacy and how it connects to theories around second language acquisition, cultural reproduction, and power. Next, I review bodies of literature that help to inform my study with a focus on students from refugee backgrounds.

Theoretical Framework

Given the complex interactions of culture, language, and literacy for students pursuing education after forced migration, my theoretical framework conceptualizes literacy within larger social structures and then situates academic literacies within the broader sociocultural framework of literacy (see Figure 1). I begin my theoretical framework with an overview of sociocultural perspectives of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2012; Street, 2001) which serve as the primary theory, both defining literacy and situating it within broader cultural contexts. From there, I draw on theories of multiliteracies and language to expand the theoretical definition of literacy. Then, I draw on theories of cultural reproduction and academic literacies to expand the theoretical perspective on what is valued, when, where, and by whom.

A sociocultural view of literacy frames literacy within social contexts, viewing literacy as contextual. Multiliteracies expand the focus from solely print-based text to include oral, visual, and audio representations (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Theories of language (Canagarajah, 2013; Crump, 2014; Martinez et al., 2017; Mazak, 2016) further

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highlight the connections between language and literacy as they occur within socially situated contexts.
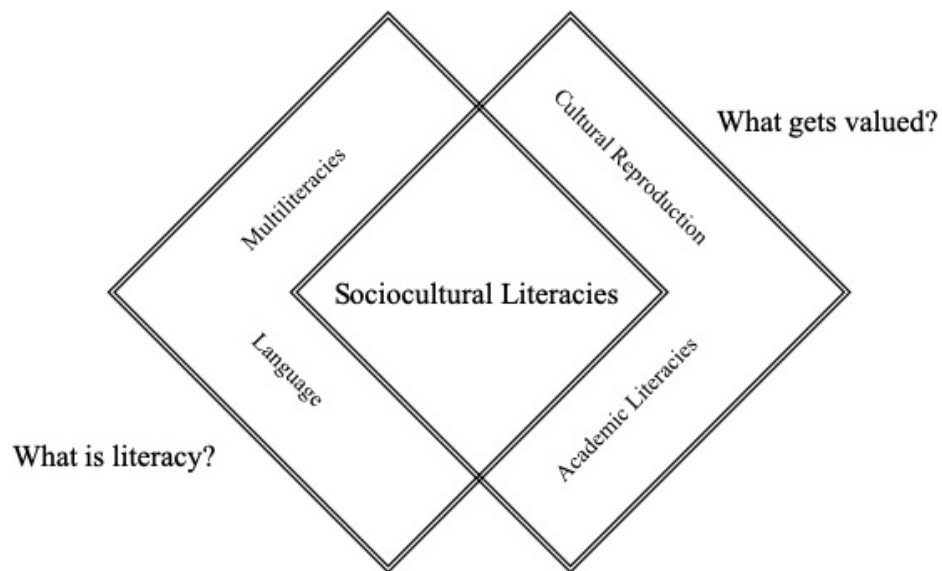
Figure 1. Theoretical Framework.

To help frame the full complexity of life after forced migration, I built on theories of sociocultural literacy. Cultural reproduction theory provides a lens for understanding the functions of social class and economic mobility on accessing education (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu's (1986, 1991) theory of cultural capitals builds on sociocultural literacy by explaining how various practices are shaped by larger social structures. Cultural capitals provide a frame for looking both at the capitals that students have and those that are required as students navigate new academic spaces. Finally, I draw from theories specific to academic literacies (Lea & Street, 2006) in order to situate sociocultural literacy, cultural reproduction, and translanguaging within academic contexts. An academic literacies perspective frames literacy practices as socially constructed and looks at how institutional settings shape and inform the literacy practices of students. Within

academic literacies, disciplinary literacy looks more specifically at the literacy practices as they are shaped within disciplines.

Sociocultural Literacy

From a sociocultural standpoint, literacy is how people interact with texts, including the choices and actions that they make within specific contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Perry, 2012). Given the importance of contexts, literacy and language are inherently connected to learning, meaning-making, community, and larger social structures (Gee, 2012). Gee (2013) defined literacy as the acquisition of social languages—a combination of learned social practices, including but not limited to, an individual's ability to read and write. As such, literacy can be best understood as interactions between people and communities rather than an individual's decontextualized skills for using texts (Street, 2001).

Conceptualizing literacy as a social practice requires builds on the concept of literacy at solely the individual level to focus on how literacy is used in social groups. Rather than viewing literacy perspectives as a dichotomy between individual and social, literacy can be framed as both in that people make decisions individually, but their decisions are informed by social and contextual norms and constraints. Literacy then is not something that a person has or lacks, rather literacy refers to the practices between members of a given group and is guided by social rules shared by group members (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). This shift helps move away from deficit perspectives of students by asking not where a student's literacy is deficient, but how students and professors are using language and literacies in a given context. This more social-oriented perspective provides an opportunity to examine how language is used, modified, and

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informed by norms and expectations rather than imposing an assumption that a skill is lacking. Barton and Hamilton (2000) presented the following six key aspects of literacy:

1. Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts

2. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life

3. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others

4. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices

5. Literacy is historically situated

6. Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making (p. 8).

To understand the context of language use, Gee (2013) distinguished between *Discourse*, with a capital D, which refers to the social languages (speech, action, beliefs, etc.) that people acquire within distinct social groups and small-d *discourse* which refers more broadly to language-in-use. Capital-D Discourses exist within communities of practice and provide a framework for how members interact through words, actions, symbols, and ways of thinking that acquire a specific meaning within the Discourse community. An example would be when and how it is appropriate to interrupt a conversation. The process of interruption might look very different in the home compared to a classroom.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) described literacy as having two main components: literacy practices and literacy events. Literacy practices refer to the cultural ways that

people use written language. These practices are shaped by social rules that set boundaries for how, when, and by whom literacy is used. Literacy events refer to activities that involve literacy, foregrounding the situated nature of literacy practices. Whereas literacy events are the observable uses of texts, they are embedded within literacy practices that are shaped "by social, cultural, economic, political, and ideological factors" (Perry, 2012, p. 258). As such, research on literacy practices in a given context must also consider what counts as literacy as well as the literacy resources available (Luke, 2010; Perry, 2012).

Central to a sociocultural view of literacy is the contested notion of culture. Culture provides people with "practices, sayings, as well as doings" (Benhabib, 2002, p. 14) much like how Discourses are a combination of "doing–being–valuing–believing" (Gee, 1989, p. 6). Culture is a socially negotiated set of representations from which meaning is negotiated in a given situation. Thus, literacy is a community resource in which meaning is negotiated situationally by individuals and "realised in social relationships rather than a property of individuals" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 12).

Literacy and meaning are rooted in social practices and worldviews that are informed by both culture and context. The act of reading is embedded, but literacy also includes the "beliefs, attitudes, and social practices that literate individuals and social groups follow in a variety of settings and situations" (Rueda, 2010, p. 84). As well as being social practices, different literacies are used across different aspects of life, thus literacy is not a static, singular process (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

Given the social nature of literacy, Gee (1989, 2013) argued that a study of literacy must also address the socially embedded expectations around language use. Gee

(2012) used the term *cultural models* to refer to the storylines shared by a sociocultural group of people that give meaning to words. These storylines provide patterns to understand how words and texts are used and understood in context. Given the intricate links between culture and literacy, reading and writing must be understood in relation to "different ways of (1) using oral language; (2) of acting and interacting; (3) of knowing, valuing, and believing; and too, often (4) of using various sorts of tools and technologies" (Gee, 2015, p. 36). The cultural models and situated meanings around the act of reading, for example, may influence how a student approaches a text.

Schools are sites of multiple Discourses, each of which could align or conflict with other Discourses, and students are tasked with navigating and adapting to new patterns of thinking and communicating as they progress into higher-level coursework. In college, students are expected to use a more descriptive language in one course whereas, in another, they are expected to write succinctly; each represents a pattern of communication that may align or conflict with how information is shared within a given community (Gee, 2012). Students enter a course with the tools acquired in other Discourse communities that they may rely on to make sense within new contexts. Therefore, understanding the transitional literacies of students requires consideration of the literacy resources that students draw on, as well as those that students adopt or adapt when presented with literacy tasks in new social contexts.

In discussions of cultural norms and cultural differences, there is an inherent assumption that cultures are static, delineable wholes that can be easily attributed to a certain group of people. Benhabib (2002) argued that this view is problematic in that it promotes a false separation, or imaginary boundary, between an insider and an outsider.

These boundaries, though imaginary, have real consequences. For example, the boundaries of political communities inform national membership and in turn the distribution of resources and social recognition (Benhabib, 2004). Cultural differences are not necessarily problematic but become so when they are treated as borders (Rueda, 2010). Rueda (2010) argued that boundaries simply affirm the existence of differences, whereas borders are socially constructed power structures that place value and privilege on certain cultural practices. As a result of forced migration, individuals may spend years living between borders. Understanding these cultural boundaries as social constructed can help to better examine the influence of migration experiences on education.

Multiliteracies

The target program in this study was a connected learning program that used an online competency-based model for instruction and assessment. In the competency-based format, the majority of meaning-making took place in digital contexts. This requires a broadening in the understanding of literacy to highlight the multiplicity of discourses, technologies, and semiotic resources (New London Group, 1996). To fully capture the ways in which participants made meaning within this context, multiliteracies expands the definition of text from primarily print-based to include other forms of representation (Perry, 2012). Multiliteracies "involve new uses of oral or written language melded with other modalities like images, actions, and sounds" (Gee, 2014, p. 108). Furthermore, Cope and Kalantzis (2009) use the term "multiliteracies" to incorporate multiple dimensions of literacies, including both the multilingual and the multimodal. Given the digital context of this study, defining text as solely print-based would be limiting, instead, the theory of multiliteracies includes other forms of representation to include written,

oral, visual, and audio representations among others (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). I distinguish between multiliteracies which focuses on the forms of information that a student uses to make meaning and intertextuality which focuses on how a student makes meaning across multiple sources in any format.

Furthermore, Cope and Kalantzis (2009) argued that multiliteracies are founded on the assumption that meaning makers are actively transforming various forms of representation, including language. Therefore, a theory of multiliteracies requires one to consider how information is being learned and understood, but also how it is being transformed to make new meaning. Rather than positioning learners as passive recipients who reproduce meaning in authorized forms, a multiliteracies perspective assumes agency on the part of the learner to make meaning in ways that transcend authorized forms of reproduction.

Language and Literacies

Much of the work of sociocultural literacy assumes a shared language despite differing variations. Language plays an important role in literacy and learning. Particularly for linguistically diverse students, the relationship between primary and secondary Discourses is mediated by multiple linguistic repertoires. A sociolinguistic perspective highlights the influences of social and contextual factors on language use (Deckert, 2011). There are numerous complicating factors when examining language use and literacies including orthographic distance (Birch, 2002), social class, power (Cummins, 2000), and solidarity (Lippi-Green, 1997). Like literacy, the language resources that students draw on may build or inhibit their literacy depending on the perceived value of such linguistic tools in a given context. Theories around language

have made similar shifts to those of literacy, moving from language as a bounded entity

that a person can possess or lack, to an understanding of language as a process of

meaning-making that is shaped by people as they interact in different contexts with

different goals (Mazak, 2016). Two theoretical perspectives on language and learning

guided this research: translanguaging and language leveraging.

Translanguaging

Translanguaging helps bring language processes into an understanding of the

literacy practices of multilingual students. Translanguaging has multiple definitions and

can be used to describe pedagogical leanings, practices, methods, and theories among

others (see Mazak, 2016). I use translanguaging as a theory that frames language by how

people use multiple linguistic repertoires to make meaning in different contexts and to

emphasize "what people are doing with language and not on languages as finite linguistic

systems" (Crump, 2014). Translanguaging builds on Gee's (1989) framing of Discourses

by highlighting the role that language plays in Discourse communities. In academic

settings, "translanguaging is when students (and often teachers) use their entire linguistic

repertoire strategically to teach and learn, which they do with a keen awareness of the

identity consequences of linguistic performance" (Mazak, 2016, p. 4).

In examining literacy practices of multilingual students, using translanguaging as

a lens puts multilingualism at the center of the investigation, rather than framing language

practices against monolingual norms. According to Canagarajah (2013), translingual

practice includes two central understandings: (1) communication transcends individual

languages, and (2) communication transcends words and involves diverse semiotic

resources and ecological affordances (p. 6). The reference to languaging connects to the

poststructuralist shifts towards understanding the nature of language as "a series of social practices and actions that are embedded in a web of social relations" (Garcia & Leiva, 2014, p. 201) rather than an autonomous system of discrete skills. Much like the shift away from Street's (2001) autonomous model of literacy, many language scholars have moved towards an understanding of language "as a product of the embodied social practices that bring it about" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 9). This indicates a shift away from monocultural assumptions that persist within academic culture (Bourdieu, 1991; Martinez et al., 2017). Language and literacy do not create meaning through surface features such as grammar and word choice, but rather by how linguistic and literacy features are valued within interactions with others in specific social contexts (Bourdieu, 1991).

The prefix trans- adds to the notion of languaging by attempting to dissolve boundaries between language systems (Garcia & Leiva, 2014). If language is no longer understood as an autonomous system, then linguistic resources can no longer be understood as being connected to a specific language, but rather speakers can make meaning between languages. Thus, linguistic resources of students are socially constructed and given meaning through interrelations with others rather than through a preexisting set of norms. This reflects Bourdieu's (1991) notion of capital in which the allocation of resources is determined within structured spaces and dependent on the perceived value of different forms of capital, including linguistic capital. Language becomes bounded when certain practices are valued over others. Translanguaging aligns with a sociocultural perspective of literacy by foregrounding the role of social practices in shaping language use.

Language Leveraging

Students from linguistically diverse backgrounds often come to school with robust communicative repertoires that are not valued within formal schooling (Heath, 1990; Martinez et al., 2017). Inequities around the value of linguistic capital within schools can lead to continued educational inequities. Language leveraging is the "process of using the home and community languages of children and youth as a tool to access the 'academic' or 'standard' varieties of languages valued in schools" (Martinez et al., 2017, p. 477). Language leveraging draws on Gumperz's (1964) notion of linguistic repertoire. Gumperz (1964) believed that language did not fully capture the totality of verbal repertoires used in communication. Likewise, Rymes (2016) believed that a focus on certain linguistic repertoires might overlook other untapped communicative practices that could be leveraged in the classroom. Orellana and Reynolds (2008) described the goal of language leveraging as

> neither simply to celebrate students' everyday linguistic virtuosity nor to transfer those skills in a direct way to school tasks but rather to expand students' abilities to work with the various tools in their linguistic toolkits—the full range of practices that they use in both home and school contexts (p. 50).

Language leveraging is often used in childhood education but may offer a useful frame for looking more broadly at the communicative practices of linguistically diverse students. Most notably, language leveraging provides a heuristic for looking "beyond the eyes of [one's] own dominant genres" (Martinez et al., 2017, p. 483). Linguistically diverse adult students draw on both their metalinguistic awareness and cross-linguistic

awareness in their learning (Angelovska, 2018) but there is limited research available on language leveraging and adult learners.

Cultural Reproduction

Gee's (1989) concept of Discourses helps to contextualize language, actions, and behaviors within communities of practice, however, these social contexts are the products of complicated histories and social hierarchies. The value of literacy does not exist in abstraction, rather, "Literacy—of whatever type—only has consequences as it acts together with numerous or various social factors, including political and economic conditions, social structure, and local ideologies" (Gee, 2012, p. 76). The way that people use language is also linked to how people make meaning of the world (Freire, 2005; Gee, 2013). Often, systems of formal education favor one worldview over others, thus creating potential conflicts between literacy expectations and students' values and beliefs. Likewise, certain Discourses become more mainstream at the same time that others are devalued (Gee, 1989), which means that literacy is shaped by social institutions that favor dominant literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

This process can be further complicated by experiences of migration. As people move through different social systems, they are integrating into different value systems and power structures. Lam and Warriner (2012) presented the notion of scale to represent power differentials that influence beliefs and behaviors. Lam's notion of scale incorporates meaningful social behaviors shared within groups and hierarchies of power, both of which inform norms, values, and hierarchies. Lam and Warriner (2012) posited that "it is important to understand the multiple and complex influences that affect the language and literacy development of learners of migrant backgrounds as they respond to

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normative values and language ideologies that operate at different sociolinguistic scales"
(p. 210). As students from refugee backgrounds navigate new Discourses, they are
drawing from socially constructed norms of the communities around them, but also
responding to new power hierarchies and potentially a new placement within power
structures.

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of habitus and cultural capitals can help to frame the
connection between language, power, and education by conceptualizing the exchanges
that individuals and social groups make with languages in addition to other resources.
Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical work around cultural reproduction stemmed from attempts
to understand inequalities in academic success between students from different class
backgrounds. Bourdieu's work helps to counter understanding of academic success in
terms of aptitude. Like Street's (2001) description of literacy as socially situated rather
than autonomous, Bourdieu (1986) argued that academic success was not determined by
individual characteristics but by "the relationships among dominant culture, school
knowledge, and individual biographies" (p. 267). Education and academic success do not
exist in abstraction from the social structures in which they occur. Migration may lead to
various adjustments in sociolinguistic scales which in turn influence both the valuation of
capitals and access to new capitals.

From a cultural reproduction standpoint, certain linguistic practices are more
highly valued by social institutions, such as schools (Giroux, 1983). The linguistic
practices that hold the highest value reflect the dispositions of the dominant class who, as
a result, more easily navigate school expectations because the valued practices are
embedded in such a way that they feel natural to students from the dominant class

(Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu's (1991) term 'habitus' refers to the dispositions acquired in a cultural context that generates a language practices, behaviors, and attitudes. Bourdieu's notion of habitus shares similarities with Gee's (2012) concept of Discourses as the "*saying(writing)–doing–being–valuing–believing combinations*" (p. 151) in that both assume there is a set of unspoken and socially acquired norms that inform beliefs and behaviors. Students have an advantage when their primary Discourse is compatible with the secondary Discourses of schooling (Gee, 2012).

Like literacy practices overall, Bourdieu (1991) argued that habitus alone did not lead to certain practices, but practices are formed in the interactions within a social context—a field. Thus, practices themselves are not sufficient to understand the role of language practices, but meanings are formed through social interactions. The role of these interactions is described by Bourdieu (1991) as a field, or "a structured space of positions and their interrelations [that are] determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources" (p. 14), or capitals.

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework offers an expansion to cultural reproduction theories by providing an asset-based lens that better captures the strengths of students from non-dominant backgrounds, particularly students of color. Yosso (2005) outlined six forms of cultural wealth, or capitals, that frame the experience of students in accessing college: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. Aspirational capitals are the hopes and dreams held by the student and the ability to maintain and pursue those goals. Linguistic capitals include the various languages and ways of communicating that a student uses. Familial capitals are the cultural knowledges shared within families and communities. Social capitals are social

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networks and community resources. Navigational capitals are the knowledge, skills, and ability needed to navigate social institutions, including educational spaces. Finally, resistant capitals are the collective knowledges that stem from historic legacies of injustice and in the fight for social justice.

In an ethnographic study within a basic writing classroom, Curry (2008) identified additional cultural capitals required to navigate college, including participation competence (knowing how to engage with both the coursework and the professor), curricular competence (understanding connections between content and pedagogical purposes) and institutional competence (knowing how to identify and use resources and overcome obstacles). In addition to situating Bourdieu's theory of cultural capitals more concretely within a postsecondary context, Curry's work highlights the contextual nature of literacies in college. Knowing how to be a student requires an understanding of one's place within a larger university system.

The social class emphasis of social reproduction theories is particularly relevant for people who come to the U.S. as refugees. Refugees suffer the "steepest occupational downgrading after migration" of any immigrant group (Batalova et al., 2008). Much like the process of trading economic capital for goods and services, Bourdieu (1986) suggested that there are multiple forms of capital that can be converted into another. First, economic capital is material wealth such as money, stocks, and property. Social capitals are resources in the form of social connections, networks, and group membership. Finally, cultural capitals refer to cultural acquisitions such as behaviors, knowledge, language, and skills. Institutionalized capital refers to institutional forms of recognition such as academic qualifications. The various forms of capital can be converted into

symbolic capital, thereby legitimizing the value of different forms of capital through the accumulating of prestige, honor, and social status (Bourdieu, 1990). Thus, students from the dominant class have the advantage of language practices and behaviors that can be more easily converted into institutionalized capital compared to their peers because they have embodied linguistic practices and behaviors that are more highly valued in an academic field. For refugees, a devaluing of foreign credentials, lack of cultural competency, discrimination, and an emphasis on rapid employment all limit access to transformable capitals by devaluing the cultural capitals they bring and restricting access to educational programs to recuperate institutionalized capital (Batalova et al., 2008; Perry & Mallozzi, 2011). Cultural capitals can be converted into social capital by facilitating membership into academic communities, or Discourse communities, where students can be mentored into new literacy practices that can, in turn, be converted into institutionalized capital and professional positions that convert into economic capital.

For speaking and broader communication, language knowledge is insufficient for entry and acceptance in different academic fields—legitimacy is granted through access and grades. Bourdieu (1991) described speaking as involving "both the linguistic capacity to generate an infinite number of grammatically correct discourses, and the social capacity to use this competence adequately in a determinate situation" (p. 37). Each field has rules that are used to evaluate and legitimize new potential members. In the relationship between linguistic habitus and the rules of a given field, sanctions and censorship can be imposed—much like Gee's (2012) reference to "saying the 'right' thing at the 'right' time in the 'right' place (p. 147). Students whose cultural capitals are

not valued in school are at a disadvantage to the extent that their cultural capitals are not as easily converted into other forms that further promote academic success.

Academic Literacies

Literacy in college generally falls into the category of secondary Discourses. Unlike primary Discourses, which are acquired through socialization, secondary Discourses are learned through new interactions in a way that builds on, extends, or conflicts with primary Discourses. Gee (2013) argued that there was an important distinction between acquisition and learning. Acquisition occurs through exposure, practice, and interactions with others. Learning, on the other hand, is based on explanation and analysis. Literacies are most effective when acquired through engaging in action and dialogue rooted in social situations (Freire, 2005).

The academic literacies model proposed by Lea and Street (2006) can help to contextualize Gee's sociocultural understanding of literacy within academia. The academic literacies model views the socialization into literacy practices as happening both at the discipline-specific level, but also at the institutional level, foregrounding questions of meaning-making, power, and agency in language use. In doing so, the academic literacy model highlights the specifics of social practices within an institution such as genres, meaning-making, and identities across domains. Similar to Gee's (1989) argument that literacy cannot be examined in isolation from social practices and expectations, Lea and Street (2006) argued that the effects, functions, and nature of literacy cannot be understood in abstraction from institutional settings.

Given the contextualized nature of literacy, it follows that literacy is not the same in all contexts, but rather people use different literacies for different purposes across

different domains of their life (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Instead of examining literacy as a singular set of decontextualized practices, what Street (2001) referred to as an autonomous model of literacy, literacy scholars are increasingly talking about literacies as multiple. Barton and Hamilton (2000) spoke in terms of "configurations of literacy practices" (p. 11) that are associated with the different domains of life such as work, school, and home. Each domain has its own Discourse community with distinct, but often implicit, rules around literacy practices.

As students transition into postsecondary contexts, an understanding of academic literacies becomes particularly salient. In literacy learning, mechanics, grammar, correctness, and other "superficial features of language" are often stressed in schools over a focus on meaning. However, these same features are essential for students to learn in order to access status-giving Discourses (Gee, 1989, p. 11). Once students reach the postsecondary level, meaning becomes more salient in the coursework, along with adjusting behaviors to different literacy tasks. Returning to Gee's (1989) focus on the importance of Discourse, "*the saying (writing)–doing–being–valuing–believing combinations,*" (p. 6), reading in college contexts requires that individuals use the vocabulary, strategies, and epistemological beliefs that match with course expectations. To fully examine academic literacies in postsecondary contexts, it is important to acknowledge that within academic contexts, students come into contact with multiple Discourse communities across courses. Disciplinary literacies provide a lens to examine the variety of literacy expectations and practices that students encounter across disciplines.

Disciplinary Literacies

There is increasing interest in the perspective that academic reading and writing are embedded with discipline-specific conventions rather than generic skills. Disciplinary literacy connotes advanced literacy instruction that focuses on mentoring students into the more specialized reading skills of a discipline (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012) or "the shared ways of reading, writing, thinking, and reasoning within academic fields" (Rainey & Moje, 2012, p. 73). Holschuh (2014) described disciplinary literacy as "unpacking the 'secrets' of the discipline" (p. 89). Disciplinary literacy also helps students to identify what information is valued and the ways of asking questions and finding answers in a specific discipline (Rainey & Moje, 2012). Returning to Gee's (2012) Discourses, students are exposed to multiple secondary Discourses. Disciplinary literacy promotes metacognitive awareness of the secondary Discourses that students interact with in college.

To summarize academic literacies, the act of reading and writing do not occur in abstraction, but shape and are shaped by social structures (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Or, from the perspective of Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital, "what circulates on the linguistic market is not 'language' as such, but rather discourses that are stylistically marked both in their production…and in their reception" (p. 39). Understanding academic literacy practices requires looking both at the practices used by students in academic domains as well as how literacy practices are perceived within academic domains. Students adapt and adopt new practices as they transition into academic Discourse communities. These decisions are shaped by the ways that past behaviors, languages, and beliefs were received in past educational contexts.

Academic literacy practices in postsecondary education are shaped by the student's prior experiences, social institutions, and power dynamics. Therefore, an understanding of the existing literacy practices of incoming students requires considerations of the various forces that inform and shape literacies. These forces may include the variety of resources that students draw from such as their primary Discourse community, linguistic resources, semiotic resources, and other social and cultural capitals as well as the role of social institutions in shaping practices through valuing certain forms of communication over others.

Theoretical Framework Summary

In the theoretical framework, I reviewed theories that frame my research. In the theoretical framework, I have included theories on sociocultural literacy, multiliteracies, language and literacies, cultural reproduction, and academic literacies. I also described the intersections between the theories within the framework. In the next section, I look more closely at research that falls within the constructs presented in my theoretical framework. In addition, I summarize research with students from refugee backgrounds and make connections to research on broader student populations within the U.S.

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Review of Literature

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Building on the theoretical framework discussed above, I turn to a review of literature and research relevant to my study, with a particular focus on understanding students from refugee backgrounds within postsecondary education. I begin with an overview of refugee resettlement practices in the U.S., turning next to literature on postsecondary education for refugees in post-resettlement contexts. Next, I summarize research on postsecondary academic literacies, reviewing studies with students from

refugee backgrounds and anchoring those findings within the broader field of research on academic literacies. To better understand the specific context of the focal program, I have also reviewed research on connected learning and competency-based education. I end with a review of literature on second language acquisition in postsecondary contexts to examine the intersections between language, literacy, and learning.

Refugee Resettlement in the United States

According to the U.S. Department of State (n.d.-a), "the United States is proud of its history of welcoming immigrants and refugees" (para. 1). Since 1975, the U.S. has accepted more than 3 million refugees for permanent resettlement. In recent decades, the global refugee population has exceeded historical records with 25.4 million refugees and 3.1 million asylum seekers in 2018 (UNHCR, 2018a). In 2017, the U.S. was the largest recipient of new asylum claims with 1.7 million new claims filed (UNHCR, 2018b). Despite the historic levels of forcibly displaced people around the world, in recent years, the U.S. has, in recent years, drastically reduced the number of refugees who can enter and placed severe restrictions on access to asylum (AIC, 2018a).

The U.S. Department of State (n.d.-b) works with domestic organizations that place refugees in about 190 communities across the country. Through the Department of State's Reception and Placement Program, refugees are given financial assistance for three months, during which they are encouraged to find employment as soon as possible, often in the form of entry-level jobs regardless of their level of previous experience (U.S. Department of State, n.d.-b). Given the push on immediate employment, refugees are granted the right to work upon arrival, but the focus on immediate employment restricts access to postsecondary education (Perry & Mallozzi, 2011). Both those who arrive with

professional credentials and those needing additional education face high levels of

unemployment and occupational downgrading (Kerwin, 2011) exacerbated by restricted

access to educational programs that would support long-term self-sufficiency (Perry &

Mallozzi, 2011). In comparison to other groups of immigrants in the U.S., refugees faced

the most severe occupational downgrading and higher levels of underemployment

(Batalova et al., 2008). Contrary to the claims by the U.S. Department of State (n.d.-b)

that "most refugees will move ahead professionally" (para. 7), Batalova et al. (2008)

found that time spent in the U.S. did not raise refugees back to their level of employment

prior to displacement, likely due to barriers in pursuing educational opportunities that

could facilitate professional advancements.

Although asylum seekers meet the definition of a refugee when they arrive at the

border, they are considered distinct from refugees because they had not received refugee

status from an international agency prior to arriving at the border (AIC, 2018b). The

different classification shapes pathways to education and employment in many ways.

When they arrive at the border, asylum seekers are subjected to expedited removal but

are allowed a credible fear and reasonable fear screening process before deportation. In

this process, asylum seekers must prove that there is a significant or reasonable

possibility they will be tortured or face persecution if they return to their home country

(AIC, 2018b). If a credible or reasonable fear is established, they have one year to apply

for asylum, but the overall asylum process can take several years. During this process,

individuals have the right to be in the country but must wait for either their claim to be

granted or 180 days to pass before applying for the right to work (U.S. Citizenship &

Immigration Services, 2018). In addition, the government has the right to detain asylum

seekers during the asylum process, further restricting access to employment and education (AIC, 2018b). Although asylum seekers may eventually gain access to legal employment, accessing education is complicated by fears of detention or removal once claims have been determined (Elwyn et al., 2012). The lengthy waits for asylum determinations may result in the time in the U.S. being one more in a line of disrupted schooling experiences that shape educational trajectories.

Postsecondary Education Post-Resettlement

Globally, only 1% of refugees access higher education (UNHCR, 2016). There are multiple factors that may influence these numbers, but this trend of low enrollment is not reflected in the aspirations of individuals in refugee contexts. Through interviews with refugees, organizations, governments, and universities, the Women's Refugee Commission (2009) found that almost all of the refugees who completed secondary education aspired to attend university (Dryden-Peterson, 2011, p. 15). Often individuals who are resettled in adulthood lack the necessary documentation to access both employment and higher education (Alazroni, 2017). Others must overcome disruptions in formal education in order to access postsecondary programs (Benseman, 2014). In the U.K., policies and practices limit access to higher education (Doyle & O'Toole, 2013; Morrice, 2009) and research in other host countries, including the U.S. (Kerwin, 2011), Canada (Ferede, 2010), and Australia (Brooker & Lawrence, 2012) have revealed similar barriers. However, discussions of barriers often focus on access to college with less attend paid to potential obstacles in college persistence.

Literacies lie at the core around issues of access to postsecondary education. Pawan and Honeyford (2009) proposed that literacy serves three functions in

postsecondary education: (1) access, (2) student engagement, and (3) the ability to legitimize one's individuality. Goals, knowledge within social networks, and past professional and educational experiences may all inform the beliefs and behaviors associated with literacy practices. The literature on postsecondary education after resettlement highlights how the role of aspirations, information barriers, credentials, and disrupted formal education shape the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds.

Aspirations

For people who have experienced forced migration, education provides a way to look forward instead of backward. Many studies have found that young people from refugee backgrounds often prioritize education and aspire to complete a postsecondary degree (Brownlees & Finch, 2010; Elwyn et al., 2012). However, aspirations, future orientation, and the value of education are influenced by the opportunities available.

Resettling into a more permanent situation may boost educational aspirations. In a research project with refugee youth in Canada, Shakya et al. (2010) found that educational aspirations, particularly around higher education, were strengthened once they had resettled. More specifically, participants stated that they perceived education as having a greater value in Canada compared to the countries they had left. Through four case studies with refugee students pursuing higher education in the U.K., Morrice (2013) also found that pre-resettlement educational opportunities shaped the academic trajectories of students from refugee backgrounds. Both studies suggest that permanence and legitimacy inform the aspirations of displaced people. Furthermore, global initiatives have focused on creating access to education, without addressing pathways towards

economic, political, and social participation where education could be put to use (Dryden-Peterson, 2016).

Information Barriers

Even after resettling, students from refugee backgrounds face numerous barriers to higher education, often with navigating educational institutions. In a community-based participatory action research project, Bajwa et al. (2017) worked with 38 survivors of torture and/or war who had resettled in Canada. The findings revealed several informational barriers that impeded access to postsecondary education. In particular, participants shared that they had limited information about navigating educational pathways and limited access to professional support. Due to these barriers, participants were at heightened exposure to misinformation. Shakya et al. (2010) found a similar trend among newcomer students from refugee backgrounds in Canada. Even students who were placed into Canadian secondary schools reported struggling to find information about advancing into postsecondary studies. When examining a program in the U.K. that aimed to help refugees gain access to higher education, Morrice (2009) found that the program was limited in its goals precisely because students needed continued access to formal support structures for advice throughout the journey.

The lack of professional assistance was compounded with limited computer literacy as participants were often told to go online for more information. Baker and colleagues (2017) found that the seven students from refugee backgrounds at an Australian university showed a preference for seeking out support from their community over formal channels of support largely because of the repeated challenges they had experienced with professional assistance in the past. Like the participants in Bajwa et

al.'s (2017) study, participants expressed frustration in being sent online for information when they sought out in-person support. Likewise, using the narratives of two refugees who resettled in the U.S., Perry (2011) noted that one participant talked about accessing higher education as a battle. Despite a strong desire to attend university, the participant's attempts to access information and support through formal structures were met with low expectations. Together, these studies suggest that educational support services are not matching the needs of students from refugee backgrounds. In the lack of professional support, students turn to family, community, and word-of-mouth advice. Findings from across several studies suggest that, despite high aspirations, challenges around navigating institutions of higher education may impede educational advancement.

Credentials and Capital

Refugees with professional credentials often find that their prior education is not recognized once they resettle (Anselme & Hands, 2010; Bajwa et al., 2017; Doyle & O'Toole, 2013). This is true in many of the top countries that host refugees (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010). The devaluing of credentials maintains narratives of refugees as low-skilled, resulting in refugees suffering "the greatest 'occupational downgrading' of any immigrant group" (Kerwin, 2011). However, Batalova et al. (2008) reported that 37% of refugees resettling in the U.S. had higher degrees and a mean of 16.8 years of education. With adequate language support and access to programs to recuperate their credentials, refugees would be better positioned to make use of their professional skills. These studies suggest that refugees as a group do not necessarily need to learn disciplinary-based content but rather communication and language practices (Batalova et al., 2008)—acquiring Discourses for new professional communities.

The devaluing of past credentials is the most overt form of unrecognized capital of students from refugee backgrounds. But undervalued capital is the linguistic capital that refugees have acquired. Undervalued linguistic capital can lead to compounded complications as refugees pursue a postsecondary education such as increased course loads, higher tuition, stigma, and self-censorship (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Looking across four cases of students from refugee backgrounds in the U.K., Morrice (2013) saw that the mobility of the various forms of capital that students brought shaped their access to postsecondary education. It was only in having the recognized forms of capital that the participants in the case studies were able to transform their capital into other forms. For example, one student who had grown up in the colonial education system in Zimbabwe was able to apply her existing understanding of education to the new context which she, in turn, was able to transform into institutionalized capital. In contrast, for students "whose capitals were not as mobile and were not accepted, access to higher education meant not only improving and developing their English language skills but also adapting to the new and unfamiliar expectations of the field" (Morrice, 2013, p. 665). The participants found that their acquired capital around language and education either helped or hindered their academic trajectories; however, for some, the experience of forced migration may have disrupted their access to formal schooling and the acquisitions of associated forms of capital.

Disrupted Schooling

The experience of forced migration may lead to disruptions in formal schooling that continue to negatively influence students even after resettlement. Using participatory action research, Schroeter and James (2015) worked with six students from refugee

backgrounds who were enrolled in a French-speaking Canadian high school. The study found that because of their disrupted schooling, students were being placed on a non-academic track with students whom the school had deemed disengaged. Likewise, students from refugee backgrounds who arrived in the U.K. late in their secondary education or after, faced increased challenges in accessing postsecondary education due in part to their disrupted educational paths (Doyle & O'Toole, 2013). By being placed on non-academic tracks, students may face accumulated barriers to advancing into postsecondary education.

Much of the research with adolescents and adults with disrupted schooling focuses on acquiring English language proficiency (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Windle & Miller, 2012). Although acquiring the language of instruction and employment is important, an overemphasis on language features overlooks the other literacies that students acquire through formal education. Working with teachers of refugee adults with limited formal schooling in New Zealand, Benseman (2014) identified four factors that together can build momentum for further education: learning skills, English and literacy skills, understanding life in New Zealand, and self-confidence. Likewise, using a social practice view of literacy, Kaur (2016) examined the literacy practices of a Syrian refugee, Mona, who had recently arrived in New Zealand. Kaur found that Mona was resourceful in navigating new literacy practices and new contexts. Outside of a formal school setting, Mona engaged in a variety of contextual literacy events to accomplish broader social goals (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Kaur, 2016). Together, these studies suggest that language learning is strengthened when combined with other literacy practices and learning skills.

Postsecondary Academic Literacies

In a discussion of higher education in refugee contexts, the academic requirements of college programs are also central to building a better understanding of the transition into college coursework. Students transitioning into college-level classes may struggle to adapt to new requirements and expectations, a struggle that may be exacerbated by cultural differences and an academic journey that did not follow traditional timelines. In the previous section, I reviewed research about disruptions to education which may arise as a result of forced displacement. However, disrupted education does not have to bar students from entering and being successful in a college setting. A greater understanding of the role of academic literacies and the process of transitioning to college for all students can help build understandings of the literacy requirements that displaced students will encounter.

A sociocultural perspective of literacy assumes that "literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). Asymmetric power dynamics at the institutional level function in such a way that certain literacies are rewarded (Lea & Street, 2006; Portes & Salas, 2014). Although no language or culture can be said to be superior or inferior, in practice, "nondominant literacies are subject to power relations favoring the elite" (Nocon & Cole, 2014, p. 14). However, no literacy is superior; instead, students must be made aware of how literacy functions across the institution so that they can strategically modify their discourses. Literacy education provides a means of empowering students to critically examine the literacy practices that are imposed upon them (Freire, 2005; Nocon & Cole, 2014).

In line with Gee's (2012) sociocultural perspective of literacy, reading is part of larger social processes of interactions within academia. Looking at the experience of four students from refugee backgrounds in higher education in the U.K., Morrice (2013) found that the students experienced the university very differently based on how their prior skills and knowledge were valued by the institution. As a result of the colonial education system, the participant from Zimbabwe came with a knowledge of both English and literacy practices that were valued in the U.K. Having acquired valued literacy practices facilitated access, engagement, and a sense of belonging for one participant when compared to the other three students who found their languages and literacies were not valued by the university.

College Reading

College readiness lacks an agreed-upon definition of college-text readiness (Armstrong et al., 2016) and college readiness overall (National Center on Education and the Economy [NCEE], 2013). Despite a rather opaque sense of what it means to be college-ready, assessments such as the ACCUPLACER (College Board, n.d.-a), SAT (College Board, n.d.-b), and ACT (n.d.) all purport to measure a student's ability to be successful in college courses. Standardized assessments that rely heavily on multiple choice questions measure literacy as a knowledge of decontextualized skills and cannot measure the complex reading and writing processes that may be expected in college courses (NCEE, 2013). Mulcahy-Ernt and Caverly (2009) argued that a successful college student knew "not only what to study but also how to study it" (p. 177) and identified five study-reading strategies: rehearsal, elaboration, organization, monitoring, and affective and motivational strategies. Nist and Simpson (2000) suggested that, in

addition to strategies, active learning was also influenced by course characteristics (texts and tasks), learner characteristics (metacognitive ability, motivation, and prior knowledge), and beliefs about that nature of learning and knowing. These descriptions of college reading and learning build on one another in that course characteristics, learner characteristics, and beliefs influence how and when students apply reading strategies and behaviors. These studies further affirm the importance of context in understanding how students approach reading in college.

Learner characteristics can include epistemological beliefs (beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning) (Hofer, 2004) and self-efficacy (beliefs about oneself as a learner) (Bandura, 1997). These beliefs, in turn, inform the level of learning that a student engages in (Hofer, 2000). For instance, if a student believes that knowledge is simple and certain, they may be less likely to adopt strategies to examine inconsistencies and contradictions when reading. Likewise, the beliefs that a student holds about their own abilities within a specific discipline can influence the amount of time and energy they allot to the coursework (Alexandar, 2005).

Course characteristics such as disciplinary conventions and teacher beliefs also inform strategy usage (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Each discipline has unique conventions that undergird expectations around reading. These discipline-specific expectations are often unspoken, and students must determine the discipline-specific purpose for reading in order to be successful. The purpose for reading in one course may be to learn facts, whereas other courses may expect students to critique, analyze, and make decisions using texts. The extent to which these are clearly articulated and modeled to students may also influence strategy usage (Najarro, 2015). Teacher beliefs about

students and learning inform teaching style, feedback, and reward structures (Rueda, 2010). Together, these and other factors influence whether or not a student adopts deep-processing strategies or surface-level strategies when reading. Deep-processing includes personalization of the reading task with the goal of learning the content (Alexandar, 2005). In contrast, surface-level strategies such as verbatim recall and rote memorization that are used for the purpose of completing a task. Given this past research, understanding the literacy practices of students also requires examining the perceptions and beliefs that the student holds about their experiences in college.

In examining the influence of culture on reading more closely, Rueda (2010) found that cultural factors have both primary and secondary interpersonal effects. Primary interpersonal effects include cognitive processes and motivation, whereas secondary interpersonal effects are the influences of the social contexts such as teacher beliefs and social interactions with others. From a cognitive perspective, reading fluency can boost comprehension by automating the act of decoding, thus freeing up working memory for other tasks (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). However, language and cultural differences may influence these processes (Rueda, 2010). Rueda (2010) further posited that such difference can influence the cognitive, motivational, and affective states that are central to literacies. Students use schema, or "organized knowledge of the world" (Anderson, 2013, p. 476), to make sense of a text or task (Rueda, 2010). Schema operates as background knowledge to a topic but also by informing our attention to important clues provided through instruction and context (Rueda, 2010). Cultural familiarity with a Discourse can reduce cognitive load because students have an automated schema for culturally familiar situations. Non-cognitive factors are often left out of research on

college literacy practices, particularly for linguistically diverse students, and yet motivational and affective aspects not only influence literacy practices but are also culturally situated and important for understanding how students perceive and respond to instruction and learning more broadly.

Motivation is driven by "expectancy…how well one expects to do on a given task, and value…how much one values a given task or activity" (Rueda, 2010, p. 95). Cultural background can influence both. The cultural familiarity with a task or activity may increase expectancy, whereas cultural perceptions may influence the value placed on a given task. Motivation was an essential component in determining attendance in Adult Basic Education and Swedish courses for recent refugee arrivals (Elmeroth, 2010). Their motivations to learn both language and literacy were informed by "broader social goals and cultural practices" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8).

Finally, to explain secondary interpersonal effects Rueda (2010) returned to the social nature of literacy and learning. Social interactions in schools are mediated by cultural ways of knowing, being, and doing. Research with children has indicated that teachers have a motivational impact on their students through instructional strategies, classroom climate, and a teacher's own beliefs about the student's ability to learn (Davis, 2003; Rueda, 2010). Working with linguistically diverse learners transitioning into community college, Harklau (2000) found that instructional images of language learners negatively impacted student motivation and class participation when they conflicted with the images students held of themselves and their needs. Teachers of students from refugee backgrounds may hold beliefs not only around language learning but also around

refugee narratives that tend to mark students with limited and deficit identities (Uptin et al., 2016).

The field of developmental education, and developmental reading more specifically, strives to prepare students for college-level reading (Holschuh & Paulson, 2013) with the foundational understanding that literacy continues to develop well beyond basic literacy skills such as decoding (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Advanced literacy includes effective and efficient strategy usage (Alexander, 2005). When a student is deemed "not ready for college" by certain metrics, they are often enrolled in some form of developmental education course, including reading and writing. Again, this notion of college readiness is not only unclearly defined, but often masks cultural incongruities between students' Discourses and institutionally dominant Discourses. College-ready metrics may function as Gee's (1989) "tests" of fluency in the dominant Discourse. Developmental courses are positioned to develop this academic fluency. In a study of undergraduate writers from working-class backgrounds, Ashley (2001) identified a form of resistance to these dominant Discourses through manipulation of the system. Although students may be bound to the rules of the institution, Ashley showed how students can, in a sense, play the game of academia to achieve success. Developmental education is increasingly relevant to discussions of diverse student populations because the representation of linguistically diverse students in developmental courses has been steadily increasing (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015).

Postsecondary Academic Literacies and Students From Refugee Backgrounds

Very little research specifically addresses academic literacies of students from refugee backgrounds. This might be the result of limited access to higher education for

students from refugee backgrounds, low enrollment rates, or an overall lack of research on the academic literacy development of linguistically diverse students (Blanton, 2005; de Kleine & Lawton, 2015; Hirano, 2014; Lee, 2016). As students from refugee backgrounds transition into postsecondary studies, they navigate literacy practices common to the academic experience, as well as those of language acquisition. Given the paucity of available research with the target population, I have examined research on academic literacy more broadly which aligns, in many ways, with the research that has looked at academic literacies of refugees in college (Blanton, 2005; Essak, 2012; Hirano, 2014, 2015; Lee, 2016).

In a year-long, qualitative study, Hirano (2014, 2015) interviewed and observed seven refugee students enrolled in a private American college. The students had diverse backgrounds: four were from Afghanistan, the other three were from Burma, Rwanda, and Liberia. In interviews throughout their first year of studies in the college, both the students and their teachers identified challenges and strategies that students experienced. Blanton (2005) analyzed the writing of two refugee-background students in a first-year composition course. Lee (2016) researched the impact of an academic bridge program on the reading strategies of students from refugee backgrounds. Finally, Essak (2012) interviewed four refugee-background students over their first year at public university in the U.S. to understand both the definitions of academic literacy held by participants and how their perceptions of academic literacy changed over the year. Definitions of literacy were largely influenced by each participant's background, but all four participants equated literacy with success in school.

Each of these studies was qualitative with a focus on a small number of students that, taken together, represent diverse education and migration experiences. Blanton (2005), Lee (2016), and Hirano (2011) referred to periods of disrupted education for participants. Of the seven students in Hirano's (2011) study, two had not experienced any disruptions in schooling, and the others had missed between one and six years. Blanton (2005) described the two focal students generally as having disrupted formal school through their entire adolescence without and further descriptors. Lee (2016) on the other hand talks broadly about students as a class with disrupted education without detailing the varied experiences of students. In contrast, all four students in Essak's (2012) study had completed their compulsory education and learned English in their home country. Together, these wide-ranging experiences help to illustrate the complexities of educational trajectories when working with students from refugee backgrounds.

Academic Writing. In looking at the experience of students from refugee backgrounds in regards to college writing, Hirano (2014) noted that the most common mistakes in student writing were around grammar, spelling, and punctuation; however, these mistakes rarely impeded comprehension. The participants were aware of their developing writing skills and sought out help for their writing assignments in the English class. However, this help-seeking behavior did not transfer to their other courses. Bharuthram and Clarence (2015) found similar results in a case study of a first-year reading English course for students at a historically disadvantaged university in South Africa. Students demonstrated limited transfer of reading and writing practices to other courses, particularly among students whose home literacy practices that differed from the university.

Adapting to new academic expectations can complicate the college experience for students from refugee backgrounds (Harris & Marrlow, 2011). Evidence from across courses suggested that the students in Hirano's (2014) study struggled with understanding the assignment expectations more so than surface-level language use. Students were receiving support on the mechanics of writing in their English composition course but not receiving adequate guidance in the more nuanced expectations of how thinking and writing are done in discipline-specific contexts. The students in Blanton's (2005) study showed an awareness that academic writing was different from their writing outside the course. However, Blanton found that their attempts to produce academic writing led to an increase in errors compared to their non-formal writing tasks. Bharuthram and McKenna (2012) had similar findings in interviews with students at a technical university in South Africa. Students expressed that the writing expectations were mysterious, language indicating that students were struggling with the disciplinary-specific conventions of meaning-making, or the "secrets" of a discipline (Holschuh, 2014). Even when students referenced an awareness of discipline-specific norms, they could not articulate them. If entering into a new disciplinary community requires acquiring a new Discourse, then students need to be mentored in the norms of the community members, not only reading and writing, but also thinking, doing, and valuing (Bharuthram & Clarence, 2015; Gee, 2012). In the context of academic writing, this entails knowing basic writing conventions but also the discipline-specific norms and conventions.

Academic Reading. In examining college-text readiness at a community college in the U.S., Armstrong and colleagues (2016) found that general education courses used texts as preparation for course lectures, expecting reading to be done independently. The

result was that few references were made to the text in class sessions and there was no instruction on navigating the course texts. Likewise, one of the major challenges that the students in Hirano's (2015) study mentioned was the different role of reading in their college courses compared to high school. All seven students had attended high school in the U.S. prior to enrolling in college. The students mentioned that reading was a more autonomous activity in college and, unlike high school, did not take place in class. In a mixed methods study in South African universities, Bharuthram and Clarence (2015) also found that, although lecturers across disciplines had different expectations of reading, the expectations around reading behaviors and norms were not discussed in class.

The changing role of texts in college courses posed a challenge as texts became more central and students faced new expectations around the level of text engagement (Hirano, 2015). They were prepared to recall information, but in their college courses, they were expected to apply rather than recall the information that they had read. According to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), reading comprehension required three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading (p. xi). The students in Hirano's (2015) study were struggling with the purpose of reading, which they had identified by using what they knew from high school. In a similar study, Blanton (2005) found that the students did not interact with the world textually in any language due to their disrupted literacy education.

The development of learning strategies is a central component in the development of academic literacies (Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2018). Some of the refugee-background students in an academic bridge program used comprehension strategies when reading but lacked strategies to counteract difficulties with comprehension (Lee, 2016). To

compensate for disrupted formal schooling, Lee (2016) suggested that students from refugee backgrounds might benefit from explicit reading strategies instruction in preparation for postsecondary studies. Past research suggests that students at all levels can benefit from reading instruction. What is less known is how disruptions in schooling influence literacy development over time.

Word knowledge requires full and flexible knowledge that includes both a base definition and how the word is used across contexts (Francis & Simpson, 2018; Stahl, 1999). From a disciplinary literacy perspective, readers need to acquire not only vocabulary but how and when words are used. The students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in Kanno and Varghese's (2010) study cited specialized vocabulary as a significant issue in reading comprehension. In a comparison of monolingual English students to those learning English as an additional language, Shanahan and Escamilla (2009) reported that word-level skills were similar, and the largest discrepancy was at the text level—reading comprehension and writing. This finding suggests that the influence of language on reading comprehension surpasses basic grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Prior knowledge in a certain content area facilitated the disciplinary-based reading tasks. Acquiring English vocabulary was a central challenge to understanding texts. However, the impact of vocabulary varied across disciplines (Hirano, 2015). These findings support research that learning new vocabulary words is not sufficient to fully engage in college reading. As Lee (2016) found with students from refugee backgrounds, identifying unknown vocabulary was insufficient as a comprehension strategy. Instead, students needed strategies to build meaning while reading even when they encountered unfamiliar words.

Although the students were concerned about their vocabulary for college reading, their professors identified prior knowledge as a greater challenge for the students from refugee backgrounds (Hirano, 2015). For both vocabulary and prior knowledge, history and government were the most challenging due to the use of primary sources. The students in Hirano's study were unfamiliar with the cultural and social contexts needed to understand primary sources, and the professors in the study failed to provide the context in lectures. This is consistent with the literature around disciplinary literacy. Alexander (2005) posited that decoding does not lead directly to understanding; instead, both domain and topic knowledge are important for reading comprehension. Domain knowledge refers to the breadth of knowledge one has about reading, whereas topic knowledge is the depth of knowledge associated with a specific topic. In the history course, the students from refugee backgrounds had limited topic knowledge compared to their peers, which made it difficult for them to understand and discuss primary texts.

In adapting to the demands of college reading, Hirano (2015) found that participants, all students from refugee backgrounds, chose not to read at the beginning of the year, perceiving that the lectures were, at best, a repetition of information, or that the texts offered conflicting information with less value compared to what that professor said in lectures. The first exam in each course helped students to determine the value of reading assignments for their courses. After the first exams, the students adopted new reading strategies. Due to heavy reading loads, many students in the study opted to selectively read using course PowerPoints and study guides. Other students found ways to enhance their reading by reading with tutors and peers, finding quiet reading spaces, and rereading after lectures. Lee (2016) examined a program that used Collaborative

Strategic Reading to build metacognitive awareness of reading strategies such as previewing, monitoring comprehension, summarizing, and questioning. Only some students entering the program verbalized that they used comprehension strategies when reading such as "stop and try to understand." Instructors noted an increase in autonomous reading strategy use over time and, though students learned these strategies using only expository texts; they transferred the reading strategies to other genres in the following lessons.

Hirano (2014) credited the availability and use of campus resources for the success of seven students from refugee backgrounds at an American college. Students relied heavily on writing tutors and also made use of the writing center, professors, and peers. The seven students in Hirano's (2015) study would go to their professors with specific questions and to tutors when they had more global questions. The help-seeking by the students indicated metacognitive awareness. Students in the study were aware of when they needed extra support and distinguished between the level of support needed. The four students from refugee backgrounds in Essak's (2012) study reported that they saw the largest strategy changes in their help-seeking behaviors. Although all four participants reported maintaining their original literacy and study practices, they also noted that they were more likely to seek out assistance in the form of study groups or supplemental instruction.

Metacognition. Comprehension strategies for college reading are most effective when they include metacognitive components alongside cognitive and affective components (Holschuh & Aultman, 2008). Metacognitive reading practices include a student's knowledge of their cognitive abilities and their ability to regulate their usage of

their abilities and skills (Holschuh & Paulson, 2013). Knowledge, strategy use, and motivation intersect and help to describe a student's level of competence (Alexander, 2005). According to Holschuh and Aultman (2008), metacognition refers to a reader's ability to monitor their learning. Metacognitive reading is active reading in that it incorporates self-monitoring of one's understanding of the reading and applying strategies. It also includes practices such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing information (Pressley, 2002) which can lead to a heightened ability to identify inconsistencies (Holschuh & Paulson, 2013).

Metacognition is an important component of strategic learning (Weinstein & Acee, 2018). Self-reflection encourages an increased awareness of one's conceptions of literacy that inform that strategies that students adopt and those they pass over (Eckert, 2011). Participants in Hirano's (2014) study explained that they experienced college writing differently in their various courses which impeded the transfer of skills from composition to other content courses. However, Hirano did not further interrogate the possible reasons behind this lack of transfer. Past literature on metacognition suggests that despite learning general writing skills, students lacked a metacognitive awareness about when and where to apply the skills they learned in composition courses (Nist & Simpson, 2000). This aligns with Hirano's (2014) findings as well as those of Bharuthram and Clarence (2015) who found limited transfer of reading and writing practices across college courses. These two studies provide an example of the importance of metacognition in college learning. Students need to develop an awareness of their learning strategies as well as when and where to apply them to promote the transfer of skills that were not found in these studies.

Findings from past studies with students from refugee backgrounds also suggest a lack of metacognitive awareness around reading strategies. In adapting to the demands of college reading, the seven refugee students in Hirano's (2015) study adopted one of three strategies: not reading, selective reading, and enhanced reading. Particularly at the beginning of the year, participants opted not to read and valued lectures instead. Additional strategies that students adopted to enhance their college reading included reading with tutors and peers, finding quiet reading spaces, and rereading after lectures (Essak, 2012; Hirano, 2015). There was some indication that participants adapted strategies over time. However, since metacognition was not a focus in these studies, it is difficult to determine the role of metacognition in the learning processes of the participants.

Help-seeking behaviors noted in past studies offer additional insights into metacognition. Some studies have indicated that students from refugee backgrounds engage in help-seeking behaviors when studying in college. Hirano (2015) found that students were aware of when they needed extra support and distinguished between the level of support needed, suggesting a level of metacognitive awareness. Students went to professors with specific questions and to tutors when they had more global questions. Essak (2012) had similar findings with four refugee students in an American university. Students reported learning to go to supplemental instruction, teaching assistants, and peers for help with difficult concepts. Seeking out help from different sources indicates that participants used their understanding of their skills and knowledge to determine the type of help they needed and where to find it. Contexts of courses and their associated

literacies are becoming increasingly important as college learning expands into online

formats that change the ways information is shared with students.

Postsecondary Connected Learning Programs

Another layer that must be considered to situate the present study within research

is the format of the program. Often, to facilitate access to a postsecondary program for

students from refugee backgrounds, students are enrolled in connected learning programs

that combine support with a competency-based online college program. Programs like

this, coined "connected learning programs," combine online coursework with local

support and have grown in popularity as a means of providing low-cost, flexible

postsecondary programs internationally (Castaño Muñoz et al., 2018; UNHCR, 2016;

Zeus, 2011). The idea of connected learning goes beyond the competency-based

education model. The term "connected learning" may seem to be a misnomer considering

that the emphasis on online learning restructures and often distances connections between

students and the connection between instructor and student. However, the term is used in

the literature to foreground the connection between online learning and face-to-face

learning. Ito et al. (2013), used the term "connected learning" to connote the variety of

support structures that students rely on in both online and offline spaces, both within and

outside of institutional boundaries. At the core of these emerging models of connected

learning is the incorporation and allowance of various sources of support to make

learning more personalized.

Distance education programs have been key in providing college access to

displaced populations (UNHCR, 2017; Zeus, 2011). For example, the Jesuit Commons:

Higher Education at the Margins Program provided postsecondary online programs to

refugees in Africa and the Middle East (Crea & Sparnon, 2017). Given the pervasiveness of disrupted education in refugee contexts, Crea and Sparnon (2017) found that a blended model of online education coupled with onsite staff was most effective. However, faculty and staff faced challenges in making courses from another country relevant to the students (Crea & Sparnon, 2017).

In designing connected learning programs for students from refugee backgrounds, Castaño Muñoz et al. (2018) identified three key components: guided instruction, personalized learning, and blended learning contexts. In online learning environments, students make use of a diverse set of skills. Two important components for participation in online learning are self-directed learning and digital skills (Castaño Muñoz et al., 2018). Yet, Crea and Sparnon (2017) argued that the target population of connected learning programs, refugees, may lack the digital capital necessary to access these new educational opportunities. Research on the literacy practices of refugees outside of formal schooling suggests that refugees do have digital capitals to draw on as they use digital platforms to maintain connections to their international communities (Gilhooly & Lee, 2014; Kaur, 2016). In documenting the digital literacy practices of nine adolescent girls from Myanmar, Omerbašić (2015) found that the girls used diverse digital platforms, including internet, computers, and iPads for communication, but that their literacy practices were not valued within their school. Increasing the use of online platforms for learning may increase the value of the literacy practices outlined in Omerbašić's (2015) study by increasing access to multimodal sources of information. Online learning may provide more access to formats that match the preferences, and perhaps strengths, of each student but lacks the in-person support and guidance provided in traditional classrooms

(Asunka, 2008; Castaño Muñoz et al., 2018). Blended learning programs create opportunities to couple the personalized nature of online programs with in-person support to better fit learning with students' linguistic and semiotic repertoires.

Past studies have shown a range of benefits from online learner-centered programs for language learners (Hernen, 2016; Janse van Rensburg & Son, 2010; Yang, 2012). Janse van Rensburg and Son (2010) examined the experiences of five adult female Sudanese refugees using computer-assisted language learning. To prepare for the program, participants learned basic computer literacy, from using a mouse to navigating the internet. Using in-depth interviews, focus groups, and tests, Janse van Rensburg and Son (2010) found that after 12 weeks, the women had significant gains on English and computer literacy tests as well as increased confidence using computers. The study also indicated the value of providing detailed assistance to students with limited computer experience. Twenty language learners in Yang's (2012) study appreciated that online learning provided more opportunities for them to practice new reading strategies at their own pace. Likewise, in a study of a hybrid model at a community college, language learners reported improving their vocabulary because they felt less rushed with online assignments (Hernen, 2016). Finally, in a case study with 200 Spanish students enrolled in a hybrid English class, Gonzalez-Vera (2016) found that integration of technology increased student motivation. These studies highlight the benefits of online programs for language development. However, these studies focused primarily on language over other academic content.

Research in online learning both broadly and in refugee settings more specifically show that personalized learning may support language learning by allowing students to

work at their own pace. In addition, the personalized nature of online programs creates opportunities for students to target skills and information that is most relevant for them. However, research also suggests that to be most effective, online learning requires matching student and program expectations and comfort with self-directed learning. Blended approaches may aid in addressing these additional components, but current research has not examined how students perceive and adapt to program expectations when navigating their own learning.

Research into broader student populations supports the importance of self-directed learning for online coursework. Using the Learning and Study Strategies Indicator (LASSI), ChanLin (2012) found that strategies for time management, attitude, and test preparation were significantly correlated with online course achievement. In a study with students in Taiwan, Lin (2018) found that, in addition to the project-specific skills, self-efficacy and knowledge integration skills were significant to student outcomes. These studies suggest that self-regulation may be of particular importance when transitioning to online learning.

Self-Regulation

An increase in online and digital learning contexts has also fueled interest in the role of self-regulation in computer-based learning. Greene et al. (2011) found that computer-based learning at the college level was more successful when students were able to effectively self-regulate. Self-regulation refers to a student's ability to monitor and manage their learning processes such as planning, monitoring, focusing, reflecting and evaluating learning (Weinstein & Acee, 2018). Self-regulation is a recurrent metacognitive process that includes forethought, such as academic goal planning;

performance control, such as monitoring goal progress and regulating emotions, thoughts, and behaviors; and self-reflection (Weinstein & Acee, 2018). Azevedo et al. (2007) defined self-regulated learning as making "decisions about what to learn, how to learn it, how much time to spend on it, how to access other instructional materials, and whether they understand the material" (p. 68). Strategic learners not only apply strategies but also evaluate their learning through self-testing and monitoring to check their comprehension. In doing so, learners can seek help or use study aids to support their learning as needed. Self-regulation also embodies anxiety coping strategies and motivation management for learning and achievement.

Online learning is an open-ended learning environment in which students make more choices on where, what, and how they learn. The Internet gives access to information in multiple formats and provides hyperlinks to additional resources. This inclusion of hyperlinks makes online texts far less linear than traditional print-based texts (Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2018). These non-linear modalities require self-regulation as readers must monitor their understanding of the content, how it is presented, and identify when new information is needed (Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2018). In addition, readers must determine when information is credible and when the depth of information is sufficient for the task at hand. Greene and colleagues (2011) suggested that self-regulated learning would help students learn in digital spaces. However, in a study of learners in hypermedia environments, Azevedo et al. (2007) found that externally regulated strategies were more effective. The study did not examine the effect of external strategy regulation on self-regulation over time. It is possible that self-regulated learning is not innate but rather skills that can be developed through explicit instruction and practice.

These studies suggest there is value to regulation in learning overall, but they do not look at the role of self-regulation in literacy practices more specifically. Moreover, these studies focused on students working in their native language, and are therefore limited in their application to linguistically diverse students.

Academic Literacies with Digital Texts

The competency-based format of the target program's curriculum centralizes the role of reading for learning, because learning occurs primarily through online resources rather than lectures and in-person interactions. Furthermore, reading has shifted from printed texts to digital formats. Afflerbach and Cho (2009) identified macro-strategies that students used when reading online, including identifying important information, monitoring comprehension, and evaluating sources. Evaluating sources may be the largest shift from printed texts. As students turn to the internet for information, there is an additional onus placed on them to evaluate the sources that they are choosing. The internet also presents a plethora of information that students must navigate. More recently, Cho and Afflerbach (2017) added new macro-strategies for reading online, which included determining a purpose for reading, locating information from multiple texts, and synthesizing information from multiple sources.

Competency-Based Learning

Competency-based programs offer an alternative model to the credit-hours-based approach and provide students more flexibility to determine course pace. The personalized pacing of competency-based programs may be particularly beneficial to students from refugee backgrounds who often have more diverse educational trajectories compared to traditional university students (Castaño Muñoz et al., 2018). Gervais (2016)

defined competency-based education as "an outcome-based approach to education that incorporates modes of instructional delivery and assessment efforts designed to evaluate mastery of learning by students through their demonstration of the knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors required for the degree sought" (p. 99). A central feature of competency-based education is that learners progress at their own pace. A competency refers to "not only knowledge, but also skills, attitudes, and values, and entails the capacity to perform successfully in an academic, professional, or social environment" (Cañado, 2013, p. 4). Each competency has clear learning objectives that students must meet to progress to the next competency (Gervais, 2016). However, a competency-based online approach requires that students learn independently and primarily from online texts, making reading central to the learning process (Hernen, 2016).

Students engage in a variety of literacy strategies when learning online in a foreign language. Anderson (2003) asked 247 English learners to fill out the Online Survey of Reading Strategies (OSORS) about reading in English to measure online-specific reading strategies. The findings showed that participants preferred problem-solving strategies such as rereading, adjusting reading speed, and guessing unknown words over support strategies such as reading aloud, self-questioning, and note-taking. More recently, Cheng (2016) distributed the OSORS to 32 students who were majoring in foreign languages (e.g., Slavic languages, Germanic). Similar to Anderson's work, Cheng (2016) found that students favored problem-solving strategies but engaged less in support strategies. What these studies did not address was the effectiveness of different types of strategies for comprehension and learning outcomes, nor how and why students made such decisions.

Competency-based learning promotes metacognitive awareness of learning processes (Simonds et al., 2017; Tudor, 2013; Yang, 2012). Tudor (2013) identified four metacognitive competencies for language learning: "the ability to assess one's current skills in a language; the ability to set relevant and realistic goals; the ability to identify one's preferred learning style and strengths as a learner; the ability to identify and exploit relevant learning options and materials" (p. 24). In a study that compared hybrid to traditional reading course structures for language learners, Yang (2012) found that including a study log on the online platform in the hybrid course promoted metacognition by focusing students on their own strategies as well as those of their peers. Finally, because students have more control over the pace and focus of an online asynchronous course, they must also be able to assess their own progress as well as identify and adjust to their learning needs and seek out help when needed (Harris et al., 2010; Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2018). Despite the appearance of a link between competency-based approaches and metacognitive awareness, current studies have not clarified whether successful students begin with high metacognitive awareness or if it is acquired throughout the course.

The benefits of a competency-based approach include the adaptive and personalized nature of learning that allows students to progress through projects and competencies at their own pace rather than a predetermined schedule (Hernen, 2016; Yang, 2012). Plass (2016) defined adaptivity as "an approach to the design of a learning system in which each learner is provided with the kind of experience he or she needs at any given time in order to be successful in reaching the intended (learning) outcomes" (para. 2). For example, a student who has less prior knowledge on a topic could take

longer in a unit to build that knowledge. Given that both topical knowledge and procedural knowledge play important roles in comprehension, this added time could benefit the student's overall comprehension in the subject (Alexander, 2005; Plass, 2016). However, what a student needs to succeed differs between students, between courses, and between assignments. Plass (2016) proposed four main categories of adaptation: cognitive variables, motivational variables, affective variables, and socio-cultural variables. These broad categories align with research in academic literacies that show how students benefit from strategies with cognitive, metacognitive, and affective components (Holschuh & Lampi, 2018).

Research into connected learning programs for students from refugee backgrounds is limited (Crea & Sparnon, 2017; Ito et al., 2013). There is a noticeable lack of research on the use of competency-based programs with students from refugee backgrounds. Existing research has highlighted the potential of online learning platforms to expand access to postsecondary education and overcome common educational barriers for students from refugee backgrounds (Castaño Muñoz et al., 2018; Reinhardt, 2018). Many researchers have shown an interest in online learning for language learning (Anderson, 2003; Hernen, 2016; Janse van Rensburg & Son, 2010; Yang, 2012). I turn next to the literature on the intersections of language acquisition within the broader context of postsecondary academic contexts.

Second Language Acquisition in Postsecondary Contexts

Language is the medium of literacy and plays a central role in education including higher education. The majority of research on linguistically diverse students focuses on a K-12 context. Yet, DiCerbo, et al. (2014) argued:

It is the medium through which concepts and skills are learned and assessed,

social relationships and identities are formed, and increasingly deeper and more

complex disciplinary understandings are constructed over time. (p. 446)

If their assertion is correct, then it follows that language becomes increasingly important

as students advance to postsecondary coursework. There is limited research on the

relationship between second language acquisition and college literacy development

(Blanton, 2005; de Kleine & Lawton, 2015). Language and literacy cannot be fully

separated; however, linguistically diverse students may experience college courses

differently than their monolingual peers. This section builds on the former by looking at

second language acquisition in postsecondary contexts and where it overlaps and

diverges from the literature on academic literacy.

Linguistically Diverse Students in Postsecondary Education

At the postsecondary level, there is a lack of research on the academic literacy use

of linguistically diverse students (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015). Little is known about adult

literacy development for academic settings with multilingual students, particularly for

students whose first-language literacy development ended in primary school (Blanton,

2005). Yet the need for more research with linguistically diverse students is growing as

globalization increases migration around the world, suggesting that globally, schools are

becoming more linguistically diverse (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). For example, the

student population in the U.S. is increasingly multilingual. This increase of "linguistic

minorities" is mirrored in postsecondary settings (Kanno & Grosik, 2012).

One of the complications in examining literature on linguistically diverse

students, and refugees in particular, is the existence of multiple classifications of

language learners. Recently, de Kleine and Lawton (2015) identified several different designations of linguistically diverse students, each with different needs and experiences in American colleges. International students are those who have completed high school in their home country. Immigrant students are those who have moved to the U.S. and attended some K-12 schooling prior to attending college. Generation 1.5 is a subset of immigrant students who began schooling in the U.S. as children (Goldberg, 2013). Generation 1.5 students are characterized by high oral language skills, with language differences in academic reading and writing. Suh (2018) suggested adding yet another distinction of linguistically diverse learners—Generation 1 learners. In contrast to Generation 1.5 learners, Generation 1 students are adult English language learners who did not attend K-12 schooling within the U.S. and transition into college with the goal of earning a degree (Suh, 2018).

Based on the age of arrival, refugee-background students in college might fall under different categories or none of the above. These distinctions are based largely on language status and past education levels but students from refugee backgrounds represent diverse educational experiences from significantly disrupted schooling to complete but unrecognized college degrees. Students from refugee backgrounds do not easily fit into one of these categories as experiences differ in terms of access to education, past education experiences (i.e., learning through multiple languages of instruction), and whether or not they remain in protracted situations or have resettled in a new country.

Length of formal schooling in a student's native language is an important predictor of the long-term academic achievement of students in a new language of instruction (Thomas & Collier, 2002). This is particularly salient in refugee contexts

where students face years of disrupted schooling that results in varied literacy levels in their first language (Migration Policy Institute, 2014). In a study that examined the records of over 700,000 linguistically diverse students, Thomas and Collier (1997) found that students who transferred into new education systems with limited exposure to content in their native language showed a persistent pattern of academic underperformance. More recently, Callahan and colleagues (2010) found that students placed into English as a second language (ESL) courses long-term in high school fell behind their peers due to limited access to content courses. The pattern continued in postsecondary institutions. In a longitudinal study that looked at ten years of data, Hodara (2015) found that students placed into ESL courses fell behind in credit hours compared to their peers in developmental writing and were less likely to complete a degree. These findings suggest that linguistically diverse students, which may include refugees, benefit from literacy support beyond the literacies learned in ESL courses.

The role of language in college achievement is conflicting. In a qualitative study with two refugee-background students in a college composition course, Blanton (2005) reported that participants received mixed signals about their language abilities. They were repeatedly told that they were underprepared for college-level coursework while also passing the general education courses they could take. In reality, more factors than language alone influence academic achievement. Looking at an American community college, Almon (2012) found that, when matched on age, English learners had higher grade point averages than their native-English peers, yet lower persistence rates in course and degree completion. Blanton (2005) found that the students did not benefit from the composition course that was designed for monolingual speakers, because their

relationship with oral and written forms of communication was shaped by their interrupted literacy education. Such conflicts in research findings may be an indication that the relationship between language acquisition and academic outcomes is complex.

The majority of research on literacy and language transfer from first to additional languages focuses on early literacy (Blanton, 2005). Cummins' (1991) interdependence theory of second language acquisition placed importance on the connection between a student's first and subsequent languages in determining the cognitive demands of an academic task. Likewise, in Rueda's (2010) work on the influence of culture and academic literacy, students who have developed literacy schemas in a first language can more easily apply the schema to new literacy learning tasks.

Cummins (2000) distinguished between academic and social language skills. Social language refers to the language of daily use and is very context dependent. In contrast, academic language skills are "characterized by low-frequency, academic content-specific vocabulary and more complex syntactic structures" (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015). Generation 1.5 students often have high levels of social language skills and are more comfortable with speaking and listening compared to academic skills that involve more reading and writing. Blanton's (2005) study supported this notion. Both students had high levels of social language fluency but struggled with academic language use that required strict adherence to Standard English grammar and rhetorical structures. These studies suggest that students have diverse linguistic repertoires to draw from, but that not all of their linguistic resources are valued within academic settings. There is a pervasive assumption that language skills develop in a parallel fashion (Blanton, 2005). Language-in-use is central to the Discourses that students acquire, and the nature of

language use is influenced by the context. Creating sharp boundaries between who speaks and does not speak a language pushes an assumption that languages exist as undifferentiated wholes (Choi & Najar, 2017). In academia it follows that students will be academically prepared when they have acquired the language of instruction, simplifying the process of language acquisition and attempting to separate language as an abstract from situated languages-in-use that are contextually shaped. In communication, "we engage in language practices, we draw on linguistic repertoires, we take up styles, we partake in discourse, we do genres" (Pennycook, 2012, p. 98). Language is not an abstract whole that one either has or lacks, rather, language involves the being, thinking, and doing within a given context.

Research and placement practices have overemphasized composition, writing, and, specifically, writing errors, overlooking the importance of language in reading. Grouping students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds together, Kanno and Varghese, (2010) found that, in college coursework, students cited several types of linguistic challenges. Overall, out of 33 students, the majority perceived challenges with reading including understanding the content and the amount of reading that was required. Writing overall was an issue for linguistically diverse students, particularly around grammar and perceived quality of their own writing. On a lesser level, students were concerned with speaking, listening, and test performance. Vocabulary was noted as a challenge across reading, writing, and listening. Qualitative studies with college students from refugee backgrounds indicated that vocabulary was central in academic coursework (Hirano, 2014; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Lee, 2016). Linguistically diverse students are tasked with expanding their academic vocabulary overall at the same time that they are

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acquiring discipline-specific vocabulary for their courses (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Lee, 2016).

More recently, some scholars have used a framework of language leveraging to highlight the robust linguistic and communicative repertoires of students from refugee backgrounds. While working with newly arrived immigrants in Sweden, Dávila (2017) noted that, by encouraging the use of all available linguistic resources, students were able to build social and linguistic capital while acquiring Swedish. The instructors promoted the use of students' full communicative repertoire—the ways that individuals use both language and literacy to communicate in different contexts (Martinez et al., 2017; Rymes, 2010). A shift from linguistic features to broader communicative events helps to better capture the diverse forms of capital that students have, particularly literacy practices that are overlooked when there is too narrow a focus on English features (Rymes, 2010).

To overcome deficit perspectives of students who have multiple language funds at their disposal, Canagarajah (2011, 2013) promoted the use of *translanguaging*. Choi and Najar (2017) put translanguaging to practice in a community language course for refugee women in Australia. The three focal women came from Somalia, Iraq, and Iran. Throughout the course, participants and teachers drew on a variety of semiotic resources. The result was that the women were able to guide the course in a way that was relevant to their lives because they were not restricted by strict language-use requirements, thereby increasing the transformative potential of the course (Freire, 2005). Dávila (2017) had similar results in Sweden with refugee youth. The participants in the qualitative study drew from their multiple language resources in learning Swedish. Students may also benefit from drawing from different language practices in their courses. Blanton (2005)

argued that for the students she worked with, promoting the use of their social language in their writing would help them overcome the challenges they felt with academic writing. Translanguaging may also help students develop metacognitive awareness about literacy and language practices that they use in their courses.

Gaps in the Literature

In reviewing the literature on postsecondary education in refugee contexts, academic literacy, and second language acquisition, there are several areas that remain under-researched. First, there is an overall need for more research on the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds who are enrolled in postsecondary education. With an international focus on policies and programs for primary education for refugee populations, failure to address higher levels of education does little to address the needs of refugee families in building self-reliance. In addition, research focused on refugees at the postsecondary level would help counter deficit narratives that too often frame refugees by what they lack rather than what they bring to their host countries (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017).

Furthermore, there is limited research that specifically addresses the literacy practices and experiences of refugees in college. The popularity of digital learning in refugee contexts is almost nonexistent in current research with refugee students at the postsecondary level. This research will build on past studies by using a sociocultural framework to examine literacy practices within a connected learning context and how students leverage and adapt their practices as they navigate college coursework.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the theories that help to frame the current study. Sociocultural literacy serves as the anchor for my theoretical framework, conceptualizing literacy as a social practice. Literacy practices are the cultural ways that people use written language as it is shaped by social rules. Given that literacy practices are often unobservable, literacy events, or the observable uses of texts, can be examined in order to understand literacy practices. To better frame the contextual nature of literacy practices, I also reviewed theories around cultural reproduction, language acquisition, multiliteracies, and academic literacies and highlighted with a focus on how each set of theories helps to contextualize literacy within a postsecondary program with students from refugee backgrounds.

Next, I reviewed literature and research relevant to the current study. I began with a review of U.S. resettlement practices and a review of literature on the postsecondary education for refugee students after resettling. I turned to the literature on academic literacies in postsecondary education, but there was limited research that specifically addressed the literacy practices and experiences of refugees in college. Finally, I reviewed the literature on connected learning and language acquisition in postsecondary contexts to further contextualize the present study. Despite a growth in popularity of connected learning programs to expand access to higher education in refugee contexts, there has been limited research on the use of academic literacy practices of refugee students in online college programs, and extant literature focuses on language learning over other literacy practices.

III. METHODS

The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the literacy practices of students from refugee backgrounds who were enrolled in a connected learning college program. This case study investigated the literacy practices that students used to navigate their coursework. Using a case study allowed me to develop a holistic description of student literacy practices by examining perceived and enacted practices. I addressed the following questions:

1. How do students from refugee backgrounds navigate the literacy practices of an American competency-based connected learning college program?

    a. In what ways, if any, do students draw upon linguistic resources to navigate these literacy practices?

    b. In what ways, if any, do students draw upon social networks while navigating these literacy practices?

2. How does the experience of forced migration inform the language and literacy practices that students use in the program?

Research Design

This study examined the literacy practices of students pursuing higher education after experiencing forced migration using a case study methodology (Merriam, 1998). Stake (1995) defined a qualitative case study as a "study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). The purpose of a case study is to understand and describe in order to gain insight about an issue and can be used for description, explanation, or exploration when the researcher does not have control over the behaviors being studied (Barone,

2014). A case study allows the researcher to provide a holistic analysis of a phenomenon embedded within the real-world context (Creswell, 2013). As Stake (1995) noted, "the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization" (p. 8). I used a collective case study to investigate the literacy practices of multiple students who were enrolled in a connected learning online college program in the eastern U.S. The findings of this study were not intended to be generalizable but to offer a new perspective to current discussions of postsecondary literacies, connected learning, and the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds.

A collective case study methodology allowed me to look at the literacy practices of individual students using a variety of data sources, including interviews, observations, and artifacts. Stake (1995) posited that qualitative case studies share four characteristics: they are *holistic*, considering the interrelationship between the case and context; *empirical*, basing conclusions on observations; *interpretive*, viewing research as an interaction between research and participants; and *empathetic*, reflecting the existence of various perspectives. By working with multiple students enrolled in the same program, I was able to investigate the literacy strategies used by individual students in the program as well as examine the similarities and differences across cases.

Stake (2005) and Merriam (1988) both emphasized constructivist approaches to case studies founded on the assumption that reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with the context and also by readers of the final report. From this standpoint, the role of the researcher is to understand meaning as it is constructed by participants (Yazan, 2015). The constructivist leanings of both Stake and Merriam align with the theoretical framings of the current study by emphasizing the context, participant, and

interactions in how meanings are made and negotiated. Given Merriam's (1998) connection to adult education research and more detailed prescriptions for case study research, I relied on her framing of a case study as a guide for my research. Merriam offered both flexibility and structure in her description of case studies from research planning through data analysis. The constructivist epistemological stance of Merriam's work, and the prioritization of multiple interpretations over an assumed objective reality, aligned with my sociocultural theoretical framing which made her work the best frame for my case study design.

Research Setting

The research took place at PAIR, a connected learning college program with a physical campus in the northeastern region of the U.S. Connected learning pairs competency-based online courses with face-to-face support (UNHCR, 2016). Students advanced through the program at an individualized pace rather than a standard semester schedule. To demonstrate mastery of a competency, students completed a range of projects, such as PowerPoints, videos, and written assignments (see Appendix C). In the place of semester-based courses, students completed a set number of competencies that served as equivalents to college course credits. Students were rewarded for hitting benchmarks that were set on the number of competencies completed. For example, a student would be rewarded for completing 30 competencies, then 60, then 90, etc. until completing 120 competencies which was the equivalent of an associate degree.

The course work was entirely online. Students were assigned a project and provided with online resources such as websites, articles, book chapters, and videos. These resources might provide content knowledge or skill-building. Projects took many

forms including papers, videos, presentations, and spreadsheets. Once the student had completed a project, they would submit their work to a grader who would then provide feedback and determine if the set if the competencies had been mastered. If not, the student would receive "not yet" along with feedback on how they needed to revise their project. The student would make the required revisions and resubmit their work to the same grader. This resulted in a feedback loop between a grader and student in which the student would submit drafts and the grader would provide feedback until the project was deemed mastered by the grader.

Unlike distance education, students were geographically tied to the program through the learning supports that were coupled with the online component, including weekly community meetings, where students in the program met as a group twice a week to work on their coursework together, and mentoring, through access to two academic coaches who helped students navigate the program and projects. One coach had regular (daily or weekly) check-ins with each student and monitored each student's progress. The other academic coach was available at group study sessions and for individual meetings to assist primarily with grammar and writing. At the time of data collection, the program had 25 students enrolled in an associate degree program. After completing the associate degree, students could enroll into the bachelor's program with the same design. All of the students in the program came to the U.S. as migrants and many arrived with official refugee status. Several countries of origin were represented in the current student population, including Burkina Faso, Iraq, Jordan, and Morocco.

At the time of the research, students were only enrolled in, or had recently completed, one of two associate programs: healthcare management or general studies

(with specializations in business or customer service). The associate degree consisted of 20 goals, or learning objectives, broken down into multiple competencies. Competencies were achieved through the mastering of various projects that asked students to write papers, create spreadsheets, complete worksheets, or make videos and presentations. These projects were graded by an online grader based on a predefined rubric and the student received "not yet" or "mastered" along with detailed feedback. Students revised and resubmitted projects until the project was considered mastered. This created a feedback loop where students received and responded to feedback with a single grader until the grader deemed the project mastered. After graduating from the associate program, students could enroll in the bachelor's programs with the same design.

Participant Selection and Descriptions

Participant Selection

As a collective case study, the goal was to gain insight into the research questions by examining more than one case. Each individual served as a single case nested within the program. Given the diversity of experiences amongst enrolled students, I used purposive sampling for maximum variation to achieve "a small sample of great diversity" (Patton, 1990, p. 172). I used reputational case selection (Schensul & LeCompte, 2012), collaborating with the head academic coach of the program, who was both a local expert and community insider, to identify potential participants. The community insider helped with determining the criteria, because I had a limited understanding of the nature of the program prior to arriving on-site. Through collaboration, I was able to draw on the expertise of the community insider to help identify potential participants who would be effective informants. We established a list of criteria for participant selection. These

criteria were as follows: participants needed to be proficient in English, come from a refugee or asylum-seeker background, and be 18 or older. The community insider included in the criteria that participants had completed at least half of the competencies so that they could speak about a maximum variety of projects in the program. Finally, we identified participants who represented a range of countries of origin.

The head academic coach, Anas, a community insider, was essential in gaining access to the program and potential participants. Once we had agreed upon the sampling criteria, Anas nominated seven students and provided their emails. I contacted students via email and six participants responded. The final sample included six participants: five males and one female, from a variety of backgrounds (see Table 1). Although I hoped for gender parity in the sampling, female enrollment was lower than male enrollment in the program overall. Among the two female students who met the criteria and were nominated for the study, only one participated. In order to maintain confidentiality, the names presented here are pseudonyms. During our first meeting, I explained the reason for pseudonyms to participants and asked them to choose the name they would like me to use. I followed up with participants after data collection was completed to ensure that they wanted to keep the name they had chosen.

Descriptions of Participants

Six participants were chosen for the study and Table 1 provides some demographic information. The focus of the study was on literacy practices; however, when denoting participant languages, I opted to highlight the linguistic repertoires of participants by including all spoken languages instead of only written ones. It was unclear the extent to which participants learned to read and/or write in all of these languages they

used, particularly for participants who spoke more than three languages. Given my

unfamiliarity with some of the languages mentioned by participants, I was not sure which

among them were written languages overall and which were acquired for solely verbal

communication.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

	Bahi	Dan	Fleur	Mustak	Tommy	Yannick
Country of origin	Morocco	Bhutan	Iraq/Jordan	Burma	Iraq	Burkina Faso
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male
Time in program (at start of data collection)	4 months	3 months	6 months	7 months	12 months	6 months
Degree Program	General studies	Healthcare management	Healthcare management	General studies	General studies	General studies
Pre-resettlement level of education (or U.S. equivalent)	Some university	Middle school	Some high school	Some university	Some university	BA degree
Languages spoken	Talmazir, Arabic, English	Nepali, English, Bhutanese	Arabic, English	Burmese, Malay, English	Arabic, English	N'Ko, Morey, French, English

Brief descriptions of each participant are provided below. These descriptions

serve as short introductions to the six participants, with a focus on their home country and

their past experiences with schooling both overall and within postsecondary programs

more specifically. In chapter four, I provide more detailed descriptions of their

experiences both before and during the PAIR program.

Bahi. Bahi grew up in Morocco where he had been pursuing a college degree.

Since childhood, Bahi struggled to attend school rather than work in the market to earn

money for his family. While studying at a local college, Bahi was active with non-profit

organizations and a local student dance group. Bahi took advantage of many opportunities to learn from local and global non-profit organizations. Before completing his studies, Bahi was forced to seek asylum. In the U.S., Bahi had experienced bouts of homelessness both before and during his studies with PAIR. Because of his outstanding asylum claim, he was not legally allowed to work in the U.S. and relied on the hospitality of local families and organizations. At the time of the study, Bahi had been at PAIR for four months and he was close to earning an associate degree. Bahi was excited to continue on to the bachelor's program and was already looking into MBA programs.

Dan. Dan was originally from Bhutan but left as an infant and spent much of his life in Nepal. He arrived in the U.S. as a teenager with his family and he completed high school and some college before dropping out to work full-time in order to support his parents. After buying a house, Dan returned to school in an online program but quickly dropped out once again. Although earning a college degree had long been a goal for Dan, he was initially reluctant to join PAIR.

Fleur. Fleur was from Iraq but moved to Jordan as a child. She moved to the U.S. during high school where she completed one year of school before aging out of the K-12 system. After two years of independent study, she earned a GED and enrolled part-time at a local community college. She was restricted by her roles as a wife and mother but, working around her husband's schedule, was able to complete all but one class towards an associate degree. After waiting a full academic year, it became clear that she would not be able to fit this final course into her limited time availability. When she entered into PAIR, the credits did not transfer, and she had to start over.

Mustak. Mustak was born and raised in Burma. He was part of a minority group that faced constant discrimination and was not officially recognized by the Burmese government. Shortly before completing a bachelor's degree in chemistry, Mustak was arrested. After a lifetime of discrimination, he decided to flee continued persecution and went to Malaysia where he spent the next 17 years of his life. In Malaysia, Mustak found himself once again illegal and unrecognized by the government. He attempted to continue his postsecondary studies, but his illegal status barred him from Malaysian schools. Rather than pursuing postsecondary studies, he spent the next 17 years starting a family and a community school for Burmese youth. In the U.S., he enrolled in a local community college where he discovered that, without documentation of his prior studies, he would have to start from the beginning. After being shuffled between ESL classes, he felt like his time was being wasted and he quickly dropped out. When the opportunity was presented, Mustak decided once again to pursue "the first dream." He enrolled with PAIR and earned his associate in seven months.

Tommy. Tommy was originally from Iraq and finished school through some college before forced migration disrupted his degree at a technology institute. Aside from taking some English as a second language (ESL) classes at a local university in the U.S., Tommy had not returned to college to earn a degree. This missing credential weighed on Tommy. Although he considered himself successful professionally—he owned a business—the lack of a degree had barred him from past jobs. For Tommy, being in PAIR was fulfilling a dream: "I always have inside me, I have to finish school."

Yannick. Yannick was from Burkina Faso. He lost both his parents as a teenager and was raised by his sister. Without financial assistance from his parents, Yannick could

not afford to continue school. Instead, while living with his sister, Yannick was put in charge of household chores. He was eventually able to complete high school in a night program and went on to earn a bachelor's degree in physical education. He worked for several years as a physical education teacher in communities around the country before following his wife to the U.S. When he arrived, his academic credentials were not recognized by local employers. After taking classes online and running into financial barriers, Yannick became overburdened and disillusioned about college in the U.S. He eventually gave up on his goal to continue his career in physical education and took on two full-time jobs to pay off his educational debt and buy a house. Years later, Yannick joined PAIR. At the time of the research, he had studied at PAIR for about six months. Shortly after data collection was completed, Yannick learned that his bachelor's degree from Burkina Faso would be accepted as equivalent to a bachelor's degree in the U.S.

Data Collection

In order to achieve the depth and breadth necessary for a holistic case study, I collected data through interviews, observations, and collaborative artifact analysis (Merriam, 1998). Gathering data from multiple sources helped to capture the complexity of the case and provide more opportunities for triangulation (Yazan, 2015). Each data collection technique brought strengths and limitations, but together, these techniques provided different perspectives on the case and served to strengthen the study overall.

Interviews

In this study, I interviewed student participants and academic coaches. The student interviews served as the primary source of data for the study since they provided an opportunity to understand the perceptions of participants. There are multiple

perspectives on the role and format of interviews. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), interviews are like conversations—they should be organic and offer reflection on multiple subjects. Likewise, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) described interviews as conversations about a shared topic of interest. Seidman (2013) contrasted the data from observations and interviews, saying that observations give access to the participants' behaviors but "interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action" (p. 19). To allow for a conversational tone to the interviews, I used a semi-structured protocol that served as a guide but allowed me to focus on listening to the participant and building from what the participant chose to share (Merriam, 1988; Seidman, 2013). Overall, the goal of interviews was to gather information about literacy practices that were not observable, including beliefs, thoughts, values, and goals (Patton, 1990). Through student interviews, I was also able to gather their stories about life, literacy, and education before and after forced migration.

Student Interviews. The goal of the study was to understand the practices and strategies of students as they navigated the college program. I used a modified version of Seidman's (2013) interview sequence, interviewing each student-participant twice with interviews spaced roughly one week apart. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 35 minutes and 85 minutes. The first interview focused on participants' literacy-learning journeys with questions about their past experiences and their current perceptions of the program. This first round of interviews served to establish the context of the participants' learning experiences and gain insight into how participants understood literacy. The second round of interviews revisited discussions from the first

interview, elaborated on each participant's current experience, and included a collaborative artifact analysis described below.

I used a semi-structured interview protocol that was adapted and informed through an iterative process across interviews, observations, and artifact analyses. Prior to beginning data collection, I created an interview protocol (see Appendix A) for both the first and second interviews. After reading through participant artifacts and observing the group study sessions, I used my field notes to create additional questions for each participant for the first interviews. These additional questions allowed me to clarify misconceptions, gain more context about the participant's experience, and member check my preliminary interpretations.

During and after each interview, I recorded field notes to capture my emerging interpretations, thoughts, feelings, and reactions. I also made brief notes about connections with other data sources and any lingering questions that I could follow up on during observations, artifact analysis, and subsequent interviews. Finally, the field notes included contextual information such as descriptions of the location of each interview, descriptions of the participants, and actions or visual cues made by the participants.

The main questions in the interview protocol focused on descriptive questions such as "Can you describe the reading you do for this program?" Follow-up questions placed more emphasis on "why" questions and probing questions. For example, I often asked, "How did you decide what to read for each project?" or, "What do you think made this project more difficult than others?" When needed, I included interpreting questions, to check my understanding of topics that arose during observations, artifact analysis, prior interviews, or the current discussion (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The use of a

semi-structured protocol helped to ensure that certain information was gathered from all participants but also allowed for the participants' unique worldviews (Merriam, 1988).

Between the first and second interviews, I made interview logs by listening back through each interview and taking notes on statements or ideas that stood out as important (Merriam, 1998), any surprises or contradictions (Miles et al., 2020), and any lingering questions. I then compiled the interview logs and the field notes recorded during the first interview. This process allowed me to reflect on each interview and incorporate any questions and checks for understanding into the second interview. In addition, by making interview logs between interviews, I was able to confirm any tentative interpretations with participants in our second interviews.

Ensuring shared meaning was of high importance in the student interviews, particularly given the fact that participants were asked to speak in English rather than their first languages. I took two steps to ensure shared meaning. The first was in-the-moment member checking. During our interviews, I would verbalize my interpretations of what the participants were saying and allow them to either confirm or clarify my interpretations. Here is an example from my interview with Fleur:

> Fleur: Cause I like when people read my paper, I don't like them just to read and that's it. I like the one who will read it will enjoy it. Yea, that's how I like it.
>
> Me: You think about your reader when you write?
>
> Fleur: Yea, absolutely.

The second approach to member checking was to use the interview logs described by Merriam (1998). In between the first and second interviews, I listened to the audio recordings and recorded my initial interpretations. After making note of these, I included

them in the second interview to check my understanding. For example, after reviewing

my first interview with Bahi, I included the following question about hope and

motivation to my second interview: "It sounds like hope and your ability to self-motivate,

or give yourself self-drive has been something that's really important, and it sounds like

it will be really useful as you continue in this program, would you agree?"

Academic Coach Interviews. In addition to student-participant interviews, I

interviewed both of the academic coaches. Each coach was interviewed once, and

interviews lasted around 30 minutes. Academic coach interviews were primarily used to

triangulate preliminary findings by talking about their work with the student-participants.

In addition, these interviews helped me clarify my understanding of the program

structure. I was learning about the program through the descriptions of the participants,

and the academic coach interviews allowed me to check my understandings of the

projects that participants were navigating. I interviewed the first academic coach between

the first and second round of participant interviews. The first coach worked part-time,

attending group study sessions and meeting individually with students as needed during

the week. I interviewed the head academic coach at the end of the field work. However,

he also shared information with me informally throughout the fieldwork that I noted in

my field notebook.

For the academic coach interviews, I used an interview protocol (See Appendix

B). The basic interview protocol served as a guide, and prior to each interview I added

pointed questions that had arisen during data collection. There were two main types of

questions. The first focused on the program overall and the second type of questions

focused on the student-participants. For the student-centered questions, I provided a list

of the students participating in my study and asked the coaches to focus on them as they answered questions.

Artifact Analysis

To complement interviews and observations, I collected two types of artifacts: personal letters and student projects. Merriam (1998) believed that artifacts were unique from the other data sources because they were not produced for the particular study. As such, the collected documents offered an additional perspective into the literacy practices of students. Unlike interviews and observations which are altered by the presence of the researcher, artifacts are often documents created for purposes outside of the research project (Merriam, 1998). The same was true for this study. Collected artifacts were created prior to the research project. Two forms of artifacts were collected, and each served a distinct goal. First, student letters provided insight into the participant's educational and professional background as well as their aspirations. Second, student projects represented a literacy event within the academic context that we could discuss together.

I used two methods for analyzing artifacts. I analyzed personal letters before beginning interviews, coding for goals, background, and references to literacy practices. For the student projects, I used a collaborative artifact analysis. Rather than code student projects directly, I used the projects to engage in think-alouds with participants. In doing so, participants led the discussion about their chosen project, and I guided our discussion using through semi-structured questions and using student-derived metaphors as described below.

Personal Letters. When applying for the PAIR program, potential students were asked to submit a short personal letter summarizing their reasons for seeking a college degree and their overall goals. The letters often had the format of a brief cover letter and ranged between one to two pages. The personal letters were the first pieces of data that I collected. They were provided by the program when participants signed the consent forms. These letters provided a background about each participant and a glimpse into their reasons for joining the program. Merriam (1998) wrote that "personal documents are a reliable source of data concerning a person's attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world" (p. 116). Indeed, in reading through the personal letters, I gained insights into each participant's views on education and migration, as well as their goals both professionally and around education. These letters also offered a writing sample that revealed each participant's approach to writing for an academic audience, which in this case was the head of a college program.

I read through each letter, making notes about goals, past experiences, and references to literacy and learning overall. I also noted questions and thoughts that arose while I was reading. After reading through each individual letter, I made note of my overall perceptions and I made note of any potential biases that arose. For example, I commented on my initial perceptions of the writing such as grammar and vocabulary such as, "writes in short, simple sentences" or "uses a broad vocabulary, seems very well written." I wanted to record my initial interpretations of participants' English usage because of the potential implicit biases associated with language use (Lippi-Green 1997; Moyer, 2013). This allowed me to be more aware of the biases that I might bring into the field when I met with participants.

I used the notes from the personal letters to include some individualized questions into the base interview protocol for the first interviews. For example, Mustak talked about his field in the letter and I made a note to ask what field he referred to. This allowed me to clarify information that was shared in the letter and go deeper into topics that they had shared. Fleur, for example, wrote that she wanted to get a college degree, which led to questions about the goals and beliefs that informed this aspiration. Talking about their letters in the first interviews also gave me a chance to learn about their literacy learning and what experiences had informed their approach to writing these letters. For example, I often referenced the type of letter format that a participant chose. Some wrote the letter as a cover letter, whereas others used a more narrative structure. Since the letters were so different in structure, I included a question about where students learned how to write letters like these. This allowed me to learn more about how their past experiences informed this task.

Collaborative Artifact Analysis. The final interview with participants included a collaborative artifact analysis with participants and their own work using an adapted retrospective metaphor interview protocol (Armstrong, 2015). Like the retrospective metaphor interview, I used metaphors to guide the discussion; however, I did not analyze metaphors as a unit of analysis. Rather, the metaphors were intended as an entrée to a larger conversation about academic literacy. The goal of the collaborative artifact analysis was to understand how students perceived and described their own practices in the context of a specific task as well as how they perceived the expectations inherent in the task.

In alignment with my theoretical framework, I wanted to interrogate understandings of academic literacies through social construction (Jensen, 2006) which meant that discussions of academic literacy should ideally be led by the participants' understandings. However, literacy practices are not directly observable, particularly the underlying beliefs, attitudes, and values (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Perry, 2012). Likewise, conceptualizations of literacy are unobservable, but metaphors provide a window into the unobservable (Armstrong, 2008). Kövecses (2002) described metaphors as a cognitive process whereby conceptualizations can be communicated by drawing similarities to other concepts. Metaphor analysis has been used to gain insights into understandings of a topic (Armstrong et al., 2011; Guerrero & Villamil, 2002) and metaphors can be generative in that they "enable the connection of information about a familiar concept to another familiar concept, leading to a new understanding where the process of comparison between the two concepts acts as generators for new meaning" (Jensen, 2006, p. 5). In this study, I used elicited metaphors, in the generative sense, as a means of guiding discussions on participants' understandings of academic literacy.

To further focus the interview and collective artifact analysis on academic literacy practices, I elicited metaphors about academic reading and writing from participants. Kövecses (2010) defined a metaphor as "understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain" (p. 23). To illustrate metaphors, Kövecses (2010) used the example that life is a journey. Here two domains, life and journeys, are not necessarily connected but put together in ways that use one domain (journey) to help explain another (life). The connection between these two domains is illustrated in many metaphorical statements such as "she'll go places in life" or "He's without direction" (Kövecses, 2010,

pp. 22-23). For my study, I elicited metaphors, not as a basis of analysis, but as a frame to help guide the conversation to academic literacy. The goal of the study was to interrogate literacy practices which are not directly observable because these include beliefs, values, and attitudes (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Perry, 2012). Asking for examples of readings and projects allowed me to observe literacy events, whereas the addition of metaphors in the discussion allowed me to elicit the participants' beliefs, values, attitudes about academic literacies in the program.

At the end of our first interview, I asked each participant to bring a reading and/or writing-intensive course project. Since participants were at different points in the program, and two had recently submitted their final projects, I could not ask all participants to bring in a current project. Instead, I asked all six participants to identify a project that they had found particularly challenging and/or interesting that they wished to share. This prompt elicited a variety of project formats. Two participants shared a PowerPoint presentation, and the other four participants shared a variety of writing assignments, including memo, op-ed, research, and personal letter. Projects were analyzed collaboratively during the second interview and then collected via email.

For the collaborative artifact analysis, participants were prompted to describe the project. I began with introductory questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) such as, "Tell me about the project" which I followed up with more targeted questions about how they navigated the project. These questions included "Walk me through, what did you do when you started the project?," "What resources did you use?," and "Did you run into any problems when doing this project?" In doing so, I wanted to learn about the actions and choices that they made when working on a project.

At the end of the first interview, I explained metaphors and gave participants sentences to complete on a small sheet of paper that I asked them to complete and return at the second interview. Participants were asked to finish two sentences: "Academic reading is like…because …" and "Academic writing is like…because…" Within the collaborative artifact analysis, I referred to the participants' elicited metaphors and asked them to show me illustrations of their metaphors in their own work. For the current study, these metaphors served to guide our discussion of academic literacy. When participants had finished describing a project in their own words, I would repeat the metaphor they had provided and ask them to explain further using the project as an example. For instance, in one interview I asked, "You said that academic writing is like a puzzle, is this an example of that? If so, how?" This allowed me to use the project we were discussing to understand the participant's broader understanding of academic literacy. Likewise, I asked, "You said that academic reading is like swimming, is this project an example of that?" This approach helped ensure that our conversations were grounded in the participant's own understandings and experiences with academic literacy.

Since the participants' descriptions of projects often focused on the work they had created, I asked additional questions about what they read or watched for the project to ensure that I was including multiple forms of literacy. In the interviews, we often talked about reading, watching videos, and searching for information in general. To give context to what they were describing, I asked participants to explain the resources that they drew on while completing the project. Resources in this context referred to the books, videos, and websites provided to students within the project description. I asked participants about the program resources that they used as well as any additional information that they

searched for to complete the project. During data collection, two participants finished the associate portion of the program. They were being transferred into the bachelor's program and no longer had access to the resources. Since all of the participants explained that they often drew from outside resources, I also wanted to get context for the types of sources they used outside of the program resources. During our discussion, I asked participants to search for additional information on the topic and to talk aloud about the choices that they were making. For example, when a participant told me that they had found some additional information, I asked, "Can you show me an example?" This prompt allowed me to see how they made decisions when looking for information. Using their own computers, all six participants used a common internet search engine to locate new information and then verbally evaluated the sources they clicked on. Finally, participants summarized the feedback that they had received as well as their perceptions about the feedback and expectations and how they used the feedback within the project.

Observations

For a third data source, I observed group study sessions and staff meetings. The former allowed me to see social interactions among students and between students and coaches. The latter allowed me to better understand the academic support offered to students. The goal of the observations was to gain contextual knowledge of the program, to see literacy practices in action, and to observe social interactions around literacy events. In the group sessions, I began as an observer participant, with an emphasis on observation. In the last two meetings, this role changed to participant observer, with an increased emphasis on participation and relationship building (Smart et al., 2013).

Group Study Sessions. Observations can complement interviews because they occur in a natural setting and provide a first-hand experience of the issue under investigation (Merriam, 1988). To that end, one of the primary goals of the group study session observations was to see literacy practices in action. Rather than create an observation protocol, I noted my research questions in my field notebook and used those to guide my attention and reflections. As the study progressed, I included additional questions from other data sources. To further focus my observations, I drew on Barton and Hamilton's (2000) definition of literacy events as the observable uses of texts. Literacy events were defined as any actions and interactions that occurred around a text, including reading, writing, and discussion. During group study session observations, I saw students reading texts online using their computers, discussing papers, and creating spreadsheets. The readings observed included websites, book chapters, project instructions, and PowerPoint presentations.

I observed four group study sessions over a two-week period. I entered into the field intending to be a complete observer in the group study sessions. However, the head academic coach requested that I participate as this would ease my presence in the room and give me a chance to learn more about the projects and the students' work. As such, I took the role of participant-observer (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015) during these observations. While observing the sessions, I would occasionally talk with students about their different projects and help problem-solve issues with computers, Excel, and writing. My role as a participant-observer grew with each observation. In the first observation, I was, in action, a complete-observer (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). As students became more

familiar with my presence, they began to ask me questions and I began to participate more.

The observations started broadly then became more concentrated as themes from interviews and observations begin to emerge. The first observation took place before any interviews. I used this first observation to write detailed descriptions of the setting, students, and staff. In addition, I made notes about various conversations that were taking place and noted any questions that arose that I wanted to pursue further. After the observation, I wrote a detailed memo about the observations and my initial impressions. I noted any lingering questions about the group for the next observation, added questions about the program to the academic coach interview protocol, and incorporated questions for participants into the student interview protocols (See Appendix A).

I continued this practice throughout the fieldwork. Although my observation notes varied each time, they always contained descriptions of the setting, participants, and activities; a diagram of the room; direct quotations and paraphrasing of what people said; and observer comments about my feelings, thoughts, and initial interpretations (Merriam, 1988). After each observation, I continued to record detailed reflections in my field notebook and made note of any questions or emerging interpretations that I wanted to pursue further. These post-observation memos became increasingly important as my role shifted from complete-observer to participant-observer. As I took on a more active role in the group study sessions, I had less time to record field notes, but I was also getting a more in-depth look at student work and group interactions, such as who was helping whom and how. Since I was taking fewer notes during the meetings, I recorded the majority of information in the post-observation memos. This meant that I was taking

fewer short, in-the-moment descriptive notes, or "jottings" (Emerson et al., 2011) opting instead for longer recordings that had a more narrative structure. My observations, therefore, included more reflection rather than immediate impressions.

Staff Meetings. I observed two staff meetings as a complete-observer. The first was a full staff meeting and the second was a meeting with only academic coaches. The meetings both took place at the program headquarters which is located about one hour from the target program.

My understanding of the program itself was driven largely by the participants' perceptions of the program. By attending staff meetings, I was able to learn about the program from the perspective of the professionals who were running the program.

The primary goal of these observations was to build a more nuanced understanding of the program and support structures and, when possible, to triangulate findings related to the program and support structures. In both staff meetings, my field notes contained descriptions of the setting and participants, interaction between staff, my thoughts and perceptions during the meeting, salient conversations, and questions that arose. The two meetings took place consecutively, so I waited until the end of the second meeting to write a more detailed memo about the observations.

Summary of Data Collection

The first half of this chapter focused on the design of the study. I described and provided a rationale for the case study methodology that I used for this study. The study took place at a connected learning program, PAIR, that combines a competency-based education model with intensive, in-person academic coaching. Six students in the program participated in the study. I collected three types of data: interviews,

observations, and artifacts. I interviewed participants twice using semi-structured interview protocols. I also interviewed the two academic coaches who worked with the participants. Over a two-week period, I observed group study sessions and staff meetings. For artifacts, I collected personal letters at the beginning of data collection and student projects during the final interviews. For the projects, I used a collective artifact analysis approach, using the projects to frame discussions about academic literacy practices. Each data source provided different perspectives that culminated in both depth and breadth needed for a holistic case study (Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data was ongoing over the course of my study. During data collection, the analysis was discursive and dynamic; as new themes and questions emerged, I adapted interview protocols and observation notes (Merriam, 1988). Analyzing qualitative data consists of organizing data, consolidating data into themes, and representing the data in text or tables (Creswell, 2013). My theoretical framework was central to this process, as I used it to formulate research questions, decide on data-collection and analysis methods, and inform any resulting calls for action (Creswell, 2014). Throughout the data analysis process, I referred back to my theoretical framework and research questions to provide a thematic focus. As described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the theoretical framework informs which aspects are foregrounded, and "which aspects remain in the background" (p. 107). As such, referring back to my theoretical framework helped me to focus my data analysis on themes that were most pertinent.

Once data collection was completed, I transcribed verbatim all 14 interviews with participants and coaches, totaling 638 minutes of interviews. These transcriptions served as the first level of analysis. When transcribing the interviews, I included ums, ahhs, mmhmms, and similar vocal fillers. Commas and periods were placed to signal pauses in speech. Within the transcripts, I also included notes of gestures made by the participants. For example, I noted when Yannick knocked on the table and when Tommy typed on the table with his fingers while talking about typing. I also documented any disruptions in the interview within the transcripts. Finally, I included my own parts in the conversation, either as separate lines or within parentheses such as the moments when I offered a word suggestion to the participants. In addition, I continued to document analytic memos throughout transcription to record my impressions and emerging thoughts. After completing full transcriptions, I referred back to any tentative findings from the interview logs in order to confirm or replace them with more robust findings.

After completing the transcriptions, I used a constant comparative method to look for patterns in the data both deductively and inductively, using an iterative process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 1998). Data analysis was conducted in several phases. First, I read through interview transcripts to familiarize myself with the data. In the margins, I noted references to literacy practices, defined as thoughts, actions, and beliefs connected to the use of text. I drew on a sociocultural theory of literacy to inform my focus. As I read through the data, I used the theoretical framework to inform what I considered most salient. For example, I included references to literacy events as well as social goals, beliefs, and linguistic resources (Purcell-Gates et al., 2011). This theoretical framing served as a guide and helped me ensure that I was not only focusing on direct

references to reading but also including beliefs and social connections. For instance, I coded for perceptions of literacy expectations guided by Gee's (1989) definition of Discourse practices as "*the saying (writing)–doing–being–valuing–believing combinations,*" (p. 6). For example, for the statement, "I work question-by-question. I don't read everything," I made the note, "strategy, reading." As another example, for the sentence, "When you reading, you get knowledge," I made the note, "belief about reading." I occasionally highlighted direct quotations that seemed to represent a larger notion. As an example, Tommy referred to "the juice" when he talked about summarizing; therefore, I preserved his language as I noted references to summarizing throughout his interviews and artifacts.

I began the second cycle of data analysis by conducting within-case analyses using a constant comparative method of "categorizing, coding, delineating categories and connecting them" (Boeije, 2002, p. 393). I read and reread the data using an open-coding process and In Vivo coding to isolate units of meaning within the participants' own words (Saldaña, 2016). I then clustered quotations into common groups looking for patterns and references to literacy practices and events. For example, "You should never exceed the milestones" was grouped with other units of meeting under the label "Perceived Expectations." Next, I compared across groups and returned to the data to verify, expand, or reorganize the emerging themes.

Next, I organized codes into larger categories and used a process of In Vivo coding to prioritize the voices of participants rather than imposing predetermined codes. In Vivo coding draws on the words and short phrases of participants, allowing the first coding cycle to be driven, in part, by the participant's own words (Saldaña, 2016). I

identified a need for additional methods to better capture the richness of the data. To address this need, I added values and versus coding. First, I discovered that participants often made references to beliefs about themselves, literacy, and schooling. To best capture these perspectives, I incorporated values coding to identify values, attitudes, and beliefs (Saldaña, 2016). I used Saldaña's (2016) definitions to distinguish the three terms. Values capture statements related to the importance that a participant assigns to something. Attitudes refer to thoughts and feelings about something including oneself. And finally, beliefs are "opinions, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 132). For example, "For me it's a diamond" was coded as "V:education." Likewise, "I didn't have any issues over there" was coded as "A:self-as-student." I also added versus coding to better capture the dichotomous terms that participants used when talking about literacy, themselves as users of literacy in academic settings, and comparisons of educational systems. For example, "when I look at video, yea, I help, helpful, it's more fast than when I read" was coded as "video vs. reading."

The goal of the third cycle of coding was to aggregate codes gathered in the first and second cycles into "meaningful units of analysis" (Miles et al., 2020). I used axial coding (see Figure 2) to reduce initial codes from individual cases into conceptual categories (Saldaña, 2016). After returning to my research questions, I removed codes that were not salient. Using the remaining codes, I returned to the data and reapplied the codes while maintaining analytic memos of exceptions, surprises, and negative evidence (Miles et al., 2020). Rather than label each category, I chose a representative quotation from the participant to serve as the thematic label.
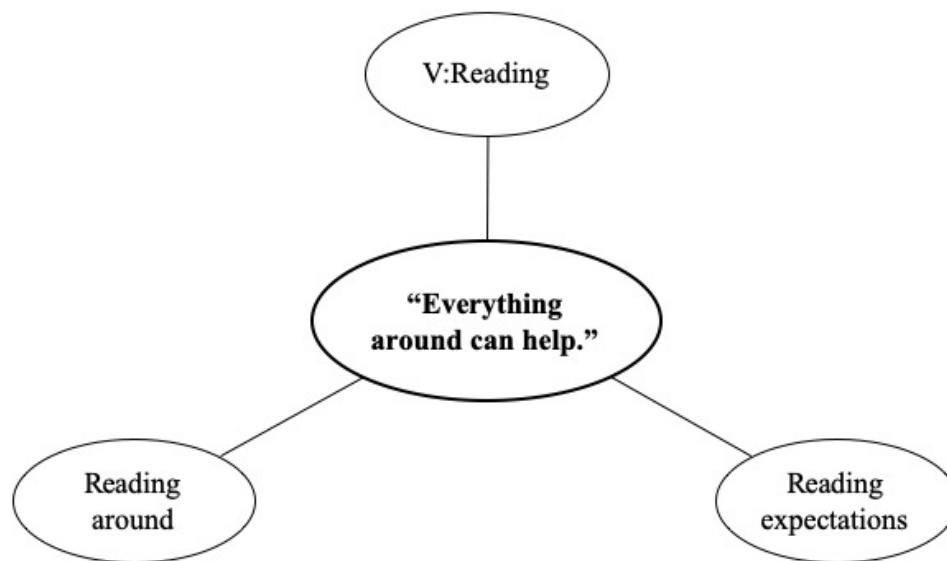
Figure 2. Example of Axial Coding.

  For the cross-case analysis, I used another cycle of axial coding in which I used the categories from individual cases and grouped them into themes. I then returned to initial codes and applied the themes to ensure that the final themes fully represented the data. To ensure that the themes were sufficiently representative, both convergence and divergence across cases were noted during cross-case analysis. Convergence helped me document codes that were common across cases, whereas divergence helped me identify and examine conflicting evidence. For example, within the theme "Our Way Versus Their Way" (see Figure 3), three categories connoted a perceived dichotomy between student and grader. In contrast, three categories acknowledged a divide but framed it as systemic rather than individual. According to Miles et al. (2020), following up on surprises, looking for negative evidence, and considering rival explanations are strategies to reduce bias and confirm findings.

"They Want You to Say It a Certain Way."

"My Way is a Little Bit Wrong."

"I Try to Forget Myself."

Our Way Versus Their Way

"I Know the College System."

"The First Thing I Do is You Read the Directions."

"But I Haven't Start Here."
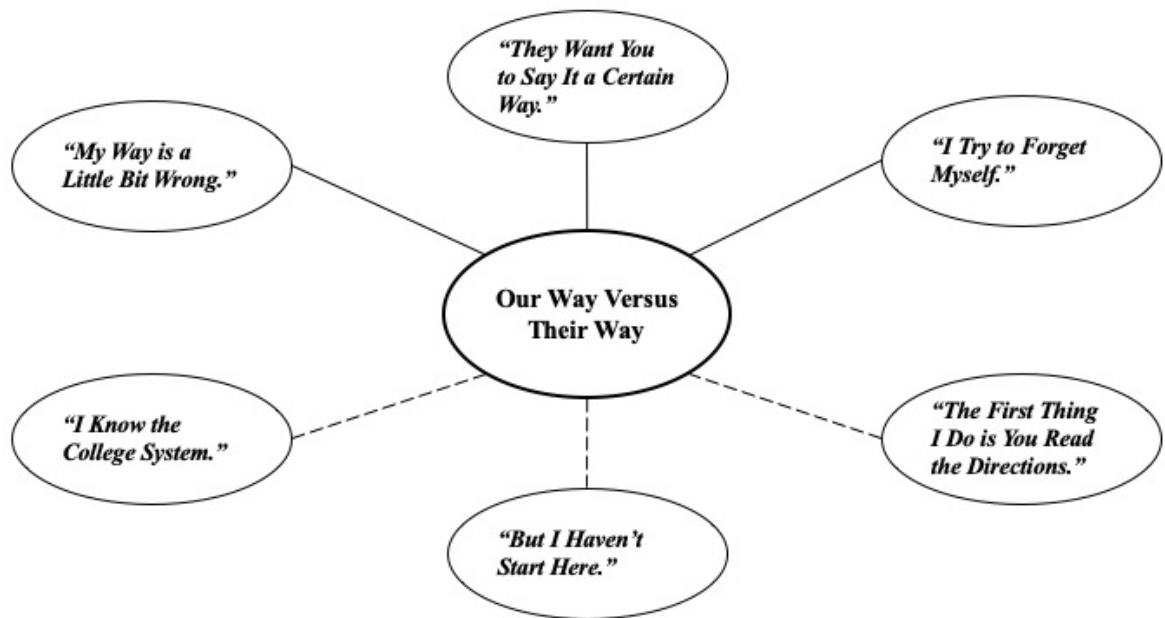
Figure 3. Example of Axial Coding for Cross-Case Analysis. *Note*. The dotted lines represent categories that were relevant but not direct.

Ethical Reflections and Reminders

The notions of validity and reliability come from positivistic research paradigms that cannot be directly applied to qualitative research methods without reinterpretations (Miles et al., 2020). Merriam (1998) described validity and reliability as ensuring that research is conducted in an ethical manner. In qualitative case study research, ensuring that the findings are trustworthy and ethical is important in order to ensure accuracy and minimize misrepresentation and misunderstandings (Stake, 1995). Some scholars have chosen to move away from the positivistic terminology of validity and reliability, opting instead to ensure that research is confirmable, dependable, credible, and transferable (Miles et al., 2020). Although the terminology differs, the focus on ensuring that research is conducted ethically through establishing trustworthiness remains constant.

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, I drew from three basic strategies described by Merriam (1998): triangulation, member-checking, and reflective journaling. First, triangulation helps to confirm emerging findings by looking at multiple data sources and using multiple methods (Creswell, 2014). I used triangulation to see if a phenomenon remained the same across spaces. The use of multiple interviews and the collaborative artifact analysis provided data from different perspectives that helped me to triangulate within and across cases. Second, to help ensure that I was accurately reporting participants' words and perceptions, I used built-in member checking by sharing my tentative interpretations with participants as they occurred within interviews and in the subsequent interviews after reviewing my notes and interview logs. For example, after reviewing my interview memos, I noted that all of the participants mentioned reading fewer resources over time. To check this impression, I included a question in my second interviews asking participants to tell me how their reading changed over time. Language was also an important consideration. I wanted to make sure that I was understanding participants even when they could not find a word. In these instances, I would ask them what I thought they were saying to confirm my understanding. Here is an example of an interaction with Tommy:

> Tommy: They're going to tell me exactly what they want, make life easier cause I don't have to oh, maybe this what they want, maybe that what they want.
>
> Researcher: You don't have to guess?
>
> Tommy: I don't need to guess, exactly. This is what they want. If it comes back again it's a simple, simple fix.

In these instances, participants would either confirm my interpretation, as Tommy did in the example, or find another way to say what they were trying to communicate. Fleur, for example, corrected me when I referred to her reading as skimming. She clarified that in English she had to read every word, but quickly. Yannick would occasionally ask me a word in French, and I would respond with the direct English translation.

Third, clarifying my assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientations before beginning research helped me remain aware of my biases as a researcher. In addition, I kept a reflective journal throughout the data collection and analysis phases to document any of my thoughts and feelings that arose throughout the research process. It was not always possible to identify biases in the moment, but reflective journaling allowed me to look back on my reactions during data collection and analysis to check for potential biases. Reflectivity is an important characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). My self-reflections on my background and my emerging interpretations also helped me to clarify my own biases during the study and how they might influence my interpretations.

Throughout the research project, I remained cognizant of the many ethical considerations at play. As an outsider to the population and program of the study, I reflected on my own positionality prior to and during data collection using reflective journaling. This allowed me to document and address the cultural assumptions that I brought to my interpretations of the participants' experiences.

Positionality

In qualitative research, given the central role of the researcher as the primary instrument of inquiry, it is important to reflect on, and be transparent about, one's own intersecting identities as they relate to the context and content of the study. My position

in relation to the research was prevalent in my assumptions, choice of theory, choice of participants and setting, and which data were collected. Thus, to further ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, I outlined my positionality before beginning data collection, and I kept a record of the decisions that I make throughout the project.

I identify as a White American female from a lower-middle class background. I was the first in my family to attend a university and receive a college degree. From there, I went on to earn a master's degree in cross-cultural and international education. I earned a bachelor's degree from an institution close to my hometown and a master's degree in a different state but within my country of origin. I was born into an English-speaking family and did not learn any other languages until high school and college, where I studied French and Spanish. I earned a master's degree in France, though, unlike the participants in this study, this move was by choice. Studying for a graduate degree in France has had a profound impact on my understanding of cross-cultural higher education, particularly around questions of language, learning, and navigating university systems. As a student, there were many assumptions that I made based on my previous experiences in an American university that did not serve me as I tried to navigate my program and courses in France. Inconsistencies in course structures, grading, and academic expectations impacted my experiences as a student in important ways.

My experiences living in predominantly French-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries has had a significant influence on my interest in language, particularly around the experiences of being a non-native speaker of the dominant language. Living abroad informed my understanding of the position of English as a language of power internationally, but my experiences as a language learner also informed how I understand

language and power in communicative interactions. My views on language and learning were influenced by my past experiences as a student and language learner as well as my experiences living abroad. My childhood was spent in a predominantly White region of the U.S., and it would take joining the Peace Corps for me to understand the role my skin color played in how I was perceived in the world. My two years of study in an American master's program was founded in critical theory and shaped how I reflected on my past and present experiences.

Research in Refugee Contexts

Research with participants from refugee backgrounds opens questions into vulnerability that are important to address (Perry, 2011). Gillam (2013) argued that institutional review boards are not sufficient in addressing ethical considerations within studies working with refugees. There are three specific issues to address in research studies with refugees: vulnerability, power, and the relationship of research with advocacy (Block et al., 2013). Vulnerability is a primary concern when conducting research with refugee populations due to past traumatic experiences, limited political and socio-economic power, and restricted autonomy particularly within protracted situations (Mackenzie et al., 2007). Concerns over ethics have led some researchers to avoid direct research with refugees, amplifying instead the voice of organization members who work with refugees (see Reinhardt, 2018). However, research with refugees can promote advocacy for refugee concerns, serving to empower refugees by amplifying their voices and experiences (Perry, 2011).

It is also important to remember the heterogeneity of individuals subsumed under the refugee label (Hynes, 2003). One simple step towards providing more agency within

this research study is to allow participants to choose how they identify. Participants were selected by their self-identification as refugees. The legal definition of refugees may facilitate access to aid and resources in certain situations, but individuals may also resist the label because of the framing of refugees as victims (Uptin et al., 2016; Zeus, 2011). When speaking with the six participants, they self-identified using either refugee or asylum seeker.

When conducting research with refugees, Perry (2011) identified a resistance to the use of pseudonyms by a potential participant. In response, the decision in her study was given to families to decide whether or not to use pseudonyms. When possible, giving the decisions of naming and labeling to participants allows them to retain ownership of their own stories (Perry, 2007). Likewise, I asked all student-participants to choose the name that I would use when I wrote about the research. At the end of our first interview, I explained issues of confidentiality in research and the purpose of pseudonyms then asked them to choose a name. After data collection was completed, I confirmed their chosen names via email. All participants initially requested that I use their real name. When I reached out the second time, five participants provided a different name. One participant reiterated that I should use a real name. When requesting IRB approval, I included that participants would be given the option of choosing their name for future publications following a discussion of the importance of confidentiality. Although I discussed this with all participants, I was hesitant to use real names in this dissertation. To avoid any complications, I asked the participant if I could use a pseudonym for the dissertation and the participant agreed. In the end, I assigned a pseudonym for one participant.

Limitations and Delimitations

In interpreting the findings, there are several limitations and delimitations of the study to consider. First, the study was limited to a small sample due in part to the case study method utilized but also by the relatively small enrollment of students at PAIR at the time of the study. Second, the study was conducted over a two-week period which limited the amounts and types of data that could be collected. Given the organizational structure of the program, I had limited access to the program resources, which meant that the discussions of the projects were derived solely from the perspective of the students. Finally, due to my own linguistic restrictions, I was only able to communicate with participants in English or French and thus could not communicate with all students in any languages that may have been more comfortable. In the end, the two Francophone students (Bahi and Yannick) opted to do their interviews in English as well. However, the language limitations may have restricted what participants shared in interviews as well as my understanding during observations.

In addition to the delimitations presented above, other limitations arose during the course of the research. Although I intended to have gender parity, there were five males and one female participant. This was, in part, the result of lower female enrollment. Next, I intended to interview current students, but two students completed the associate degree portion of the program during the study. This meant that participants were in between the online programs during some of the data collection.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the collective case study design used for my research. The case study design is guided primarily by the work of Merriam (1988, 1998). The unit

of analysis for the study was six focal students and their literacy practices. Participants were all enrolled in the same connected learning program, but the study focused on each participant as a unique case. I also detailed my data collection methods. I collected data from three sources: semi-structured interviews with participants and academic coaches; observations of student and staff meetings; artifact analysis of personal letters and course projects shared by participants. Finally, I summarized ethical considerations and described the steps and decisions that I made to ensure that the research project was ethically conducted.

IV. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I describe the six individual case studies and a cross-case analysis. First, I provide detailed descriptions of each of the six participants (Bahi, Dan, Fleur, Mustak, Tommy, and Yannick). For each participant, I give a background on their past education and current learning goals. Then, I illustrate findings relevant to the two main research questions:

1. How do students from refugee backgrounds navigate the literacy practices of an American competency-based connected learning college program?

2. How does the experience of forced migration inform the language and literacy practices that students use in the program?

First, I focus on how they navigated the program expectations and second on how their experiences of forced migration informed their experiences. Each major theme is titled using an illustrative quotation from the participant. In the illustrations from our interviews, I used direct quotations from the transcripts, but I omitted stutters and fillers such as "ums" and "uhs" to the extent that these omissions did not interfere with the central meaning of the participant's language.

The stories presented in the following case studies reveal an array of strategies that the participants used to address the literacy expectations as they perceived them within the program. There are many instances where these strategies converged across participants as well as several places where they diverge. These six cases offer a small glimpse into the many ways that forced migration transpires and the potential ways that resettlement reverberates in the educational experiences of students. The chapter ends with a cross-case analysis where I expand on themes that arose across these cases.

Bahi

Bahi came to the U.S. directly from his home country of Morocco. Unlike the other participants, Bahi had filed for asylum from within the U.S., which limited his access to many of the support systems provided to refugees (those who applied while outside of the U.S.). At the time of the study, he was waiting for work authorization. In the interim, Bahi had experienced bouts of homelessness both before and during his time as a student in PAIR.

Before coming to the U.S., Bahi had been studying for a degree in communication and trade but he was unable to complete the program. Outside of school, Bahi maximized opportunities to work with international organizations that were present in his community. He attended workshops hosted by the Peace Corps and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), among others. He joined Enactus, an international club for college students that promotes social entrepreneurship. Bahi believed that he was learning more valuable skills in these experiences, so he often skipped class to attend clubs and workshops. He studied at an American postsecondary institution through the Middle East Partnership Initiative and at another American university through an online program. These experiences with other American organizations and universities played a prominent role in how Bahi navigated PAIR and what he valued as a student.

Navigating Expectations

Bahi summed up his perceptions of the expectations very succinctly: "Throughout all the program, it was always reading, understand what it is, and write it in my own words. That's what almost every project requirement is." Learning occurred in three

steps: read, understand, and write. When describing how he approached the projects, he relied on three primary techniques to navigate the expectations. First, he read the directions carefully and repeatedly. Second, he leveraged his prior knowledge to narrow down his studies to new information. Third, he used a multimodal approach to learning new information.

"The First Thing I Do is You Read the Directions."

When distinguishing academic literacies from activities outside of the classroom, Bahi made one main distinction: "Something, like more academic, you go to what it is that they're looking for." According to Bahi, reading and writing in academic contexts were distinct from reading and writing in other contexts because they were led by the expectations of someone else. Outside of school, Bahi engaged in a range of literacy events online such as researching and writing long posts on social media sites. Through engaging in online communities, Bahi used numerous literacy practices common in college courses, including forming and researching questions, integrating multiple sources of information, and writing arguments. In these personal projects, he was both the question asker and answerer. In contrast, academic work was driven by someone else's questions:

> It's more like question and answer, it's not like something that you are, it's not like something professional. It's not like personal project where you are the one who look for the questions online and you bring the questions and you put the answers.

For Bahi, the explicit project directions and questions set academic work apart from professional and personal pursuits. In response, he used the directions as a guide throughout a project.

The directions of a project explained what would be expected in the final product. He reported feeling like the instructions and connections to the provided resources were very clear. The only frustration was the occasional overlap between the project overview and directions provided in the project prompts:

Usually, just go to directions and work on the project. But sometimes you have to consider the overview too. It's not always the overview. The thing is that directions are the ones that you are working on. The overview is just talking about the project, the way it is. But some projects have directions in the overview.

The overview provided context for the project, often describing the project as a workplace scenario. The overview was an attempt to situate a project within a real-world scenario. Interestingly, it was exactly this work connection that Bahi appreciated most about PAIR; he described the program as "more like life things." Yet the overview provided less specific information about mastering a project, and as a result, Bahi skipped this information and began each project by going straight to the directions.

Bahi described the program as similar to a game: "Studying in the program is like, it's more like a game. I take it. Like for me, usually for me, it's like challenging, kind of challenging you. And, you just keep up, you have to keep up with it." To play the game, Bahi first had to learn the rules. His study habits changed over the first few projects as he learned these rules:

The first project was very exciting and new, you want to read all the resources, you want to know first how it works. And when you know how it works and you get mastered and mastered, you understand what they are looking for, what the work is.

Over time, the biggest change that Bahi made was in how he read the resources. In the beginning, without knowing what the graders were looking for, Bahi had to read everything. Over time, his reading habits changed as he learned how the new program worked. In the first few projects, Bahi read all of the resources, but as he learned what was valued, he began to read more strategically. He used the directions as a guide to what he needed to read:

A project can take you like four hours to read the resources. And the way I work is that I work in the same time, I work question-by-question. I don't read everything, or read everything else and start thinking, I just go in thinking.

Bahi progressed through a project working question-by-question, using the questions to inform what, and how much, he needed to read. Working on each question individually also broke the learning down and focused his attention: "Sometimes the question wants only one thing. So, you go to the resource that talks about that thing. But these other ones, if you like, extra details, I just to go to the one that is required." He returned to the directions periodically to determine when he needed additional information: "I go back to the directions, not the overview, the overview just talking about basically the directions. So, and after that you just pass to the resources you just read a little bit of the resources, if they are not enough you just looking online." By using the directions to target his reading, Bahi spent less time reading the resources in order to finish projects faster. The

directions also served as a good comparison to gauge the information that he had and what he still needed.

"Find What You Didn't Know."

Bahi drew on his prior knowledge to work more efficiently, corroborate new information, and evaluate online resources. He was able to apply the knowledge and skills acquired through school and workshops in Morocco to navigate the projects in PAIR. This served him on two levels. First, his experiences with online learning from an American university helped him understand what would be valued in this new online program: "In the program too, this kind of program helped me a lot to learn a lot of different things, what, what actually, makes a difference in these projects." Second, he had already learned some of the content for the projects that gave him a knowledge base to draw on: "I feel like, some projects I don't have even to look the resources, I already got it, it's already that."

Bahi used his prior knowledge to focus his attention on new information. When starting a new project, Bahi's approach was the following:

> I start the introduction, just from my own knowledge, just generally. And then
> you go and read a little bit about the resource. And whenever there's something
> different, you go back and you change it, and then you start putting the full
> introduction, and then so on.

To begin a project, he started with what he already knew. From there, he would target his reading and research to any gaps in information through an iterative process between project, prior knowledge, and product. This allowed Bahi to complete projects quickly:

I don't really spend too much time on them. Especially when the project makes perfect sense, like I already know what it is about. So you just write from your own knowledge or just look for, you go to the resources, you look what they are looking for, can be like two sentences and you just put them in there and that's it.

By building on the information that he already had, Bahi could limit the amount of time he spent reading: "I usually just read them like that, the one that is, is that missing in your project? You want to add it, you want to make sure it's there, it's supporting your project because you never know." Bahi noted that finding new information was only valuable to the extent that it fit the needs of the project. To find the information that he needed, Bahi would consider the instructions, his past knowledge, and what he was writing to determine the information that he needed. Rather than reading for contextual information, Bahi searched out the very specific information that was needed, which was often only a couple of sentences.

By focusing on only information that he needed to complete a project, Bahi would occasionally skip the suggested resources altogether. This strategy of targeting only new information made the longer resources seem like a burden: "Sometimes when you see it's too long, it's a lot of work, you just say well, you just want particular this thing for example, and you just go and Google it and you get briefly what it is about." He found that internet searches gave him more targeted results with less time spent reading. Looking outside of the program resources also gave Bahi access to information in other formats. His preferred platform was YouTube, where he could have the information in a shorter amount of time and with additional context clues: "You know, the effects and animations and all of that is very, very nice, very good. It makes you understand a little

bit more, so you can write in your own way." Bahi used a strategy of identifying the information he had and the information that he needed and targeted the specific information he needed for a project. While narrowing down the information that he needed, he simultaneously expanded the format options that he could use to find the necessary information.

When searching for information online, Bahi drew on his prior knowledge to determine the credibility of sources. When determining which websites to use for a project, Bahi explained: "What makes perfect sense is what is a good resource for me, because that's what I want." Although he was searching for new information that he needed, Bahi was also using what he knew to determine the value of a source, limiting his ability to find contradicting information. He further explained that a source was good if "you already understand some of it, you already read some of it somewhere. And it's basically supportive to what you are doing." When searching for information online, Bahi used intertextuality to triangulate information across resources while also prioritizing the specific needs of the current task. When he searched online for additional information, he was using additional texts, videos, and memes to reinforce and build on his existing schemata.

Although Bahi did not have educational or professional credentials from his studies and work with organizations in Morocco, he was able to leverage his knowledge and skills to accelerate his learning in the PAIR program by developing targeted reading strategies. He began each project by inventorying what he already knew and then used the resources to support, update, or add to the knowledge that he already held. The strategy of using specific questions to guide his research allowed Bahi to scan the

resources more quickly or to forego resources altogether and search for information in a video format instead. The internet was also where he went when he ran into obstacles.

"If I am Stuck About Resources, I Just Google It."

Bahi said that he liked reading and aspired to read more: "I mean everybody, a lot of people read, and I just want to read more books like everybody else here." Growing up, Bahi's family did not read books and Bahi did not have access to many books. The internet became an important source of information for Bahi: "I usually like to, to read online, most. Basically, I didn't have too much books when I was, like, from long time as a kid." His use of the internet for resources informed how he approached his learning in PAIR as well.

Bahi considered himself a visual learner and used that belief to guide his studies when possible. His preferred format for learning was using videos and occasionally the program resources would include videos in the provided resources: "I'm kind of visualizing learner. And I feel like this program fits me perfectly." When videos were not provided, the internet offered the opportunity to search for information in a broader variety of formats: "Just know there's videos you can see in YouTube. I'm already familiar with that, like Crash Course. I already was watching that before like, when I came here, I was like, they have it here too, in resources." Part of his preference for videos was that they offered visuals, which he believed helped foster understanding. This was particularly beneficial when studying in English and coming across new words:

> It's not like a lecture where you just read and you may not, for example,
>
> understand a word in English or something. And that, that will take you a lot of

time, or maybe not understand what it is. But when there are a lot of ways to

visualize, stuff like that, you really get to know what it is.

Bahi preferred the additional context clues offered by videos compared to print text;

words were more difficult to define out of context.

When searching for new words, Bahi explained that the definition did not always

make sense:

You go first with the definition, if it doesn't make perfect sense, you Google it

and you look what the videos are, what the pictures are. Usually, the pictures

helps more. You go, for example, a particular word can be used in a different

context, you take that sentence, you put it in Google, and then it gives you a lot of

memes and you just read the meme, lift a little bit and yes we got it.

To understand new words, Bahi preferred to see a visual of the new word in context

rather than simply definitions. Using online resources not only helped Bahi understand

new concepts but also new words.

Possibly due to growing up without easy access to books, Bahi became

comfortable with looking for information, readings, and videos online at an early age.

Learning to search for information online had, in turn, been a valuable skill in the PAIR

program where Bahi primarily learned online. Bahi found the format of the program was

a good fit with his own beliefs and preferences about learning. The internet was an

important source of information from the word-level to broader conceptual learning.

Furthermore, Bahi appreciated the added visual formats available online.

"It Was Only Between Friends and Internet."

Bahi was set apart from the other participants by the isolation of his migration experiences. Unlike the other participants, Bahi had neither arrived with nor established a family or a community in the U.S. This was particularly relevant when he talked about the support he had in the program. Similar to his childhood, Bahi remained a very independent learner at PAIR. He drew on online tutoring for help revising his work, but aside from the support offered by the program, Bahi spoke very little about those around him. His classmates offered new insights into projects and the community helped him meet his basic needs, but in terms of his work in the program, Bahi painted a picture of himself as quite solitary.

Growing up, Bahi turned to the internet for social interactions. It provided him a space to practice languages and interact with people who held similar interests. At PAIR, his most frequent support came in the form of online tutoring provided by the program. He most often relied on tutors for proofreading, especially when he wanted to turn something in quickly:

> When you have [online tutoring] they kind of tell you here is where the problem is and then you take, you have, it's a matter of time. For me, it's a matter of time, I would make it without that as I used to do in the beginning, but because of running out of time, you always need, where is the correction, what is the problem? And you save a lot of time.

Using online tutoring was a strategy to save time because it saved Bahi the trouble of having to proofread his own work. However, he also valued the way feedback was given because he saw it as a learning opportunity: "I start just going there and they give you the

feedback. You actually learn. It's not that you don't learn when they give you these feedbacks and the way that they do this [online tutoring] is that, they ask you again about the answer." He did not have friends and family relationships established in the surrounding community while he studied at PAIR, but in the absence of these social networks he was able to leverage the supports provided at PAIR to get the advice and help that he needed to be successful on his projects. Bahi believed that he would have been successful without this support but admitted that he would not have been able to complete projects as quickly without support.

"I Just Learn by Myself."

As a child, Bahi felt like he had to fight for his education. Growing up in poverty, he was often forced to earn money rather than attend school. Instead of school, his father would take him to work construction jobs or to sell items in the local market. Bahi watched as his older brothers remained illiterate and permanently dropped out of school. In response, he began running away to avoid the same future:

> My brothers all drop out of school. My father used to take me a little bit by force
> to go and work. My father is a very aggressive man. I just, mom used to
> encourage me a lot to not go. She was crying like pushing everything and I was
> running away, you know, sleeping in the street or with the neighbors something
> like that, just til my father goes to work and not push me to go and work and drop
> out of school like my other brothers. So, mom sacrificed a lot of that and uh. Yea.
> I just keep studying and I'm willing to finish.

Bahi had limited support in his home. Both parents and his older brothers were illiterate. He had limited access to books as a child and limited access to help with his schoolwork. With limited support from his family, Bahi became an independent learner.

An independent approach to learning also informed Bahi's learning of languages. He explained that he learned French and English primarily through film: "I was very interested to English. And end up watching some movies and stuff like that and I found it more actually helpful even for French language, watching the culture, the cultural aspects of those people makes it more easier." He was interested in languages from a young age and used movies to access the language and the culture around it. He would also talk to tourists in his hometown to practice speaking: "There's a castle or a big, historical place. A lot of people come around to see it, so you just sneak around, and you say if you need any guide I'm here and you should speak a little bit of English or French." Bahi reported a tendency of learning without the help of others, even when he sought out people to talk to. He remained independent in PAIR as well. An academic coach shared that he did not reach out for help. However, Bahi's experiences with the social component of PAIR and the group projects made him reconsider the value of independence.

"It Gives Me a Little Bit of, like, Thoughtfulness Whether You Can do it Alone or Not."

PAIR coupled online learning with in-person intensive support. Among these supports were group study sessions that occurred twice a week. For students like Bahi who were new to the U.S., these group study sessions and team projects helped students build new social networks. For Bahi, who grew up learning on his own and often outside of formal school structures, working in teams gave him a new appreciation for the value

of working with others: "I always think I can do it, I can do the work myself, I like to work alone, like by myself, but it's never enough, it's never enough." He described these team projects less as a means of learning to navigate the programs, but rather a chance to learn from those around him.

Bahi expressed a particular appreciation for group projects which required him to not only attend meetings, but to work closely with other students. Working in groups led Bahi to reconsider the value of independence and the value of teamwork: "What I learned here is that, I should always, not rely on the team but be in a team and get their insights on the work." Even though the degree program was online, the inclusion of group work with PAIR's in-person structure helped develop closer relationships among students.

"I Knew That Somehow."

Language was a central feature of education for Bahi growing up. In primary school, the language of instruction was Talmazir. When the language of instruction changed to Arabic and later to French, he began to fall behind and, in total, repeated two grades. Much of the language learning that he did was outside of formal schooling. Although he often missed school to earn money, he was able to learn Arabic as he worked which would later help him in school: "We didn't have much time to go for school too much and learn Arabic. However, I got the dialect, I start getting the dialect so." Learning languages outside of formal schooling remained a constant for Bahi throughout his time as a student. Bahi's interest in languages gave him insight into broader social dynamics, particularly as they manifested in access to language learning. He fostered a love for languages outside of school with an acute awareness of the importance of linguistic capital for his future:

Arabic was a little bit by force, so I had no choice. Either I speak Arabic or not even be in society. French wasn't. French was important that, if the politics, the politics is very, it's very, it's very complex. They don't want you to speak French, they don't want you to speak English, they only want you to speak Arabic. But they want for their children, in private schools, to speak all these languages. And I knew that somehow. Just felt that because, coming from a background, being like a child doesn't know anything, just feels like it's good to take other languages, why not. So, I started learning those and it was, it was, it wasn't in school. Nothing happened in school, it's all of it watching a movie, French movie, English movie from Hollywood. Different things like that.

Bahi developed an awareness of the role of language as a capital that could be leveraged to advance socially in Morocco. Bahi, in turn, was able to apply this meta-awareness of linguistic capital to navigate language and power in other situations. For example, when talking about learning French, he distinguished academic French: "If you go to faculty in Morocco most of the things that, we study in French, so I got a little of academic French." This matched his awareness of academic English as unique from the English he used in other settings. Bahi was able to translate his understanding of language and power to an understanding of the power dynamics surrounding academic languages.

Bahi sensed from an early age that language was a valuable form of cultural capital. It was the language spoken in higher education and the language of the elites. Once he accessed higher education, he had a critical perspective on how language was used as a means of social inclusion or exclusion. This translated into a critical awareness about not only how different languages are used in different settings, but also how

languages differ across settings. This meta-awareness was harnessed by Bahi to assess

the linguistics rules of the program. He even came to PAIR with a head start thanks to his

experiences with other American universities:

> I've already been to some programs, so you always know what the professor's
>
> looking for. So, you just go to the point, to the point directly, you don't really talk
>
> about too much things there, usually. Something, like more academic you go to
>
> what it is that they're looking for.

Learning a language meant also learning how it was used in different settings. Bahi

learned French and English through movies. He learned Arabic at the market. And each

of these languages he was able to transfer into academic settings with relative success. He

developed an interest in the cultural settings around language: "I was very interested to

English. And end up watching some movies and stuff like that and I found it more

actually helpful even for French language, watching the culture, the cultural aspects of

those people makes it more easier." When Bahi summarized the role of language in his

current program, he explained, "I think without being so interested into the language and

learning and the culture, I don't think I would even be here, right now."

Experiencing Forced Migration

At the time of the study, Bahi had been in the U.S. for less than a year and still

felt the losses incurred from seeking asylum. He had lost his family, friends, and his

chance to complete the college degree that he had been working toward in Morocco.

Fleeing Morocco meant a series of sacrifices that reverberated throughout his life. He lost

a home, stability, and a clear path forward. The experience of forced migration filled

Bahi with a mix of isolation and hope, both of which shaped his experience prior to joining PAIR and continued to shape his experiences while a student in the program.

"I Lost Everything."

One of the results of forced migration is isolation. Bahi, having fled alone, was isolated from his social networks. Alone in the U.S., Bahi soon fell into poverty and depression. When seeking asylum, he had left behind much of his social network, including his friends, classmates, and family: "I lost everything, I lost some friends, a lot of friends, I lost my family and, I was very depressed. The only thing that let me keep up was that I was to think that maybe something would happen, which gave me hope." In the absence of a robust social network, Bahi drew on three sources of support while at PAIR: the community, his classmates, and online tutoring.

During this time, he visited a community center where he would eventually be introduced to the PAIR program: "I got into a resource center, and it's kind of a drop-in, they have food in there and everything. So they connect me with different, they connect me first with a lawyer, and then, after that, I meet the mayor there." The community center was a crucial resource for Bahi to rebuild his life. Getting daily support within the community allowed Bahi the space to think about his future. The center also provided him with connections to go back to school: "I wasn't expecting to go to school, or go back to school at all. I mean, if it wasn't that opportunity, I would still be in the street, I would still be doing nothing, looking for a job, work under the table or something, I don't know."

After enrolling in PAIR, Bahi was taken in by a family. With a house to live in and his basic needs met, he was better able to focus on school. Community support was

essential in helping Bahi find the program, enroll, and ultimately support him as he completed the program. Finding these mile markers gave Bahi something to strive for as he rebuilt his life.

"But You Just Learn How to Keep Going."

Bahi was balancing his desire to finish his education and meet basic needs: "I used to be homeless a little bit for some days, I just, you know sometimes you just say, why would I finish schooling if I have a lot of troubles? But you just learn how to keep going." When he first learned about PAIR, he was initially reluctant:

> I wasn't thinking about school at all. I thought I lost everything; I'm not going
> back anymore to school. I was very depressed, knowing that, what all sacrifice
> about, my mom sacrificed, is all gone just like that.

It was in this place of sadness, loss, and depression that Bahi enrolled in PAIR. Part of the sacrifice that Bahi made was the pursuit of a college degree. He was not working towards any dream job, just a college degree: "I don't have a dream job. I would say, a dream education, finishing education." He framed the hardships that he had experienced as a motivational force to enroll in and complete PAIR:

> It's kind of motivation, it is. Because, when you look at that, you say wait, I don't
> want to go back, I don't want to live that anymore, I don't want to be homeless, I
> don't want to be. I want to keep my dream and you start going forward just like it
> used to be.

PAIR provided Bahi with a new opportunity to earn a college degree. After four months in the program, he was already finishing the associate degree and moving into the bachelor's degree portion of the program.

Summary

Bahi described several strategies that he used to navigate the program and accelerate his progress. Reading the assignment directions closely and consistently helped Bahi narrow down the information he needed and reduced the time he spent reading and learning new information. He was able to further cut down his study time by starting every project with what he already knew. More so than the other participants, Bahi leveraged his prior knowledge to accelerate his time in the program. This was in part due to his ability to intuit the tacit rules because of his similar experiences with American institutions. By starting each project from what he already knew, Bahi limited his need to read everything and narrowed his focus to the questions that he could not answer. He was the most recent arrival among participants which meant he had less developed social networks around him. He described himself as isolated from family and friends.

Dan

Dan left his home country of Bhutan at 25 weeks old when he fled to neighboring Nepal in the arms of his mother. In Nepal, Dan grew up in the confines of a refugee camp where he was surrounded by literacy. Those who could write wrote histories of Bhutan so that the next generation would know why they had to leave. Returning to Bhutan was a central component of Dan's education as a child. He framed the subjects he learned in school as a chance to prove allegiance to Bhutan. For Dan, primary school was a trilingual space:

> In Nepal, we speak Nepali and, even though we get kicked out from our country,
> we get forcefully taken out we still loved our country so from grade fourth

through grade nine we learn their language hoping that one day if we go there, we

can show them how much we loved our country.

He learned to speak in Nepalese. He learned to write in English. He learned patriotism in

Bhutanese. After completing some secondary school in the refugee camp, Dan's family

was granted asylum in the U.S. He arrived as a teenager and was enrolled in ninth grade

at the local high school.

Although Dan described himself as a good student in high school, he struggled

with a new school structure: "Nepal they forcefully, you need to go to school. Doesn't

matter what age you are, until you finish the high school you need to be in the high

school. It doesn't matter how old you are. Over here, after 18, if you don't want to go you

don't got to go." As an older student in a new school system, Dan struggled with the

temptation to drop out: "The first year of my freshman year of high school did influence

me, negative, positively I would say. Because, what you do is like, you're not going to

get beaten here." Dan completed high school, but he went on to drop out of the local

community college and, once again, from an online program. These experiences made

Dan feel like a drop-out risk coming into the PAIR program. Although he talked highly

of himself as a student, he would often refer to moments when he worried he would drop

out once again:

Sometimes I used to think, I think I'm totally out now, I don't think I'll be able to

go back and be able to join college because it's been eight years, I never get back.

I did some at some point, but I didn't have to write I was just getting into there

and just looking for an excuse to get out. So, I think I didn't do that much work

even when I was there so, I used to think like ok I was done.

Dan's experiences with unfinished college programs shaped his experiences in PAIR. He framed much of his success in the program in terms of his continued enrollment. The challenges that Dan described were more often connected to a sense of shame around dropping out rather than any challenges with the content: "I started my first experience of my college life and that didn't go very well. And then I join [the university] in 2015 as an online student—that didn't go well." These disruptions in his education, both those he perceived as self-inflicted and those related to relocation, were instigated by the ramifications of forced migration. Even after more than a decade in the U.S., the experience of forced migration continued to shape Dan's experiences as a student.

Even though Dan's past experiences within American postsecondary institutions ended without degrees, these experiences also provided valuable insights into American institutions that Dan could leverage in his approach to PAIR. Through his time in a local high school, community college, and online university, Dan had developed several strategies that he brought with him to PAIR. He also drew from the years of professional experiences that he had accrued outside of school. His years working in the health field provided context to his coursework and motivated him to persevere by giving him a tangible goal to work toward.

Dan had a strong social network that gave him access to a variety of forms of support and knowledge. For example, his two older brothers both had graduated from college, one with a bachelor's degree and the other with a master's degree. His brothers encouraged him to pursue a college degree, described the college experience, and advised him on the fields to pursue.

Navigating Expectations

For Dan, the expectations in the program were a source of confusion. Deciphering expectations was particularly challenging for Dan because of the format—students do not interact with the professors outside of the feedback they receive on submitted projects: "You never see them, you never know what they're expecting even though you take like 10 days to finish up your project and you submit it and you, like 90% of the time it will come back to you to revise it." For Dan, mastering projects seemed like guesswork because he never saw the person who would be grading the work and only interacted with graders through feedback on final projects.

When describing the expectations in PAIR, Dan had two main perceptions: the importance of meeting the expectations of each project and meeting the overarching expectations of advancing quickly through projects. It was important to know the expectations: "Reading and knowing exactly what the professor is looking for, those of your paper, are very important." Knowing the expectations was an important step to read strategically and be able to use the material from the readings when writing papers. Yet, as Dan described, deciphering expectations was difficult without knowing the graders. In contrast, Dan described the goal of the PAIR program in different terms: "Submitting the paper, like not struggling in one thing, is the main goal of this [PAIR] program." Getting stuck meant slowing down. For Dan, being successful in the program meant not spending too much time struggling with something and matching his work to what the grader wanted. A main struggle was figuring out what the graders expected. As a result, he adopted strategies to decipher expectations quickly to better tailor his learning of the

material. These perceptions informed Dan's approaches as a student in PAIR as he balanced completing projects successfully and also as quick as possible.

"I Have to Refresh My Mind."

Before enrolling in PAIR, Dan believed that he had been out of school too long to return. In line with this belief, the strategy that Dan referred to most was refreshing his mind. Dan used the internet to build up foundational knowledge that helped to contextualize the projects and readings that he was assigned. The internet provided additional resources that Dan could draw on when he felt like he was missing requisite knowledge. One example Dan shared was using this approach for math-related projects:

> They didn't provide much about the metric system and the other system, so I have to go back and see because it's been 8, 10 years I've been out of high school. So, I have to refresh my mind about metric system, so I went to the other sources to find the other formulas.

In this example, Dan determined that he needed more information about the metric system to complete the project. This information was not included in the resources, so Dan went online to refresh his understanding of the metric system.

This strategy was particularly useful with the readings provided in the program. Dan described feeling like he occasionally needed more information to understand an assignment. He explained that he rarely used these outside resources in his work, but rather these additional resources helped him better understand the resources provided:

> Look for the articles you know? I didn't take 1% from [the internet], but I can get a knowledge like what ethic mean. What ethics does. All those things, like, I learned from there and when I come back from my project then I can say like ok,

they're asking me this. So let me read their articles now. So when I learn what is

ethics and all those things from their articles, then when I come back to [PAIR]'s

articles, it's so easy to understand.

The internet was a useful resource to build the schemata that would help Dan understand

the course material. By learning more about the concept of ethics, Dan was better able to

understand both what he was being asked to do for a project and what the provided

resources were saying. This approach gave Dan the option to assess his understanding of

a topic and to scaffold his learning when necessary.

The resources provided by PAIR were drawn from a variety of sources and they

were often authentic texts. One source that Dan struggled with was *The New York Times*.

The writing in *The New York Times* differed from other forms of academic texts and

often used more specialized vocabulary that made reading difficult for Dan:

The New York Times always has big words and all those things, so I had to go

back to outside resources of what they are looking for. And, for example, a couple

of weeks ago, I was doing a Fed project…So on there they talked, all the articles

they gave us from *The New York Times*, so I, it was so difficult to understand, so I

used outside resources to learn about Fed, so it gives me an idea about what *The*

New York Times is talking about.

Because *The New York Times* articles were difficult to understand, Dan searched for other

resources that provided alternative descriptions of the main topics. *The New York Times*

does not necessarily provide an in-depth background on topics, which might make

reading more difficult for learners who are unfamiliar with the topics being discussed. To

help bridge this gap in understanding, Dan used the internet to learn more about the topic

so that he had additional schemata to understand the more difficult text. Building

schemata was one strategy, but Dan also drew on his prior knowledge.

"Writing the Papers of What You Understand."

Dan believed that the goal of the PAIR program was that students should not

struggle on any one task. This goal undergirds one of Dan's strategies for reading. After

reading, his first step was to write down what he understood: "I just read and then,

whatever I understand from my reading, I just write down on my paper." This approach

helped Dan target misunderstandings. After reading and writing based on what he

understood, Dan would turn in the project to get feedback from the grader:

> Then I finalize my draft, I send it to my professors, and then he will give me
>
> comments like, 'hey you did wrong in this part, you did this and that,' then I come
>
> back to my paper and, ok, now I can understand what he wants.

This approach allowed Dan to take some of the guesswork out of the expectations. By

starting from what he understood, Dan could more quickly turn in a project for feedback.

This also allowed him to assess when and where he needed to search for supplemental

information**.** When reading, he began with what he understood. When this was not

possible, he turned to the internet to build a foundational understanding of the topic.

Finally, he drew on what he understood about the college system to decipher what was

expected and what would be valued in the projects, even though he did not know the

grader. Dan's case highlights the various types of understandings that can help a student

in college. For Dan, it was not only understanding words and concepts but also

understanding how college works.

"I Know the College System."

After completing high school and some college in the U.S., Dan felt more comfortable with guessing what would be valued by the graders at PAIR: "I have a language, I had a language, I learn in high school, I went to college, I know the college system, how the environments work, how the college system works, so that was the bonus point for me." Even though Dan perceived the expectations as requiring guesswork, he felt like his past experiences as a student helped prepare him to make those guesses.

Past experiences within American institutions had shaped how Dan understood academic reading and writing. For example, when describing his approach to projects, Dan explained that "grammar I can do most of it, but you know, for the academic writings everything has to be 100%." Dan believed that academic writing differed from the writing he did in other contexts because of the lower tolerance for error.

Dan also drew on past experiences about expected reading behaviors. He believed that reading was highly valued: "I realized when I started getting in here for this, I think reading is very, very important when you're doing college work." To target his reading, Dan used the questions provided to focus his attention:

> What I do is like when I go here, I look at the questions, and then based on the questions I go, I read through the informations. I read everything but like, especially when I have to do the project, I'll read the questions and follow and that only applies on this project because this project is more like specific reasons. But when you are writing a paper, then you will have to read everything.

Even though Dan had a structured strategy for reading for different tasks, he felt like he was not meeting implicit expectations: "I'm supposed to be doing more than what I am doing."

Dan also used his past experiences as a student to help motivate him. Because his last two attempts at college had ended prematurely, Dan was worried that the same would happen at PAIR. He drew on his knowledge about the college system and also what he had learned about the value of education in professional careers to help motivate him to continue school: "All those things and once you realize that and once you realize the power of education, how much it can do to you, then I think your self-efficacy is very, very powerful."

"Over Here it's All English."

Dan summed up his language repertoire saying, "English is my primary. I love to speak in English rather than my language." He both claimed English as his primary language but not as *his* language. English was the language of Dan's education, but it was not the language of his home. Bhutanese was the language of Dan's heritage and Nepalese was the language of Dan's daily encounters in Nepal. Dan was trilingual and each language was maintained within different communities, within different spaces, and with different goals. Dan was educated in English-medium schools while living in Nepal. As such, English was the first language in which he learned to formally read and write. In moving to the U.S., English became the medium for a larger portion of Dan's life and these transitions informed his self-perception as a speaker and student.

Language for Dan was connected to space. Growing up, he learned Burmese in school to maintain a connection with his home country. In the U.S., Dan listened to

audiobooks in Nepali but used English primarily for academic tasks. English was the language of school, therefore, it was also the language of writing: "Writing is English language, always, it's the primary language." The non-English languages did not directly help Dan academically, but they allowed him to maintain connections to communities which provided valuable support. In the PAIR program, Dan read, wrote, and listened using English. English was the language that he used to communicate with academic coaches and fellow students. Nepali remained the language of his home. He listened to audiobooks in Nepali and maintained Bhutanese as a means of continuing his connection to his home. Dan's experiences learning in English as a child gave him a lexicon to draw on, although it did not always match the academic words he encountered in PAIR.

"I Rephrase That Again."

When Dan came across words that he did not understand, he would note the difficult word and finish reading: "What I do is like you know when I read, when I don't understand I just write the words in the paper, or in my computer and I just keep reading it." If needed, he would look up the new words and replace them with synonyms that he already knew:

> I don't read that word, I read the word that I found out, that I don't understand, and I plug it into there in my mind it's like ok this is that. Then I read so that way it gives, it helps me, what I'm reading and what that means.

Dan had academic English experience from his schooling in Nepal, so he had a robust vocabulary, but it did not always align with the vocabulary in the course readings: "New York Times is so difficult to understand, you know. Those, because of the wordings and the phrasing they use." Dan had built an English lexicon from school in Nepal, his social

life, and work but these were not always the words he needed. In response, he searched for synonyms and replaced unfamiliar words with the words that were more familiar. Alongside synonyms, additional context was a useful resource for academic texts.

"I am the Visual Learner."

Dan's preferred method of learning new information was visual and audio rather than reading text. He explained translating text and audio to visuals before starting to write: "In order for me to do any project, I am the visual learner. So first I read, and I visualize everything and then I transfer that into the paper." To visualize, Dan felt like text was not the best medium for him. Instead, he preferred formats that he could listen to, which allowed him to focus his energy on taking notes rather than reading: "I don't like readings, I like listening and then when I listen, I can visualize what they are talking about and then I can take notes. But when I'm reading, I cannot memorize everything, what I read." Dan felt like he understood the information better when he listened rather than read.

Dan used English to develop friendships with other students. He saw moments of miscommunication as a chance to meet new students and he framed these friendships as a means of learning social languages:

> Maybe they, they make fun of me, but I don't, I didn't think that was bully. I talk to them, I say like hey I'm from here I didn't know all those things, can you teach me all those things? Because I need to grow, and then they help me teach and then they became my best friends in high school.

Developing social languages helped Dan build confidence with new forms of English. Dan learned new school Englishes through interactions with his peers. This familiarity

with oral language informed his studies in PAIR. In learning the local English dialect through social interactions with friends, Dan developed a comfort with, and preference for, spoken English. As a student at PAIR, Dan leveraged these social languages by transforming written English to spoken.

Reading articles was more difficult to understand but having the articles available online presented the opportunity to transform text to audio: "Even though when I read I don't understand and most of the articles they give, some of them has the audio, so I just click the audio and I listen. Some of them I have to read it." The availability of different formats for the resources allowed Dan to occasionally opt for an audio format that was easier to understand. This is possibly the result of Dan learning American English dialects primarily socially. As a high school student, he developed friendships that supported the development of his social language. As a result, listening to English became more comfortable than reading texts.

"Because of Her, I Say Yes, Ok."

One major juncture in Dan's educational journey was the decision to enroll in PAIR. He talked about this decision as being made by his wife, and he credited both his wife and Anas, the lead academic coach, for his enrollment: "My wife who is sitting outside, she forced me to go to college. She forced me." When he learned about the opportunity to attend PAIR, his wife encouraged him to contact Anas. In the end, it was Anas who contacted Dan. After Anas initiated the conversation, Dan's wife told him to apply. A third source of support for enrolling came from Dan's older brother: "Since my oldest brother uh got his master he encouraged me as well to go to college." Although

Dan believed that he had been out of school for too long to successfully return, it was those around Dan who helped him overcome this belief and return to college.

"They Push You Every Day."

The relationship that Dan built with Anas became an important source of support in helping Dan persist. Dan had dropped out of two college programs before joining PAIR and he worried that this program would end the same. He also felt like the temptation to drop out was greater in the U.S., where he felt less pressure to stay in school compared to the strict school environments in Nepal:

> Being from a strict environment to the loose, sometimes that affects a lot and I think that's what I see in our community. Because they came from a strict school system to their own freedom. Then like they choose to go to school and they choose not to go to school. They have a choice, whereas in Nepal you don't have a choice you have to go to school no matter what.

What made PAIR distinctive was the intentional development of relationships within the program: "Anas and Anas' team, they support you every day. Even remotely they call you, they text you to see what I'm doing. They can access my work and see what I'm lacking of what I'm doing and then they call me, they push you every day." The intrusive academic coaching helped give Dan more structure to an otherwise flexible program.

Receiving intensive support from Anas helped Dan navigate moments when he might have otherwise considered dropping out. This support was particularly crucial in the beginning:

> Being this independent, Anas and my wife are the main backing of this. They keep pushing me and once I hit 30 competencies then I start to realize, I think I

can do this. Only when I hit 30, before that I was like, I might going to drop this

off, I might going to drop this off, but once I hit 30, then I started thinking of

having my own business.

Anas, in particular, helped Dan through moments of self-doubt by checking in with him

regularly. As Dan became more independent, this dynamic changed: "By the time, I was

like, I was changing my mind like oh yes, I can do this now. Then Anas step-by-step drop

himself down. So he left me independent so I can do my own work." The relationships

developed within the program and, particularly with Anas, served as valuable supports to

keep Dan in the program: "I was encouraged by the support and the care of this group,

this program give it to me." Building a supportive community around the program

through intensive academic coaching and group study sessions, Dan received not only

academic but also social support that buffered him as a student and stripped away excuses

to drop out.

"Once That Thing is Taken Out, and Divided to Parts, It Relieves You."

One reason Dan believed he could not return to school was because of the

additional responsibilities that he had taken on since dropping out of the community

college:

The first thing, when I started working, I buy my own car. When you buy your

own car, you need to make a payment, you start working a little more. When

you're working a little more, you have other expectations and the expectations

build up, build up, build up, and then, you cannot drop out your work because you

have bills to pay, all those things. And if you don't drop out you cannot study

because you have a lot of responsibilities.

Time for studying came in conflict with work demands but a full work week was necessary to pay the bills. Dan's family supported his studies by relieving some of the additional burdens: "You have a lot of pressure, you cannot focus on your study because now I have support from my family, they take all the burdens out from me so I have a little bit relief so that gives me time to study and to focus." By taking on some of the added responsibilities, Dan's wife, in particular, was able to remove additional priorities that could have become temptations to drop out.

In the past, Dan's role as caregiver for his parents had added increased responsibilities that overshadowed school: "I need to make my parents happy, that's my first priorities. Education comes second. So, I dropped out and then I started working." Helping his parents has been a significant priority for Dan since finishing high school such that family has been both a source of and a relief from additional responsibilities as Dan finished his studies. Dan's family survived through a cohesive goal. Dan provided for the family so that they could buy a house. Then, when it was time for Dan to return to college, his family helped provide for him so that he would be less burdened.

Experiencing Forced Migration

Compared to the other participants, Dan lived a more traditional narrative of the migration experience. After fleeing from his home country at a young age, he spent most of his life in a refugee camp before eventually resettling in a third country. He was too young to remember the first migration, but his experiences growing up in the camp were extremely influential to the decisions that Dan made throughout his life. The experience of forced migration did not impact Dan's academic experiences directly but indirectly his

experiences with migration shaped his priorities which in turn informed his decisions as a student.

"I Want to Go Fast."

Leaving the community college was the second major educational setback in Dan's life. When his family relocated to the U.S., Dan repeated high school: "I have finished grade nine from the grade til we go to college, so I almost finished up my high school but due to our process to come here, I could not finish." The process of resettlement pulled Dan from the school system in the refugee camp before he graduated from high school. Due to these regular disruptions in education, Dan entered PAIR with limited uninterrupted educational experiences. In PAIR, he wanted to finish the program and earn the credentials quickly. Dan worried that he might once again have to start over. After repeating high school and college, his goal was to complete this degree by working quickly before there was a need to stop.

Dan often portrayed himself as a drop-out risk. He explained believing that Anas saw the same risk: "He knew that I could have dropped out." The choice to drop out felt imminent to Dan because he had dropped out of college twice before. The first time, Dan quit going to the local community college in order to provide stability for his parents:

> My family wants their own land and house because they have been begging that
> in the refugee camp and now they started here they see the dream that we can
> make our own house and then we decide in our family that my brother was
> finishing his bachelor and my other brother was finishing his associate and I was
> the one just entering into college and so I sacrifice my college to work and then
> buy a house for my whole family.

The instability engendered in forced migration and life in protracted situations had led

Dan to prioritize the home that his parents had given up decades ago in search of safety.

As a result, this desire for a home overshadowed Dan's educational goals.

Dan's second attempt at college was an online program in criminal justice. He

planned to start online and transfer to the campus. When he asked to change to the IT

program, they told him that he would not be able to transfer to the physical campus in IT.

When he met this roadblock, he dropped out: "I was looking for an excuse I would say,

you know. If they could have supported me, I could have been in the campus already, but

I didn't get a support and maybe I was looking for an excuse and I just dropped out." Dan

not only felt unsupported, but he also felt like he would have to start over which was

counterintuitive to the goal of going fast.

"This a Migrant Process Again."

Resettlement in the U.S. did not guarantee an end to migration. Dan described a

second migration that people from his surrounding community made within the U.S.:

"Like they moved from Nepal, Bhutan to Nepal, Nepal to here, and then you know these

generation, the older generation, they want people surrounded by them. So everybody's

moving to Pennsylvania, Ohio, Texas, Arizona, there's a big group of our communities."

This continued movement impacted Dan's opportunities. They also presented new

challenges and an increased need for transferable credentials.

Maintaining these communities required repeated migration but also afforded Dan

professional connections. In order to continue to live in these Bhutanese communities,

Dan was preparing for another big move with his extended family. This move opened the

opportunity for new professional ventures:

When I planned to move from here, I have friends, family friends, who is in the

administrative business for health and human services for the past 18 years and

then I collaborate with him, sit down and discuss what I can do in Pennsylvania,

what are the things that I can do.

Having a clear professional trajectory to work towards helped to motivate Dan by giving

him a concrete use for the content he was learning. In particular, Dan could make clear

connections between the reading and writing he was doing at PAIR and the reading and

writing he needed for work:

Writing is very important because like, you know, the field that I choose, the

healthcare management has, when you thought about healthcare management the

first thing that click in your mind is, you're dealing with the patient. So you're

dealing with the numbers, you're dealing with the, their medical records and

everything. Being in the, working with the intellectual disabilities people, I

believe that working in the healthcare system is a lot of writings. You need to

write the notes and follow-ups and everything.

Dan was expanding his social network through a second migration with his family. This

expansion opened new professional opportunities that helped Dan outline a tangible

destination after graduation. This, in turn, motivated Dan to finish quickly but also helped

Dan to contextualize his learning. The professional connections served to make his

learning less theoretical and more practical as he made connections between the work he

was doing in PAIR and the work he was doing to start a business. The imminent move

motivated Dan to earn his associate but ultimately meant that he would not continue on to

earn the bachelor's degree at PAIR because he, once again, relocated with his family.

Summary

Dan's main challenge was his own fear of dropping out. Dan felt comfortable with how college worked thanks to his experiences in the local high school, community college, and a past online college program. A common thread throughout Dan's strategies was to proceed from a place of understanding. He found background information that provided context to the assigned readings. He began each project from what he already understood. Dan leveraged his social English and the English that he learned in Nepali schools. The academic support built into the program helped create an environment that Dan felt removed the temptation to drop out and built his confidence. The experience of living in a protracted situation for most of his youth also defined Dan's priorities. Helping his parents find and maintain stability rose to the top of Dan's desires to the extent that it overshadowed his education.

Fleur

Fleur was born in Iraq but grew up in Jordan. She left Iraq at the age of four and never returned. She resettled in the U.S. and was placed in high school where she aged out after one year. The result was that her high school education in Jordan was disrupted by the resettlement and her high school in the U.S. was disrupted by age and policy. She earned a GED which was largely an independent learning experience: "It's harder than high school or the college. Cause you just take the book, read for yourself and try to figure out how to do it." After earning the GED, she took classes at a local community college, but she was unable to enroll in all of the classes required for an associate degree because of conflicting schedules and priorities. Even though her education before PAIR was marked with disruptions, she was able to bring a rich educational background to the

program. She had completed the majority of compulsory education in Jordan, had some experience in the American school system at the secondary and postsecondary level, and had experience learning primarily through independent reading. She felt that her time at the community college was particularly valuable. Although she could not transfer her community college credits to the PAIR program, she found ways to transfer her learning. From community college, she had learned how to be a student in the U.S., and she found that those experiences transferred easily to a new college context.

Perhaps as a result of having her education disrupted on several occasions, Fleur had one driving goal as a student in the PAIR program—to finish quickly. She often described herself as loving to learn. Yet in the program, she renegotiated her identity as a learner to one that better fit this goal. In order to navigate the literacy practices within the competency-based model, speed became a central feature in her decisions.

Fleur's literacy practices in navigating the program took place through interactions with several social networks. She relied on different people for different types of support. In order to navigate the program expectations, Fleur reached out to the academic coaches. To navigate the expectations of specific projects, Fleur leveraged the feedback process to create her projects through asynchronous digital interactions with the graders. An important source of support was her peers in the program who provided guidance on projects and also emotional support. Her family was a less prevalent source of support but served as a motivational force in Fleur's progress through PAIR.

Navigating Expectations

Fleur illustrated navigation in her description of academic reading which she likened to "sailing. It's more about just looking and not knowing where to go." Fleur's

primary concern with the assigned readings was finding her way through them. She talked frequently about how she decided what to read and the strategies that she adopted to make these choices. Initially, she said that reading was like swimming but changed her response to sailing: "It's more about, not swimming, it's about the boat." This aligned with the central role that she gave to the academic coaches in helping her navigate the program's expectations. She was not doing the work alone, but rather she felt supported.

"I Always Like to Double Check."

When discussing the assigned resources in the program, Fleur talked less about reading to learn information and more about reading to *find* information. For example, she did not like when a book chapter was assigned for projects: "They say which chapter, but still like, each chapter about 20 page. And you read it, and read it, and read it until you get a paragraph you will use." She felt like the information that she needed was often buried in the text which was, in turn, buried in a list of project resources: "Sometimes they put ones they aren't really helpful which make it harder because we need to like, we have to read more." From Fleur's perspective, the resources provided in PAIR were not essential information that she was expected to learn. Instead, Fleur believed that the task was to find the right resources with the right information. Because Fleur felt like the assigned resources were not always useful, she relied on the academic coaches to help her navigate the reading expectations. The coaches, in particular Anas, played a significant role in the way that she read for the program.

> I don't know what to choose, that's the problem. I need to choose; I will ask Anas if he recommend any. Sometimes I don't see him, so I just read all of them and I see which one is like the fastest one.

This desire to identify only the most useful, or "fastest" resources was likely a result of her desire to finish quickly. As a student, her driving goal was to finish quickly which meant that her goal with resources was to read them quickly.

For Fleur, reading and writing were deeply intertwined. Her reading goals were often informed by her writing goals such that she read very specifically for information that she needed to write about in her projects. To strategically navigate texts more quickly, Fleur often started with a guiding question. This was a strategy that she adapted from her leisurely reading. At home, she liked to think of questions and find answers to them:

> I always think about stuff, like if they do, like I sit down, and I think by myself. Like, one day I remember like I sitting and thinking, and I was like, huh, why would we peel this kind of fruit, I call it the skin, I'm not sure what is the name for it. (Peel?) yea the peel of the fruit will change and dry. I was like, maybe the chemical they have in that peel is really helpful for the skin. And I was like, I wish I have a place to do my search about it. Then, when I go online, I find like the researchers did that before and it's like, oh I'm too late.

To adapt this process, she substituted the project instructions for her self-directed questions: "I have the paper here, the directions, how should I do the memo, which I will follow." Fleur used the instructions and grading rubrics to determine the information that she needed for her projects. She would then look through the documents and through supplemental resources that she found online to find the exact information that she needed.

"I Still Always Look for Other Articles, Always, for Everything."

The beginning of every project was reading heavy. Fleur's first step was to gather the information that she needed: "I read like a lot, I read for a week. I get all the information." Fleur often looked for additional resources to supplement those provided. When she turned to the internet for more information, she compared across multiple sites to choose appropriate sources: "I try all to see which one is the most helpful. Like try four or five. And like have five, six pages [open] yea, and see which one is better." She combined information from multiple websites to understand a subject: "Go to different website and search it. Sometimes I use two or three websites until I get the main idea about it. Or to get the way how can I understand it." This allowed her to focus her reading on the websites that seemed most relevant to the questions that she was trying to answer. It also gave her access to different ways of presenting information. This allowed her to choose websites that felt more accessible.

Fleur turned to the internet when she did not understand a concept from the resources provided. One example was learning about healthcare in the U.S. The resources included a video about Obamacare, but she felt like she still did not understand what it was, so she searched for additional information:

> Like with Obamacare, it was hard to understand it. Like I just have a video and it
> was really hard to catch the difference between Medicaid and Obamacare. I know
> like they both make like people pay low insurance, I was like, what's the
> difference, what's the point for it?

In this example, Fleur identified that she needed additional information but also the specific information that she needed—she needed to know the difference between the

programs and also why both were necessary. She used these questions to guide her search for new resources. As she looked through websites, she compared the information on the site to what she was looking for: "For example, this one, this Obamacare. I click on it. It was the same information I had. Then when I want to. No, I don't like this, cause it takes you from a link to another link…let's see this one…yea see now this one is different." This process allowed her to assess websites quickly before reading the information more closely.

The internet also provided one additional benefit—resources in Arabic. When we talked about reading online, Fleur shared that online reading was "mostly in Arabic." She was able to clarify information that she was struggling with by looking for additional resources in a language that she was more comfortable reading in.

"I Just Go So Fast."

Speed often took precedence in her approach to the projects at PAIR. Finishing projects quickly meant not only reviewing the resources quickly but also writing the papers as fast as possible. When describing academic writing she explained, "I'm just like flying, because like I just do it very fast." This notion of flying through projects could be seen in how she completed projects. For one unit, she had to write a letter about health insurance options. She explained:

> For this letter, I start with it, I will say Wednesday and today is Sunday, so I just finished it in four days while I was working, I have to take care for my home, do my shopping, take care of my daughter. So I didn't really have enough time, otherwise, I will finish it in one or two days. But just because I was busy it took four days, but it's still very fast.

In her description, Fleur emphasized that she completed the writing assignment quickly and without conflicting priorities, she could have completed it even faster. In our conversations, speed was emphasized in writing, reading and studying in general.

As a PAIR student, Fleur valued speed and also believed that some resources were often irrelevant. In response, to navigate the resources quicker, she adjusted her reading strategies: "I just read it all very quick. Yea, like I just read it all very quick." Because she did not always see value in the provided resources, she skimmed them to see which would be the most useful resources. Her strategy when skimming the resources was to read everything as quickly as possible:

> Not looking for a word or something because it will be very hard for me because, you know, it's my second language, not the first one. Could be my, in my home language it will be like ok, just look for words, but for this one, I have to read everything, very very fast.

Fleur described skimming the resources for useful information but acknowledged that this required more attention in English than it would have in Arabic. Reading in English was more time consuming, so she compensated by reading at a faster speed.

However, even when reading everything, she felt like she risked missing important information. To make sure that she found all the information that she needed when she found something important, she would reread around it:

> That's why sometimes I go fast and be like, no no, wait a minute. I read something that like take my attention, just let me read it again very slow and read like the paragraph before, the paragraph after. And see if there is any other thing that I miss like can you use it.

Fleur combined reading strategies that allowed her to read quickly but also read more in-depth when needed. By identifying the information that she was looking for beforehand, she was able to read specifically for the information that she needed. Once she identified an important part of a reading, she would go back and reread the text around what she had found to make sure she had not missed additional material. Using these strategies, Fleur was better able to focus her attention on the information that she believed was most relevant which was important because she often had to reread passages in English to fully understand them. By adopting a targeted reading strategy, Fleur could manage the time she spent reading.

When writing for the PAIR program, Fleur skipped revision to turn in projects more quickly: "I will just want to speed so I just write very, very, quick, I don't always check the grammar, I just send it to them and then start on something different." To complete projects faster she skipped revision of her work, which led to projects being returned as "not mastered." In weighing the options between revising before submitting or submitting before revising, Fleur decided that revising after the first submission was the most efficient strategy.

"I Just Send It to Them."

Turning in drafts quickly allowed Fleur to spend less time trying to decipher specific expectations upfront and instead allow the feedback to guide her. This also allowed her to work on more than one project at a time: "I just send it to them and then start with something else just to save the time." By turning in projects quickly, Fleur was able to better navigate the expectations specific to the project. She used the feedback loop that was built into the competency-based design in order to interact with the otherwise

anonymous graders: "The first time I just write what I think the professor is looking for and they send me feedback, I try to fix it, then like when they send it the third time. I know like what 100% I need to do." By using the submission process to get feedback from the grader, Fleur was able to more effectively develop an understanding of what exactly was expected from her. This process allowed Fleur to balance multiple projects by spending the bulk of her time addressing specifically what the grader wanted. Fleur saw the value in working on revisions rather than the first drafts because she could progress through projects more quickly and without upfront guesswork.

"It's a Long Process but That's the Way How I Do It."

Repetition was a reoccurring strategy that Fleur drew on for reading, writing, and learning vocabulary. It was also a tool when she felt stuck. For example, when she was struggling with the health insurance project, she rewatched the video multiple times: "I could not tell the difference between Medicaid and Obamacare, and like I saw the videos two, three times until I get it." Likewise, for reading, she strategically read the text in multiple phases with a goal for each step: "The first time I read it just to have an idea, the second time I read it just to make sure I get more information. The third time I will get the whole thing they are talking about. So I need to do it three times." This strategy fit into others that she shared. The first reading was quick and surface-level to find relevant sections. The second reading she would read around the target segment. And the final reading was for comprehension. Although she would often skim through articles and websites, when the reading was important it was also a time-consuming process. She credited language for this additional time cost: "If it was in my language, or if English was my first language, I will need to do it only one time. So just, just make it very slow

for me. Like make me slower which is not good." This repetitive reading strategy was one that she had adopted as a student in a new language.

Repetition showed up in her approach to writing as well. When writing a paper, Fleur engaged in an iterative process between texts, paper, and notes:

> Like when I have something here, let's say, for example, I like this paragraph here, and I was like oh, ok this paragraph works good for me so I just copy-paste it or just type whatever I think is important here in Google document, and take whatever I want from the other one, and then I go back and read it and write it in the way that I really want it.

To write, she gathered notes on what she found important then rewrote the information in her own words. She then assessed if there was anything missing and returned to the resources, or Google, to fill the gaps: "I will see like what I have and if I need to write more, sometimes it's easier to make it simple."

Repetition revealed itself more broadly in her approach to writing: "I write it, I delete it, I write it then delete, you know. Couldn't be clear from the first time." This was likely driven by the beliefs that she held about reading and writing and what counted as good writing. For example, she believed that good writing led to enjoyable and more memorable reading: "When you enjoy to read it you will get it more, like if you just read it maybe you will get like 50% or 20% of whatever was here. But when you enjoy it, just like a movie, when you enjoy it you will remember it." Likewise, she wanted her writing to be enjoyable to those who read it: "I like when people read my paper, I don't like them just to read and that's it. I like the one who will read it will enjoy it." To reach this writing goal, she pulled from her knowledge of writing in Arabic: "I try to write the way

how I like it because in Arabic I try to write the words in nice way, so now I start to do the same thing in English which is good sign." Not only was her writing a process between resources, notes, and paper, it was also a conversation between English and Arabic.

"But I Haven't Start Here."

Fleur credited her success and speed in PAIR to everything that she had learned at the community college. In talking about how she had changed as a student at PAIR, she explained, "maybe I improved a little bit. But I haven't start here." Her college journey started three years earlier at the community college. When she made the decision to abandon her community college studies and enroll in PAIR, at first this felt like a step backward: "I have to start from the beginning. Like so many classes, I take them right now, but I already mastered them in community college. And I saw like, my work over there wasn't worth it because I cannot transfer anything." Because PAIR did not accept outside credits, her credits did not transfer; as a result, she started over. Although the credits did not transfer, Fleur was aware of all the knowledge that she brought with her including many of the academic literacies that she would need at PAIR:

> I learn everything over there the grammar, the way how we write the essays, how to do the researches, I learned everything there. So here it was just easier for me, like I already have the idea so here I just have to type and finish it. That's why I was moving so fast.

Because she had learned a lot of the rules of the Discourse of college, she felt like she was able to spend less time figuring those out and more time mastering projects.

Fleur's time at the community college had been challenging but overall, she viewed it as a rewarding experience:

> The school at community [college], it's hard. People think community it's easy but it's one of the hardest because we start on it and the professors are, they just want the students to make sure they got everything they teach them this semester, not just like pass them or something. So, they want to make sure, Like, we really get it. They examine everything, it was a little bit hard, the way how we do it, like, a lot of homework.

She was not only learning grammar and writing genres in these classrooms. Because she aged out of the public school system in the U.S., community college was also where she was learning the rules of college and schooling in America:

> It was in the high school classes. ESL classes. It was really helpful. But unfortunately like, my age was 20 when I came, so I didn't have enough time to have, like all the classes that will help in the future. I just take like a few, then when I turned 20, they said we can't have you anymore because you will be 21. So it was like, I wish I came a year before so it could help me more.

She was aware of the learning experiences that she missed by having to earn a GED instead of finishing high school. Her experience in community college, though it did not lead to a degree, provided valuable information about what was important in academic work in American schools.

"In Our Language, So It's Easier."

Despite believing that language was slowing her down, there were many instances when Fleur leveraged her first language to navigate the program. First, she used Arabic

when talking to peers and Anas to quickly clarify information. Second, she used the internet to access resources in Arabic to supplement program-assigned resources. Finally, she used her knowledge about writing in Arabic to inform her approaches to writing in PAIR.

During observations of the study groups, Fleur often sat with other students who spoke Arabic. They used this time to come together and share advice on the various projects—in Arabic. This group would often shift between Arabic and English to include other students. Anas, the head academic coach, also spoke Arabic. Often Fleur would ask Anas a question in Arabic from across the table and a quick answer would follow: "We have Anas who can help us. If we read something and didn't really get it in English, he can explain it to us in our language. So, it's easier." In contrast, she often spoke in English with the other academic coach for more writing-specific concerns. It appeared that Arabic was often leveraged to understand project expectations and topic knowledge, whereas English was employed when discussing academic language and writing-specific situations.

"Just Go to Anas, Yea, He's the Best Help."

The academic coaches played a key role in how Fleur navigated the program. She was most likely to reach out to them at two points: the beginning of a project and when she received feedback. The academic coaches served as an important source of information in elucidating the tacit expectations. As Fleur progressed through the program, she became more confident in her understandings of what was expected and relied less on the academic coaches. One coach explained, "She also used to make one-on-one appointments with me and then that slowly just started to trickle away." Fleur

described similar progress: "In the beginning, I have no idea what to do. Like I always have to meeting Anas to explain to me, but now I can start a new project, read it, and can do it by myself without help." As Fleur became more confident in what was expected of her, she relied less on the formalized sources of academic support.

"Everyone Try to Help Me."

Even though her use of academic coaches lessened over time, her peers continued to be a source of support. Fleur regularly attended the study groups and worked with other students in the program. The other students could offer guidance in navigating project expectations because those who were further ahead had experienced the feedback loop already:

> Students start before us so when I have a question, I go to ask them, like have you done this project? I was like, I'm not sure what should I do, so they will give me an idea like, you should do, maybe like have to read, write an essay three, four paragraphs, they are looking for this that and this. It's like, oh ok now I get it.

The other students provided more targeted descriptions about what was expected from a different perspective than the academic coaches. Her classmates had experienced the feedback firsthand. Aside from targeted advice about projects, Fleur also received affective support from her peers. In getting help from the other students, Fleur's goals became the goals of the group. She reflected on one particularly difficult project: "Everyone try to help me, to be honest with you, because, like we all were tired and sick from this project. Like, it was very easy." She reported feeling like the project itself was not difficult to complete. The hard part was figuring out what the grader wanted that

made the project hard. She was able to draw on her peers to find support in her perception of the project.

"My Daughter's Life."

Another source of social support that Fleur mentioned was her family. Her husband seemed to play a minimal role in Fleur's education, occasionally helping her with English: "My husband. Yea, he speak better than me, so he always watch me when I speak, and he try to fix it for me." Her daughter, on the other hand, was a critical source of motivation for Fleur. Her beliefs about education, and postsecondary education more specifically, were highlighted in Fleur's discussion of her daughter: "I want to have better life for myself and my daughter. I want to support her when she grow up. The only way to get that, by education. That's why I like to learn." When I asked why she wanted to get a college degree, Fleur responded, "It will be the key to save my life, and my daughter's life." Her daughter was not actively supporting Fleur with academic literacies, but she was ever-present in Fleur's goals as a student at PAIR.

Experiencing Forced Migration

Fleur's resettlement was defined by her age. She arrived at the age of 20, at a point when she had developed dreams and goals for her future but had not been able to achieve them. Moving to the U.S. in late adolescent or emerging adulthood led to a series of complications for Fleur. The results of resettlement forced Fleur to reevaluate her goals and reimagine herself as a student and outsider to a new educational system. These movements not only shaped how she progressed through the system but also what she valued as a student. Speed became a goal that was both essential and frustrating for Fleur.

"They Said We Can't Have You Anymore."

      A major disruption that Fleur experienced as a result of displacement was that of her education. Because of her age when she resettled in the U.S., Fleur was unable to finish secondary school in Jordan and unable to complete it in the U.S. At the age of 21, students age out of the public school system in the U.S. and must instead take the GED exam:

> I haven't completed all. When I moved here, they put me in high school for one year, then I turned 21 so I have to take GED which was very hard in the beginning because I'm still like start to learn cause I didn't speak English in the beginning, just a little bit. And the GED, it's harder than high school or the college. Cause you just take the book, read for yourself and try to figure out how to do it.

Fleur saw this move from high school to the GED as a loss of valuable experiences to learn about the U.S. and to learn English. She moved from a social educational environment in the school to a more independent learning environment.

"I Always Feel Like I Will Stuck With the Language."

      The move to a new country also meant moving into a new education system and a new language of instruction. Fleur, who had always considered herself a good student in Jordan, faced new barriers to achieving her dreams. Her dream was to become a dentist, yet she found herself reevaluating that dream because she found studying in English limited her potential: "Still like even if I have 10 years here but my language is just like I have a limit for it." Had she been able to remain in an Arabic school system, she believed that she would be much further along in her education:

It's harder for me like, if everything was in my language, like if my language, my first language was English, I will have my master right now. But just because I stuck with the language, so sometimes I need to spend like double of the time that other people use or more.

Fleur saw English as a speed bump that was significantly slowing her down. Learning in English meant that her schoolwork took twice the time and energy than it would have in her native language.

Moving more slowly through her education raised additional barriers between Fleur and her dream to become a dentist. Her education was taking longer than expected; as a result, she felt like she was quickly becoming too old to continue pursuing a dental degree: "Just my age, like I'm, that's the other concern like, I'm a little bit old for dentist to start study for dentist. Like if I go and I will be around 40 like when I graduate which is a little bit late, but I will see." Forced migration and resettlement had disrupted Fleur's education and in doing so, it also disrupted her dreams. Even though PAIR provided a pathway to a bachelor's degree, it offered limited programs. Fleur was considering how to fit this new pathway into the one she had envisioned:

But it will, say like, I will work on it until I feel like I cannot do it anymore. So I will start my bachelor after this one then transfer to a different program like in health, like more about nursing or doctor or something and I will see myself where I can go.

PAIR did not offer a direct transition into dentistry, but Fleur was actively envisioning new pathways. Despite these disruptions, she remained hopeful: "That's my dream so, let me see how far I can go with it."

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"But It's Hard for a Refugee. Really Hard for a Refugee."

Fleur saw herself as an outsider in the community college because of her language-learner status and because of her refugee status. She felt like the community college curriculum was not designed for students like her:

Like the courses are already made for people who speak fluent English, but we don't speak fluent English, so we go there, we face so many issues and the professors still expect us to finish the work in the same time that American students finish it.

Reflecting on her previous community college experience alongside American students, she recognized that the courses were not designed for her and linguistically diverse students in general. She understood that she was following rules set for a different student population. As a student, she identified by her contrast to this assumed norm. In connecting herself to a larger demographic of college students, she was signifying solidarity that she shared with other students who were not native to these American programs.

The pacing of courses was where Fleur felt the most disadvantaged. In the community college, where courses follow a stricter schedule, Fleur felt particularly disadvantaged: "The time is made for people who speak fluent English but for us, we have to work double to finish it in the same time. So it was a little bit hard for us." Whereas the strict deadlines of the semester-based community college made Fleur feel disadvantaged by her refugee status, the competency-based format of PAIR felt more welcoming: "Here like even if you are a little bit behind or you are before, you don't get

shy because, and we didn't get shy here because of like language or something so, most of us are from different countries and so we are very comfortable in that."

Summary

Fleur's desire to finish the program quickly informed how she navigated it. Fleur drew on academic coaches and peers to dissect the expectations of each project which in turn directed her reading and writing. She felt like English slowed down her progress and required her to adapt her reading strategies to account for reading in a new language. However, language was also important in helping Fleur build relationships with her peers and she found ways to leverage her first language and her past experiences as a student to navigate the projects in PAIR.

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Mustak

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Mustak fled Burma after being arrested several times for community advocacy work in his home country of Burma. As a Rohinga in Burma, he was not recognized as a citizen. He left behind the opportunity to complete a bachelor's degree in chemistry. After spending several months in jail, Mustak made the decision to leave. He went to Thailand and then continued on to Malaysia where he was, once again, not recognized by the government meaning he could not attend local universities. After 17 years, Mustak sought permanent refuge and was resettled with his family in the U.S. When he arrived, he attempted to restart his postsecondary studies but found his access barred once again because he did not have the documents he needed to enroll. After spending the majority of his life living as a stateless person in his home country and his country of asylum, Mustak was driven by a desire to be recognized. Access to citizenship would help him be

recognized as a legal participant of a nation, whereas college credentials would help him be recognized as a professional on the job market.

Living as a stateless individual shaped Mustak's life in Burma where he faced near-constant discrimination and limited access to school: "You can face every discrimination, starting from your home to school. So like in class you have a lot of discriminated by your classmates, from teachers, the way to school. So it's terrible situation than here." It was only after resettling in the U.S. as a refugee and eventually obtaining citizenship that Mustak was finally recognized by a country as a citizen. After gaining recognition by a state, Mustak maintained his goal to graduate from college which was driven in part by the expectations set by his family and also by the additional recognition that he would receive with the institutionalized capital afforded by a college degree: "The program, the first thing it give me, recognize who I am, you know. Why, whatever or any company, any, whatever institution you go they look at what's your qualifications, right? I created that in this. I mean I have a source of my credentials to show who I am." The strategies that Mustak adopted and adapted as a student in PAIR did carry him to his goal of earning a postsecondary degree. As the study was taking place, Mustak completed the coursework to earn his associate degree and was considering moving into the bachelor's portion of the program. This first milestone fulfilled his long-held dream: "So that is my second dream. My first dream is, I have to become a citizen, a country, that I am done. I have a degree. I am done right now. I am proud myself."

When we talked about his work at PAIR, Mustak often equated academic work with perfection: "There's one sentence sometimes, you're missing one sentence or a few

words and then your whole project is saying no everything." Mustak seemed frustrated by the focus on grammar over ideas. It did not matter what he said in the paper, but rather how he said it. The emphasis on punctuation and grammar was an obstacle. Academic reading was complicated because of the academic words: "Commonly and similarly, same. The academic words, they're not common." Although Mustak was proficient in English, he struggled with the less common words used in the academic texts.

He also made a distinction between academic work and professional work. Because he had not been able to pursue a college education, Mustak had acquired several years of work experience in different sectors. In Malaysia, he had opened a community school and worked with non-governmental organizations. In the U.S., he started his own translation business and worked part-time as a case manager for a local non-profit organization. He reported feeling like these experiences were not directly relevant to the work in PAIR because those experiences were professional and not academic. For example, when describing presentations at PAIR he explained:

> Academically, it's correct because they give you a folder so we can look at what background look like, but I'm not seeing any black, but they give different color, you know, depends on what you have to read. So, I said that's fine, that I learned academic and different professionally when you present a PowerPoint totally it look like different.

Mustak found that academic work meant doing what he was told to do with a pre-approved set of resources. In response, he defined academic work in terms of what the graders wanted which in turn informed his approach to the projects in PAIR.

When he talked about difficulties that arose in the PAIR program, Mustak made a distinction between challenging topics and projects that were difficult to master: "A little bit of explanation. It's not, for me, harder. But it's harder for me to master it." Learning the material was easier than mastering a project because mastering a project meant careful attention to minute details: "This is the academic reading. So, you have to use that skill. You know, I did not know, if you miss one comma your projects not get mastered." In order to master a project, he needed to figure out what was expected of him and match that expectation. In addition to believing that academic work required perfection, Mustak perceived the expectations as rather opaque, particularly when provided via feedback on his work. Vague feedback made it more difficult to meet expectations because he would have a project returned without a better sense of the expectations.

Navigating Expectations

Mustak perceived the expectations at PAIR as a moving target because they changed with the graders: "It's not every single time have the same issue; it depends on the reviewer." This belief shaped his approach to the projects. When reading for new projects, Mustak stuck close to the resources provided and rarely searched for additional information. When he did search for new information it was most often to provide comparisons that would help him understand the concepts. He followed the questions and rubrics very closely and used these in an iterative process to guide his progress. Mustak abstracted himself from the projects to focus solely on what the graders wanted. Finally, he began each new task with trial and error.

"The First Time I Guess."

Mustak navigated the projects using trial and error. He felt like his work was not going to receive the grade of "mastered," so he had to do it the way the graders wanted, which felt arbitrary. To navigate these opaque expectations, he would begin with a guess and tailor his projects from there: "I just guess and then I submit it. But when I submit it second time it's come back, so you have to pay a lot of attention on that. So, it tells you just guess, it doesn't work out." Guessing was a strategy to build a better understanding of what the reviewer wanted. Mustak felt like each reviewer wanted something different, and as a result, each first submission was always a guess.

He described discerning the expectations as a process that he engaged in through feedback:

> First time, second, they don't specify which one we need to amend. You have
> three and so you are adding three of them and then I make changes and she says,
> oh no you are correct this on where you change it, so I do not know which I need.
> So then she give, so let's say four times already I submit it.

First, he started with a guess, then he guessed where he was not meeting the expectations, and finally guessed how to fix his project. Over time, Mustak shared that he felt like he began to make more informed guesses as he learned what to focus on: "Another thing, are they giving you directions. Sometimes, the first time we don't understand what we need to follow and day-by-day we learn which one they are focusing." By learning to anticipate the expectations, Mustak felt like he had a better understanding of where he needed to focus his work.

A lack of assumed foundational knowledge added to Mustak's need to make guesses. One example was a presentation that Mustak needed to make about ethos, pathos, and logos. One of the resources that he needed to analyze was a video game that used Star Wars characters. Mustak was asked to describe the audience for this game but he lacked the assumed schema on the Star Wars franchise and its significance in American pop-culture: "So, I watch, I do not know who is Han, who is changed do you know? But I play that game, they gave it to, so, you don't have any information. So, you just look at the games." Lacking relevant schema, Mustak was able to master the project through a series of trials and errors: "The first time I submit it, let's say, this is like Disney character, it is they put it. So who was interested to buy, or to buy their product. But he say, oh no no, this is not. So finally I found out this one." Mustak adopted a similar approach to new concepts: "This is tricky if you don't understand what looks like subtext. I put it the first time is different. And it doesn't work out so it's probably this." When he learned a new concept, such as subtext, he read through the provided resources and made an informed guess. When he received negative feedback, he revised his understanding and tried again. Comparing drafts to feedback was only one use of comparison, it was also a central strategy for reading.

"What Difference That."

Mustak used comparisons and contrasts to decipher new information. He would use this approach when he did not understand the definitions provided in the PAIR resources or when he felt like the definitions he had been given did not help. When he felt stuck with the provided resources, he turned to the internet to find additional examples: "I just Google it here and then I put it over, what, what was that presented. And then I, it's

not give directions, it gives explanations, so this is, you can look at that. You can look at that and then, oh in the end I find out, oh probably it's this one." Rather than integrating these new examples into his work, he compared them to the resources from PAIR and narrowed them down to a definition that he understood. As Mustak explained, the additional resources provided additional explanations about the project but did not replace the original directions that he was following.

Although he was allowed to look for additional resources online, Mustak preferred to use solely the resources provided in the program. The one exception that he made was looking for additional examples of a concept that he could use to compare to those provided. One example of this strategy was when he needed to analyze an ad for a diet: "So here, I came only not this diet, I look at several diets for that. What difference that." Comparing the ad he was analyzing to ads for similar products helped Mustak see the differences in how the ads talked about their products. In this example, comparing and contrasting helped him understand the concepts of advertising within his project by seeing advertising in action. Alongside comparing, Mustak also needed to see the resources through the eyes of the graders.

"I Try to Forget Myself."

Success often depended on specific grammatical and syntactic features in his writing. In describing academic literacies, Mustak explained, "I have to take the time to explore, to configure a verb and structure a sentence currently." This focus on detail over larger meanings made Mustak feel like his own views, thoughts, and perceptions were unimportant. Therefore, the less of himself he could put into a project, the more likely he

was to succeed: "So that's why, if I try to forget myself, it's just I put that information in my answer."

This approach seemed driven by the frustration he felt at the beginning of the program when he would put a lot of work into the initial submission of a project. He found it disheartening to receive feedback that he had done nothing correctly: "Look like I read it this kind of project, then you see you are no everything. Not yes anything else." He interpreted this as a message that the way he was thinking was wrong: "It's tricky. Somebody cannot, your idea or probably this going to be wrong." This feeling was associated with the vague feedback that he received on projects. Rather than learning about the specific areas that he needed to fix, Mustak felt like he was just being told that he was wrong. Interpreting feedback as a judgement on his overall work was frustrating and left Mustak with limited signposts to fix his work: "That is difficult. Sometimes the reviewer just gives you like oh I don't like that. But they give specifically, they don't point at what you need to do. They say, 'oh you are not correct your subtext'."

The topics covered in the program also occasionally led to feelings of disconnect between Mustak's values and desire to complete projects. These cultural incongruities made Mustak feel abstracted from the program:

> It's hard, sometimes you feel that this is not my project. Why I have to read this
> stuff? They have a lot of different stuff, like my last project, as Muslim do you
> know the naked women I have to read, so I read it myself. So but learning. But
> sometimes the culturally, when I study, most of my study time my daughter was
> by side a lot of time, so I have, myself I'm shamed to study this stuff in front of
> her. When my wife just walking around 'What are you doing? In front of the

family.' It's, sometimes, you know, it's just hard you need to read it, you need to find out what's happening.

In order to succeed as a student, Mustak needed to separate his student self from his family self. He also felt like he lacked important assumed schemata when topics fell outside of his personal values: "Culturally a little bit, some projects have gone like, alcohol, things, you know, because we never use alcohol so you have to express what look like, what, how you do." When studying alcohol, Mustak lacked familiarity with the experience of drinking alcohol because, as a Muslim, he did not partake. Although these examples represent a fraction of the topics covered, they highlight the ways that Mustak felt disconnected from his learning.

Part of Mustak's learning curve was to stop working on a project from his own point of view and to hone in on what a grader would want. He let go of himself in order to be a successful student. In doing so, he learned where to focus his attention, his time, and his energy. He described this process as something that all of his peers also underwent: "And that we learn by what focus we need to focus. And then it make you comfort to do different things or common goal." Learning what was valued by graders helped Mustak feel more comfortable as a student in the program.

"We Go Back to Questions or What They Wanted."

Mustak often referred to academic reading and writing as a practice of perfection—perfection in grammar, punctuation, and focus. Learning what to focus on was an important skill to learn. Over time, Mustak began to use the directions and the rubric to focus his work:

So, I look at the questions and the answers. So also, we have rubric. So rubric is

when you submit it, let's say they have seven rubric, the first time you submit it

they say, your APA citation is not correct, so we have a yes or no.

The questions and rubric provided important signposts for Mustak to navigate the assignments. Focusing on the right points and features made the difference between receiving a "mastered" and a "not yet" on the projects: "Before we just try to write a paper or three pages, they say oh I have write 2,000 words, but we never focus what they mean, they wanted. Like, a simple word, it means the whole project is gone."

Learning about the rubric was an important steppingstone. Although Mustak had almost completed a college degree in Burma, his past experiences in college courses had not revolved around a rubric. Without knowing a rubric was available, Mustak reported feeling like his work was undervalued. He also felt like this experience was shared by his peers in the program: "Before we didn't realize, we just make it our work like hard time, we didn't look at what was the rubric look like. And then we learn from them, so when we submit it, we just see everything no, no." Before using the rubric, he was not passing any aspects of the assigned projects. Access to the rubric allowed him to tailor his work to specific expectations.

Going back to the project prompt questions was particularly useful in narrowing down the reading to a manageable amount. When we talked about the amount of reading, Mustak replied, "Too much. It's too much reading." Mustak came to realize that not all of the provided resources were necessary for each project. To determine which resources he needed to read, Mustak used the questions:

The first thing. When the first I get a project, I try to read every resources. I never

focus which ones I need to read. Later I realize they provide me all the resources,

it doesn't mean I have to read everything. I go by their what they needed and then

I read only their resources. So I save my time.

Targeted reading helped Mustak accelerate his progression through the program. By

limiting the amount he needed to read, Mustak saved precious time and was able to

progress through the program at a faster rate. While reading, Mustak also used the

questions to focus his attention: "First time, I take a note, one page by one page. What

most question ask, they're asking them. I collect that note and then I try to paraphrase

myself first." This helped Mustak ensure that he was addressing all of the questions

because he knew that each point mattered: "You know they want every single thing on

it." As he became more familiar with the expectations of PAIR graders, his work better

aligned with what the graders wanted, and as a result, Mustak felt more confident in his

work: "So in the next time, I have a recording project looked like it's not give me a hard

time, you know? I know what they want."

Mustak used an iterative process between his work and the provided questions.

He began by looking at the questions and determining which resources would be the most

useful to answer the questions. This allowed him to focus his time and attention:

Before I go every resources, so one by one, we didn't look at which resources I

need the most, so I go by questions, they have directions for the project, if you

have a direction, what you need to do. So, I look at the questions and the answers.

The questions and the rubric helped Mustak decide which resources he needed to read.

The directions provide insights into what the graders wanted, what he needed to focus on,

and where he needed to spend his time. This approach helped Mustak more strategically

balance his study time in the program and provided a window into the expectations

before he submitted a project.

"They Just Make You Mess Up."

Mustak grew increasingly independent as he progressed through the program:

"The first one, I try to make them a little bit, probably a few weeks and then after that I

become independent. I just come regular classes." He maintained participation within the

academic community but relied less on the academic coaches to understand what the

graders wanted. Instead, he would utilize coaching to help finalize his writing projects.

This independence was strengthened when he felt like the support he received

from coaches, peers, and tutors was not translating to success on projects. Mustak was

increasingly frustrated by what felt like arbitrary expectations. Because he had no

interactions with the graders, he turned to the academic coaches to demystify the

expectations, but they were also not experts on what the graders wanted: "Your coach or

your trainer, they're giving their knowledge to you, but it doesn't work out so it's

frustrating."

The greatest turn toward independence was with Mustak's use of Tutor.com. He

began to believe that Tutor.com was only useful for final proofreading, and even then, it

had its limits: "Tutor.com is only one this helpful, I give you 80 or something 85%, just

reviewing grammar. The best for it. You just completely do your job, everything, just

give them proofreading." The support he received, even on proofreading, was not

supportive. He often felt it as abrasive: "Sometimes that proofreading on tutor also

difficult, sometimes they give you hard time. We just ask proofread or whatever and then they go why you put that here, why you put it here."

This mistrust of the online tutors was likely exacerbated by a negative experience with one of the tutors. An academic coach confirmed that Mustak felt resistant to using the tutoring service after a tutor told him to learn English. When Mustak sought out assistance to fit his work into classic academic writing conventions, he was met with a hostile denial of his identity as an English-speaker. Rather than feeling supported, Mustak felt rejected after this tutoring experience. Although he still used their services for proofreading, he limited the trust he placed in their support.

The problems that Mustak recounted with the online tutoring were particularly frustrating for him because of the value that Mustak placed on time. He wanted to get a college degree because he felt like he had lost so much time since he first started college. Whereas the PAIR program offered an accelerated path to this degree, he felt like using the online tutoring service was a waste of this precious time he was putting into his coursework:

> But they just spend the time because they're getting paid also, right. And I end up with nothing, and then one hour, you just spend it, time, I know he or she making money, but we are get frustrated, more than what you go for something else for help, but it's not come back what you wanted.

Mustak showed a tendency to seek help with his work toward the beginning of the program. A series of negative experiences that ranged from simply not mastering a project after seeking help, to being denied status as an English writer led Mustak to mistrust the resources available. Even while Mustak grew to distrust the people who were

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purportedly there to help him, he also valued the community of students and positioned himself as a helper among them.

"We Look Like Family Here."

Mustak developed a social network within the student community at PAIR that he would occasionally turn to for academic support, particularly to make sense of the expectations. He attended the weekly group study sessions regularly to work with the academic coaches and the other students. The coaches provided navigational guidance: "I come here. I ask my coach. Oh they wanted this, but they give us idea, oh look like this going to be your meaning and then we put that." Group study sessions were also an opportunity to get assistance with academic writing: "We come to here (the center), so we ask our coach. We have some writing coach and they can look at it and then we work together. How we can fix this. They give idea, probably this was you had to make this." One academic coach confirmed that when Mustak asked for help it was often with specific tasks such as citations, paraphrasing, and proofreading.

The social network that developed between students was also a source of navigational support. As students progressed further in the program, they could help the students who followed:

> Sometimes a person try to meet you or try to connect you a different way. It depends on the person because everybody has a different life here. So we have some close, say close classmates. We just say 'what are you doing? How is your project going?' Sometimes we try to ask, did you, 'I can help something?' It's not, I am giving questions or how I make that success and we share.

Although he described the other students as having a different life, he often talked about his experience in the first-person plural which suggests that he felt a shared experience with the other students. For example, when he recounted a project that he had found particularly difficult he explained, "It's not the definition, how come they give the definition is like number? Every student though, it's hard for every student when we are, everybody." He felt like the difficulty he felt was not specific to him but reflective of the experiences of other students. Overcoming these challenges as a group was an important source of support that he found among the other students. Mustak was further along than most of his fellow students and often spent group study sessions helping other students navigate the expectations of projects that he had successfully completed.

Experiencing Forced Migration

Mustak's complicated experiences with schooling informed his approach to PAIR. As a student in primary school, Mustak explained that he learned from his father at home, school was simply a place he went to be counted on the register:

> Because our education system is you have to go to school only for record, they are not teaching you. They are not giving you, what you needed right? That's why, let's say we are going next year grade 7 or 7 or 8 or 5 whatever next year. We learn, before we go to school at our house. My father teach, you know? But we just need to go in school only for record, you know the public record of the government. We are not going to learn because we attending classes we already know; we already learn at home.

The learning he did was mostly at home and reading was a central feature of his home life where his "father was a reader. He read books." Being surrounded by books was

something that Mustak adopted in his new home: "So what I learn, I'm not learn from school, I am learn from reading." Mustak's family was also behind his drive to complete college.

"I'm Not Able to Finish."

One of the largest marks that forced migration made on Mustak's life was the barriers it caused in his pursuit of a college degree. In some ways, he was a refugee long before he fled his home. In Burma, he was not recognized as a citizen which left him essentially stateless and limited his access to educational opportunities. His first time in college was interrupted when he was arrested for being Rohinga:

> I try to finish my degree, but I could not make it because of my documents. They say, you are illegal here, how you get to get university degree? And then, I got arrested like 6, 7 months and I released from that. I make decision. I try to make my life different. I need to find out my way was my future.

He fled without finishing his chemistry degree. In Malaysia, he was barred from the university because of his status: "In Malaysia, you are living as a refugee there count you as illegal because they are not signing the Geneva Convention. So, it's hard for you to obtain your education." In the U.S., he found himself again barred from the university first because of his papers:

> When I came in 2013, I tried to get, continue my education in Nashville Community College. I study IT, but they ask me document, you know, they ask me a lot of my real document from Burma. Because I could not bring my documents from Burma.

With persistence, he found a path into college but quickly dropped out after feeling

alienated when the school did not know what language course to place him in:

> I just take a course and then I drop off myself. Then they tell me I need to go to
>
> the learning center to learn English. You know? To have a…what calling?
>
> Diploma over there. I said this doesn't work. I went at the learning center, looked
>
> like I'm wasting my time, right? So I went for a week so first day they put me in
>
> class and then every day they are changing me and then at the end of the day they
>
> don't have a class, so why am I here?

After leaving his first college and struggling to enroll in another college, time was

precious for Mustak, so he was eager to finish this program. The value that Mustak

placed on his time served as a filter for the strategies that Mustak adopted. When tutoring

felt like a waste of time, he moved away from online tutoring. Possibly contributing to

Mustak's frustrations was the value he placed on college and the institutional capital it

bestowed.

"That is a Tool Not Only Just for Your Life but for the Community."

Mustak valued education as a benefit for the whole community. He held several

social roles over the course of his migration experience and these roles continued to drive

Mustak. He was a son, a teacher, a school leader, and an activist. These community

connections each served in their own way to motivate Mustak toward his goal.

Mustak's father was an important figure in his education. His father taught

Mustak outside of formal schooling to ensure that he was getting a high-quality

education. His father also played an important role in keeping Mustak in school in the

face of daily discriminations:

For me, my father push me back. Oh you need to go you want to go right? So our whole family has study academic, not go to specifically only religion school. So my father was graduate, and my uncle was graduate, so he, every family push you have to done. Whatever facing discrimination or whatever.

Mustak's father read and wrote often in the home, particularly about their family history. He adopted his father's affinity for reading: "He gave us, pay attention to reading book, because when you reading you get knowledge. You don't need to go to school. For reading a book you can read at home so." Mustak developed as an independent learner under the guidance of his father. Education was important to Mustak largely because of the values that he learned from his father:

My father doesn't teach us. My father says, I am not earning for you guys or money, I am earning for you guys to survive. If I give a billion dollar probably you will spend tomorrow. In the end you doesn't have anything, your life. That's why, I am spending my money on your education, so you go in any country you have that. You can survive with that.

Mustak described his father's role as both an educator and motivator. His goal of earning a college degree was largely driven by the goals set by his father. Through his father, Mustak learned how to study independently and learn through reading—skills that equipped Mustak for online learning.

During his time in Malaysia, Mustak became both a teacher and a school leader. Much of the value that Mustak attributed to education was community-driven. He believed that education was for his own gain but also valuable to the broader community:

So this will create, probably this can create for one day government not

discriminating us, because if we are everybody are educated probably they not

discriminate us, right? So that is a tool not only just for your life but for the

community.

At the same time that Mustak was studying in the program, he was also expanding

educational opportunities to the students of his home community: "Try to create. I am

running a school in Burma right now. My own village where I was attending primary

school. So, our two brother who are living in U.S., we build that school." For Mustak, the

degree he was working for meant more than increased institutionalized capital. It was a

means to help his community. Mustak recognized the value of community knowledge:

The skill if you're going outside of a country. So let's say I have a brother, I have

whoever, I can give them that kind of information what looks like where you are

going, and what country you learn are going college or what you need to read. It's

just not, because whatever you have in your country is totally different. So you

know, the system, the requirements.

Mustak maintained communities with people that he met across the globe. He maintained

contact with students in Malaysia, with his community in Burma, and was also active in

his new community. These connections helped give additional meaning to the education

that he was pursuing but he also valued the navigational knowledge that he could gain

and share with these global social networks.

Summary

Mustak's desire to accelerate toward a degree informed many facets of his

experience at PAIR. Time motivated Mustak throughout the program and the

competency-based format of the program supported his goals. Mustak learned at the beginning of his studies at PAIR that the fastest path to a degree was to think less from his perspective and to mine the questions and the rubrics to interpret what the reviewers wanted. He adopted the strategy of guessing on his first attempt in order to get more specific instructions through feedback. Social connections gave Mustak a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging. Mustak also developed a community within the PAIR program where he was able to share in the struggles of the other students and help them with the projects that he had completed. He also felt a certain limit to the support that he found within the program. When the difficulties began to feel like a waste of time, Mustak relied less on the support around him, opting instead to learn independently. Time, once more, was a salient facet in Mustak's decisions around seeking help.

Tommy

Tommy was originally from Iraq and finished school through some college before forced migration disrupted his degree at a technology institute. Aside from taking some English as a second language (ESL) classes at a local university, Tommy had not returned to college to earn a degree since resettling in the U.S. This missing college credential weighed on Tommy. Although he considered himself successful professionally—he owned a business—the lack of a degree had barred him from past jobs. For Tommy, being in PAIR was fulfilling a dream: "I always have inside me, I have to finish school." He was also the inaugural student of the refugee initiative at PAIR.

As a student, Tommy seemed driven by one central purpose: "I have to be number one. I cannot be number two." What this idea of "the best" translated to in the competency-based, and thus self-paced, program was finishing first. This belief served as

a motivating factor: "I want to be the first one who hit 90, I want to be the first one who hit 30, I want to be the first one who graduate. I always have that." Tommy wanted to accumulate mastered competencies and meet benchmarks (30 competencies, 60 competencies, etc.) faster than other students. Achieving this goal did not necessarily mean mastering the content but strategically navigating the expectations. In order to be his vision of the best in the class, Tommy maximized his use of feedback to identify and respond to the specific expectations of each grader.

Navigating Expectations

Within the program, Tommy engaged in an array of literacy practices to meet the expectations he perceived. In many ways, Tommy made meaning using multiple modalities, including videos, audio recordings, images, and presentations. In doing so, he often pushed back against traditional notions of what students needed to be successful.

Tommy's beliefs about education in general, and reading and writing more specifically, informed the way Tommy approached academic tasks. Three beliefs were prominent. First, Tommy believed that reading was not the most efficient way to learn. Second, Tommy did not identify as a writer. Third, Tommy believed that he understood topics in a way that was incongruent with the perspectives of the anonymous graders who determined when he mastered a competency: "Most of the time, our understanding is not exactly what they want. This is our level of education. This is how we understand it. But it's not exactly what they want." Tommy used his beliefs about education, himself as a student, and the expectations that he perceived in the program to inform the decisions he made in PAIR.

"Give You the Juice of It."

According to Tommy, a central feature of academic reading was knowing which information was important. This extended to the various modalities that Tommy used to gather information as a student. In reading and watching videos, the element that set academic work apart from learning for fun was the act of finding what would be considered most important: "You need to know what's important, important enough to be on that page. Not putting everything, anything, or something important, more, very important, most important. So, you need to know what to put in there." In fact, reading for the grader seemed to be a defining feature of academic reading for Tommy. He made a clear distinction between the way he read and the way they expected him to read: "It's a problem. When you read, the way they want you to read, you go into the video, you go over there, it's going to be you, it's not what they want." Tommy perceived a dichotomy between what he found important and what the graders found important.

Compared to reading, looking for information in a video was less of an uncharted adventure. When reading, listening, or watching, Tommy was driven by one main goal— to figure out what was most important. He prided himself on his ability to pick out "the juice" from a source. Tommy was very confident with summarizing: "I can pull the most important things. One is what do you need to hear about. You don't need all the details. This I have. I can summarize." In determining what information was the most relevant or the most important he cautioned that there was a distinction between his views and those of the graders: "Sometimes, I have the video and stop, ok this is what I want, but this is what they want." This distinction, between what he found interesting and what the graders wanted, informed his approaches to assignments. He used the project descriptions

to more strategically gather information: "In the requirements, the projects. Sometimes I have the video, I stop it, that's what I need."

In discerning what was most important, Tommy relied on instinct. When describing how he found information online, Tommy said that he could tell when a website or video was good because it aligned with his knowledge: "It shares the way I'm thinking." However, he also expressed an awareness of his limits as an authority on what was correct or incorrect. Instead, he explained, "To be honest with you, if I like the video, I feel what they're saying, I go with it. Because, and I cannot tell which one is right, or the best, or bad." Tommy was confident in his ability to summarize, or find "the juice," but he considered this an instinct rather than a skill. He also felt like his instinct for what was important was occasionally undermined by a mismatch between his perspective and those of the graders. Even though he felt confident in his ability to summarize information, he suspected that what he found important did not always match what graders wanted.

"They Want You to Say It a Certain Way."

Tommy expressed an understanding of the nature of academic Discourses. He deduced that there was a right and wrong way to talk about topics and that those rules were context dependent. This was evident in Tommy's description of academic writing as like "learning a new language. It requires you to see and understand different perspectives and use them in your own way." In his description, Tommy described communicating in a certain way, as well as thinking in new ways.

Tommy made a distinction between day-to-day vocabulary and words specific to academic concepts: "I watch a lot of documentaries. So all the words not familiar to me,

especially like school words, college words." Watching documentaries was a key strategy

for learning new words, and more importantly to learn the words needed in school. Even

though Tommy watched documentaries as a leisure activity, he found that they supported

his acquisition of an academic lexicon.

The resources provided by the program were another source of this new

vocabulary. One goal of Tommy's when reviewing resources was to learn how to talk

about a topic. Knowing the right words and how people talked about a certain topic was

important to Tommy. Yet, knowing the right words did not lead to knowing what to say:

> Let's say I want to write something; this I have difficulty with…I reviewed so
>
> many resources. I got so many extra words, so many. I know how they talk about
>
> this stuff, how they mention certain things, but I still have that weakness when I
>
> want to write something.

For Tommy, writing successfully included knowing both what to say and how to say it.

He was also aware that there was a certain way to do both in a given context. Knowing

that there were governing rules, but not knowing what those rules were created an added

obstacle: "Even if it's right like, if it's you give all, everything they want but not the way

it should be written, they send it back." At PAIR, Tommy deduced that is was not only

the content but also how he talked about the content that was important.

In order to learn this new academic language in specific contexts, Tommy made

strategic use of the resources provided. When reviewing the resources, both videos and

texts, he considered the content but also the words they used and how the topic was

discussed. For Tommy, this goal reshaped how he consumed media:

When I watch something, I go in the mode like I'm there. But when you do

project, you need to get out from there. You know, you just need to understand it,

how to express those things. Not just feelings, talking, no you put it in the writing.

Even though Tommy often learned from videos outside of school, he found that he

needed to more actively consume information when watching the resources for PAIR.

Beyond learning from the video, Tommy was also using the video to learn how to express

his ideas about the topic.

Tommy's perception of the different ways to write about topics was undergirded

by his belief that his way of doing things did not align with what the graders wanted. At

PAIR, Tommy felt like it was insufficient to learn the information; there was a right and

wrong way to talk about what he had learned. He leveraged the resources provided by the

program to learn how to talk about the topic, but it was not always a successful strategy:

"Sometimes it doesn't make a big difference, because you give them exactly what they

want as an idea. So, but they want it to be written in a certain way. That's the thing." He

did not interact with graders outside of the feedback process, and as a result, finding the

right way to say something often felt like a guess.

"I Don't Need to Guess."

Tommy's goal as a student was to be the best which, for Tommy, meant finishing

faster than the other students. Speed was equated with being number one and if the goal

was to be faster than others, improving one's reading and writing was not necessarily the

most effective approach. Instead, Tommy adopted strategies that allowed him to use the

feedback system in the most efficient way:

I don't have to waste my time, my effort, just to figure out what they want from

me here. So why I spent two days on it, and it's going to come back to me

because my experience, the first three, four projects, they all come back.

After completing the first few projects, Tommy determined that he was unlikely to master

an assignment on his first try, despite his level of effort. In response, he adapted his

strategy. He identified that understanding each grader's expectations was crucial to

passing each assignment. Because each grader was different, he started to submit his

work with minimal revisions so that he could get specific feedback about what the grader

was looking for.

Trying to anticipate expectations was a waste of time for Tommy: "Sometimes

when you have a problem and it's not exactly what they want, you waste all the time, a

lot of time." He often described academic expectations in dichotomous terms. He

understood a topic *his* way but needed to write *their* way so he began to submit the first

draft quickly in order to receive the detailed feedback that would elucidate the

expectations:

So, when I send it to you, you're going to tell me what you want. I do it the way

you want. Cause my point's to master…I send it to them, let them worry about it,

let them do the work for me. They tell me exactly what is required. Cause most of

the time, our understanding is not exactly what they want. This is our level of

education. This is how we understand it. But it's not exactly what they want.

This approach was specific to the competency-based format of PAIR in which students

submit projects as many times as needed until it is deemed mastered by a grader. Each

submission is returned with feedback, and subsequent revisions are reviewed by the same

grader. When Tommy decided that his way of doing a project would never be mastered on his first try, no matter the effort he put in, he adapted by using this strategy to accelerate his progress. This approach to PAIR was largely successful in accelerating Tommy's progress, and he was the first student to complete the associate degree.

"Technology Helps a Lot."

Tommy's laptop helped him overcome several of the weaknesses that he perceived in himself as a student. For one, Tommy did not like to read. He provided two reasons for this. First, when reading, he felt obligated to look up new words whereas with videos he felt like he could rely more on context clues. Second, when reading texts he would often unintentionally skip lines. Using his computer to read offered a solution to both of these issues. Whenever possible Tommy used his computer to transform the text into audio: "Simple things, I read it but like three, four pages, I just put it on read and then like, I put my headset and I listen." When he was reading on his computer, his mouse provided a tool to keep him reading the right line of text: "I use the mouse, that's what I do. I mean when I start the line, I put the mouse on that part. So, it give me direction."

One main obstacle for Tommy as a reader was vocabulary: "I get lost. I stare away about meaning of the word because my level of English, I lose that." Language was a central feature of how Tommy saw himself as a reader. Reading in English was a new experience, unique from his experiences reading in Arabic. Although he said that he could often understand a sentence without knowing every word, he later explained that he did not like reading because he felt obligated to translate unknown words: "When you

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read, when you get something you know you have to stop. I have to stop to translate it."
He did not feel the same compulsion when watching videos.

The computer also helped Tommy transfer the vocabulary that he learned aurally to writing. Tommy learned most new words by listening to videos, which meant that he had a large vocabulary for speaking but struggled to write. Tommy credited documentaries with helping him develop an academic vocabulary that he could then use to talk about a variety of topics. To translate what he was learning through listening, he relied on his computer to help put the new words in writing. Spellcheck changed Tommy's approach to spelling:

> Misspelling's not a challenge like before, because you know that's going to tell this is a problem. But I still, it's going to give you three or four options, you have to translate it. Get to the dictionary to see which one.

Spellcheck could provide him with options for what he was trying to say, but because English words are often spelled similarly, and because different sounds are represented by the same letter, it only facilitated part of the process of translating words he learned aurally to words that he could write.

"I Like the Videos."

For Tommy, reading was one method of gathering information but not his favorite; instead, he preferred to watch videos. He appreciated the additional context clues offered by videos, and he also explained that videos better summarized important information: "When you read or whatever, 10 pages. But when you go to video, you go 15 minutes, 10 minutes max. It's just much faster. They give you the juice." He believed

that videos were a more efficient way to learn new information because he spent less time seeking out what was important.

When our discussion turned to reading, he would often redefine reading into practices that better fit with the skills he identified as his strengths. He explained, "I'm more like visual or listening learner than writing and reading." Luckily, the format of the program supported Tommy's preference for videos by providing resources in a variety of formats. When Tommy was given a reading assignment, he changed how he read by using his computer to transform text to audio. He was not confident with reading, so he listened.

"I Go to My Savior, My Son."

Tommy preferred the support of his family over the use of online tutoring that was available to students. Counter to his goal of finishing quickly, Tommy did not just want his work corrected; he wanted the opportunity to ask why certain changes were made.

> We have a free 24/7 tutoring. But I never used it. I always, cause I, my wife, I can ask her why this. And not just send it to someone and fix it for me and send it back. So it makes big difference for me and help me a lot.

His son was his favorite source of help for reviewing his work. This was in part because the support from his son also served as a learning opportunity:

> He's a smart kid. He's 16 but he's so smart. And, I have him read, unless he's making fun of me. Bad grammar, bad grammar, he does it all the time (laughs) I tell him, ok don't fix anything. When he comes, 'oh see daddy, look at this.' I say,

'no, no, don't fix it, just tell me. If you fix it, I'm going to repeat it again and

again.'

When he needed help with a project, he went first to his family, particularly to check

spelling and grammar. For other types of support, he relied on the academic coaches.

"We Have the Help Here Actually."

Tommy occasionally used the formal supports provided by the program,

specifically the academic coaches. When talking about the program, Tommy shared, "We

have everything to succeed. Anas is one of them." At the beginning of the program,

Tommy used the academic coaching to help him understand the expectations on different

projects: "You meet with Anas, or you meet with someone else to explain to you. I

stopped doing that. I don't need to ask anyone." As he progressed through the program,

Tommy's use of academic coaching changed. Instead of asking for help at the beginning,

Tommy relied on academic coaches most at the end of a project:

> I always want to be the best. Number one, so even something I know is right, I
>
> don't need help on it, I go ask for it. Just, it's something in me, I have to be the
>
> best, I don't know why and sometimes it doesn't make sense.

Towards the end of the associate degree portion of the program, Tommy felt confident in

his ability to navigate the program expectations and sought help from the academic

coaches to double-check his work.

"It's Too Much Help."

Although Tommy used his family and the coaches for support, he also felt that

asking for help impeded his ability to improve in other ways. For example, being the best

student in terms of speed meant not working toward being the best writer. Tommy

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explained that, although he often asked for help from coaches and family members, he also felt that, "It's too much help. I've been dependent on it. So, that's why slowing my ability for writing."

This tension was most pronounced around language. He felt like asking for others to proofread his work held him back from improving his writing. Tommy struggled with many aspects of writing in the program from spelling, to grammar, to knowing how to say the right things in the right way. More so than with reading, Tommy talked about language as an obstacle to his writing. Writing in English meant working on grammar, learning new words and how to spell them, and learning to leverage the skills he had. For Tommy, language and writing were inextricably linked. Becoming a better writer meant becoming more proficient with English: "I'm working on it and I'm doing much better. And I'm even thinking go take another ESL class only for the writing." Although Tommy described certain types of support as a hindrance, he also discussed the value in having help with deciphering assignment expectations.

"I Was Helping Them a Lot."

Tommy not only drew on his social networks for support but was also aware of his role within the social networks of his classmates. Even though he had recently finished the associate program and was transitioning to the bachelor's program, Tommy came to every group study session during the two weeks of the study. He liked to help other students because he was often further along in the program. In the observed meetings, he would sit back in a relaxed position and watch YouTube videos until someone asked him a question. He became somewhat of a passive academic coach, bridging the gap between coaches and peers:

I mean I helped a lot. I feel like I'm always faster than them, so when they get

their project, I already got it. And I got it back two, three times, so I understand

what is the problem, or what happened, what they want.

He mainly offered support in the form of interpreting expectations. He used the feedback

that he had experienced to help students figure out what graders were looking for on

specific projects.

Experiencing Forced Migration

At the time of the study, Tommy had lived in the U.S. for over a decade. He had

sought and received citizenship, served in the U.S. military, and established a business

and a family. Although it was in his somewhat-distant past, his experience of forced

migration remained a resource that Tommy drew on to define himself. His story was

what made him unique and what made him strong.

"I Have a Lot of Experience in Life."

Tommy framed his story as an asset in his education. He found strength in his

own experiences:

Everything I put in there, everything if you review my work, is my own

experience. I don't have to make it up. And stories, any situation, even when like

you're in a tough situation, you have to think fast or a lot of stuff, it's all, all I

have is my own experience.

Tommy perceived his experiences to be an asset that helped him both within and outside

of PAIR. Having a great deal of life experience gave Tommy a large pool to draw from

for examples and illustrations in his writing and also in interviews:

When I write oh, I don't made up stories, I have my own experience. Like let's

say I go to a job interview. Whatever they want, I don't have to make up one. You

know what I mean, to make up stories, you have to think, and you need to put

together, oh it's got to make sense.

Having a plethora of stories to draw on made Tommy feel confident. His stories set him

apart from other candidates.

He repeatedly referred to the story of leaving Iraq and getting by with very little

money. His story of fleeing and resettling was reminiscent of the quintessential American

bootstrap tale:

Whoever wants to run for senate they come stop in my place to talk to me. So, I

told them, I came to this country with $20 in my pocket. Now I'm rich, even

when, my first stop was Chicago airport—$20 in my pocket. Pizza and price of

Coke it's $5. It's advertised this and this $5. I just point to it, I want this. Ok. So I

start from scratch.

Tommy's story of forced migration had all the elements of the American dream. He spent

the last of his money when he arrived and went on to build a successful life. Here he also

illustrated how his story allotted him certain capital within the community, as it was

sought after by those looking for a position of leadership.

Tommy's story did not end after buying pizza and a Coke. He continued to

struggle to build a life and provide for himself. This, too, was a source of strength:

I have a lot of experience in life and I told you that I came to this country, not, not

even that I don't speak English. I arrived to [the] University. I took a ESL class,

the class I study, I clean at night, cause I was housekeeper. That make me proud,

that work. I don't look at it as a weakness, I say ok this is kind of strange, I go to

the class in the morning, I clean at night. I'm proud of that. People, they

sometimes shame you, they say you work housekeeping or whatever, that doesn't

make anything. Your situation bring you that job.

Here Tommy acknowledged a sense of shame that was imposed by others. He left a

college education behind when he fled and found himself credential-less and cleaning

classrooms. It is possible that he felt his social status changing due to resettlement, but

Tommy also saw his situation as temporary and less a representation of himself than his

experience. His housekeeping job was a step that gave him access to English courses that

were essential for future education and employment. Furthermore, as a student, he

believed that it was his experiences that set him apart from his classmates and made him

a better student: "My point, everything there's my experience. But make easier for me to

finish faster than anybody else." Tommy saw his experience as providing valuable

stories, but his literacy journey drew on many of his experiences both linguistically and

professionally.

"I Was an Interpreter for the Military."

Tommy felt like his past college experience in Iraq was no longer an asset. Too

much time had passed, and it was from a system that was too different. After moving

once again in the U.S., Tommy started over with English courses. He felt successful

there, but he did not finish the course sequence. Instead, Tommy joined the U.S. military

which took him back to Iraq:

I went to take ESL class in [the University]. I thought it was from level 1 to 6, I

finished level 5 and I was the, the first in the class, the best in the class. Yea,

everybody else like, they all like already graduate college from where they came

from or China or other countries, so they have the academic level from where

they came from. So, after that I joined the military, I worked as interpreter. I

practiced like verbal translation in Iraq, I stationed three years in Iraq.

In the military, he would develop pertinent academic skills. Working as a translator

helped Tommy develop metacognitive awareness of the differences between English and

Arabic. He often made comparisons between Arabic and English as a way to understand

where he was struggling with writing:

That's my challenge with spelling. Arabic, either you know how to write it or not.

Not like English, you maybe finish college you have a problem with spelling. But

writing, reading Arabic when you're an elementary student in school, when you

graduate, you're excellent in this. You cannot be like half and half or you're

missing something. Because it's a very specific when you write the word, the

sound is different so not like English. Same words, one letter makes big

difference. That's what's confusing here.

Tommy made comparisons between the two languages to understand the differences

between them. This helped him identify when he needed to adopt strategies, like using

the dictionary and/or thesaurus and asking his son to help with writing.

The time that Tommy spent in the military was also when he developed his

affinity for finding important information and summarizing "the juice" of it. In addition

to working as an interpreter, he also worked as an interrogator. Interrogation gave

Tommy a lot of practice with listening for key information and doing so quickly:

I got a lot of practicing with that. Interrogate someone, you don't talk, you just

listen, and you keep asking same question, maybe make a mistake check the

statement. So, it was good practice, to remember what they say, what they going

to say, if you ask them again how going to say it. Even the tone, how they say it.

So I have this background.

He likened this job to watching videos. He explained that his instinct for what was

important in a video was developed from interrogating people: "So when I watch video,

come to my mind oh this, it has to be written, this it needs to be there, this should be

included." Joining the military may not have been on Tommy's original intended path in

the U.S., but the experience did give him practice with a set of skills that he could

leverage as a student.

Summary

In navigating the reading expectations of the program, Tommy renegotiated the

expectations that he perceived. When asked to read, he chose to listen. Tommy used

online resources to find multimodal ways to learn information. Instead of redefining

himself as a student within the program, Tommy redefined the rules in ways that better

portrayed his strengths. Tommy pushed back on traditional notions of literacy, expanding

what counted to include more than reading and writing. In addition, Tommy was able to

use what he knew about expectations from other contexts to identify what he was being

asked to do.

Yannick

Yannick came to the U.S. directly from his home country of Burkina Faso where

he had worked as a physical education teacher. He had been orphaned as a young boy and

spent his adolescence working for his older sister. Moving in with his sister meant taking on household duties that interfered with his schooling: "I was really working with my sister and like, watering the flowers and do a lot of stuff at home. Yea and then, I can see her kid going to school every day. Me, I can't go." As a result of this move, Yannick dropped out of high school and eventually continued his education in a night school: "The high school I start doing, go to school, over there we call 'cours du soir' this one is the school of night. Yes. I start over there with my high school." He went on to graduate and entered the university where he quickly found a position as a physical education teacher: "After my high school, I went to university but this was the first year, I did the first year over there and I got the, my first job when I was 22."

Even before losing his parents, Yannick's education was defined by poverty. As a child, Yannick's mother could only afford to send one of her two youngest children to school:

> We were two with my mom and I remember one year it was really difficult for my mom to decide who's going to go to school because it's money. Who's going to stay home? And I was with my brother. And she sent my brother to Arabic school and me, she sent me to French school.

As a result, Yannick learned to read and write like his older siblings but when talking about his brother, Yannick explained, "Today he doesn't speak French, even Arabic too. Just our language but you know, I do my, I do what I can with him. I send him money, yea to pay, yea to help him everything he wants." His mother could not afford to send all of her children to primary school. As a result, Yannick felt a continued responsibility for the brother who stayed home so that he could go to school. Yannick's mother passed

away when he was 15, causing a disruption in his secondary schooling. When he was offered a job, Yannick quit his university studies. After earning some money, Yannick returned to the university to complete his degree.

When he came to the U.S., Yannick was eager to continue his career as a physical education teacher:

> When I came here for the first time, for me, it's going to be easy for me, for all the degree that I got in my country. For me, it's going to be easy, for me to get a job here and to continue my field. But I was wrong. I was wrong.

He talked to the principal of a local school who told Yannick that he was not sure what credentials would transfer to the U.S. school system:

> It's a different system so maybe I have to go to school and they can check my transcript. Ok, you do this, you do this, you do this, oh, you don't do this one anymore, so you do new one. So, I understood like that and then ok.

Yannick quickly discovered that starting over in the U.S. was going to mean starting over at a university.

PAIR is a program that enrolls students in a separate online college program while simultaneously providing academic support. Students can enroll in the online program without enrolling through PAIR, which was how Yannick originally returned to college to recuperate his professional credentials. Not far into the program, Yannick found his education once again disrupted by financial barriers:

> After my second semester, and then [the university] stopped me because I have a balance, I have to pay like 3,000. I did not understand that. It was a little bit hard for me because, before to apply they say ok you don't have to pay anything. Yes.

Everything, what you can do is to finish your program. And I was going through

and they stop me. I was little bit sad but, what I can do?

After a battle with the university over what he was required to pay, Yannick dropped out

of the program and took on two jobs to pay off his debt. Paying down the debt was soon

complicated by his desire to buy a house. One year later, Yannick achieved the goal of

buying a house, but his goal of getting an American college degree was still buried in

debt: "I got the house. Yes. And I was still paying the school." When his school debt was

finally paid off, Yannick was understandably hesitant about enrolling in another program,

particularly PAIR, which simply built on the program that had failed him before. Yannick

carried this lack of trust into PAIR with him, and it drove him to finish as quickly as

possible:

I explain to them, they say ok, this is a different program, it's supported by PAIR,

you're not going to pay something. I say ok. And we start applying with Anas.

When we were halfway, I stop him, 'are you sure I'm not going to pay for

something? Because if they send me again, I'm not going to pay.' And he said

'no, not with PAIR, no you're not going to pay something.' And I apply and I was

quick in the program because I want to finish before they can send me a letter

again.

Yannick had already worked on some of the competencies, so he was able to draw on his

past experiences with the online program and he was also able to see his own growth as a

student. Yannick felt like he had improved his English after years of working in the U.S.,

but he was also able to see the content from a new perspective: "When I came back, I, it's

like I got an open mind on a lot of things and I understand, like talking more English than before." Both his open mind and improved English gave Yannick confidence.

Even though Yannick's career had been disrupted by the move, he was finding new paths to create by earning a new college degree. Shortly after the study was completed, Yannick received a notice that his degree from Burkina Faso was equivalent to a bachelor's in physical education in the U.S. After several years of living and working in professional limbo, Yannick was on the cusp of holding two college degrees in his new home country.

Navigating Expectations

According to Yannick, studying at PAIR was like a puzzle because one needs to have the right words and needs to put them all in the right places:

> You know, puzzle like when you cut an image and a lot of pieces and you have to, after that you have to put them together to make the same image. Make sure you don't put the other, even if you put the other one somewhere, it doesn't fit. You have to move to get the right one. Yes. It's like the presentation.

Reading is finding the right pieces and writing, or making presentations, is putting the pieces together to make the right image. This built on Yannick's larger metaphor of the program as being like a game: "It's like a game you're playing and you're looking to understand something like how it's, and when you're going right, you're happy." In this game, Yannick needed to decipher what the graders were looking for and to create that image for them. When he mastered projects, he was winning and when he received a "not yet," he was stuck on the level. Indeed, when he talked about difficulties in the program, they were usually associated with mastering a project: "It's really, was, really tough for

me this project. Yes, because, I don't really know how many times I got 'not yet'." For Yannick, challenging projects were those that received multiple "not yets." To win this game, Yannick drew on a variety of strategies, both to learn the content and to play the game.

"I Go on YouTube."

One of Yannick's best resources was the internet, specifically YouTube, where he could learn new content using videos. YouTube videos provided the same information as articles but videos provided that content quicker than reading:

> When I look at video, yea, I help, helpful, it's more fast than when I read. Maybe I can, sometimes, you give me a text, one guide to do something, and, the video is give the same guide, in the video, I'm going to understand more than the writing, yes. I'm going to understand more than the writing.

He would occasionally forgo reading altogether and immediately consult YouTube: "I don't have to read and, even reading, it's, it can clear the video when you explain something. Yes. More explanation about how you talk to the people, the introduction of something." Yannick also preferred videos when he was learning a new skill on the computer because following a video was easier and quicker than reading instructions. For example, when learning how to make a PowerPoint presentation, Yannick felt like reading required too much back and forth between task and text, whereas the video could show and explain the steps simultaneously:

> It's difficult for me to go online, and come back again, open another page, go over there, if I don't understand I go back over there again, it's take me long time. And

when I have a video in front of me, I see what they're doing, where they go first,

second, third.

Videos also felt more accessible, perhaps because they provided multiple inputs,

including sound, text, and images.

YouTube also provided access to additional videos when he needed more

information: "Because they have a lot of videos and you can get more information. Yes,

and then it can give you a lot of ideas and how to explain, how to explain inflation or

something else." Access to additional videos provided more information as well as a

means of comparing information across sources: "What I used to compare them is just,

these from this video and the other one too." Yannick compared several YouTube videos

to ensure that he was getting reliable information.

Another reason that he preferred YouTube was that it was accessible at all hours:

"I know one day I was stuck, like at midnight, I don't know how to do it. I went on

YouTube, how to do a presentation on PowerPoint. And it shows me everything and ok,

I'm going to try it." YouTube was a resource that Yannick could fit into his schedule. He

often studied late at night or in small chunks of time. When he was at home, he explained

that he could rarely study for more than a few minutes: "Sometimes I just, I can get like

15 minutes, I'm reading something." YouTube provided a quicker summary of

information that was also easy to understand. Videos were resources that he could fit into

15 minutes at any time of day.

"Everything Around Can Help You."

The readings provided in the program were often very specific. For example, if a

book was assigned, the students were given specific pages to read: "If they give me one

book and, in the book, usually they give the number of page where you have to go."

When assigned a specific piece of a text, Yannick would read around the text for any

additional information: "You can focus just on one page or one paragraph to understand

something, but everything around can help you." By reading around the assigned portion,

Yannick could get additional context clues to understand the text: "Before, to get on this

page, the page before may make an introduction of the next page." He read around the

assigned books more broadly as well. Rather than focusing on the page or paragraphs

around the portion assigned, he would also refer to the book's introduction: "I can read

the page for, and even the introduction of the book, yes, it can explain you how the book

will be, different steps of the book everything." Reading around a text was a strategy to

get more background information on the text that was assigned.

Yannick also used the read-around strategy to find additional relevant

information: "When I read the book, it can be two pages, and, when I read and I see it's a

lot of things I have to understand, I just go ahead to see if it can help me to more explain

my idea." By reading around, Yannick could look for more information that might help

him with the projects. This was true for reading websites as well as books. When reading

online, Yannick used hyperlinks to look for additional information: "Online stuff, I read,

I see it's interesting or if someone put a link on, online, I just click on it to see what's it's

talking about." Yannick looked around a text to gather additional information that he

could use in projects but that might also be helpful in understanding the assigned content.

The program required a lot of reading. Yannick felt that reading in the program

was important, not just for passing, but that reading was a source of power: "In this

program, reading is, it's somethings can train you, and give you more power, because if

you don't read, you're not going to get some idea about something." He felt like he was reading a lot of resources in the program but also saving a lot of the readings he was given: "Sometimes I download them and, to put in my computer because I need in the future maybe, or everyday life." He saw value in the readings related to the assignments but also as resources for his future. Reading-around was also a strategy that Yannick could use to learn more about the topics that he might need in the future.

"I Have My Own Experience to Give."

Yannick's favorite projects were those that asked him to draw on his personal experiences: "The easiest one is when you, the, some part when they ask me to give my opinion on something. To give my experience." He could draw on his past experiences for a variety of projects, not just those that specifically asked for them. Certain projects presented the opportunity to compare his own experiences to the provided resources:

> Sometimes the examples that I got, I don't take the example in the book, I don't take the example online. I just take the example from my experience. From how I was dealing with the kids. Yes, how I was teaching the kids, how they understand something when I explain to them.

Yannick's past experiences provided him with additional resources that he could pair with those provided in the program.

He made connections to his own experience to understand the content. One example that he provided was learning about inflation:

> On inflation, when I went on there and I felt oh, ok, I know now what that means, inflation. And when I went back to my country with my personal experience, right now I have my brother who's taking care of my stuff over there. I send him some

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money to survive just to pay somethings and then he studies too. So, before I

came here, I have the price of rice was, I know the price at this time and now I

have to send money for my brother to pay something, too, like a bag of rice and

sometimes he give it to the price of different things he wants to buy, and when I

see the price, yikes, cause I, high it's not like before.

His experiences providing financial assistance for his brother gave Yannick an

experience through which he could understand a complex economic phenomenon.

However, Yannick also felt there was a limit to the value of his experiences.

"My Way is a Little Bit Wrong."

One obstacle for Yannick at PAIR was a mismatch between the way he did things

and the way he was expected to do things. He increasingly felt like his way of doing

things was not the path to mastering projects: "What I think is right for me, the professor

say 'no, no, no, you have to do this one again, you have to do this one again, no not right.

This is no good.'" This meant that in order to master projects, Yannick needed to think

like a grader. He used the feedback on projects to decipher what was expected: "If they

said, if I do the first one, like I do my way, the way I understand. And they send me

another explanation." The feedback that Yannick received on his projects taught him

other ways of doing a project. Feedback from graders provided new perspectives on how

to do the tasks: "It explain me how, it shows another way, another way to get there."

Mastering the projects meant putting the pieces together in just the right way. He could

make an image with the pieces, but his image was not always the correct one. Using the

feedback loop in the program, Yannick learned new ways to put the pieces together.

One central belief guided this approach: "I can say it's a lot of ways to understand something." Because he believed that there were different ways of understanding, he simply needed to find the way that was right for the graders. He felt like he had made progress in seeing things from new perspectives. His experience in the online program, both before and after joining PAIR, gave him a comparison. He saw that he was reading and understanding differently his second time in the online program: "So when I went back on [the online program], I got different idea on it because my English changed a little bit because of how I understand today and how I was reading before." In comparing his first and current experiences with the online portion of the program, Yannick saw how his English changed as well as the changes in the way he understood the projects and the ways that he was reading for them.

"I'm Like Both, I'm Kid, I'm Teacher, I'm Student."

A valuable source of knowledge for Yannick was his perspective as a teacher. He drew on his experiences as a teacher to strategically navigate his schoolwork: "I was teacher and I know what I ask to the kids, to the students, to respond me, to respond my question." Working as a teacher provided Yannick insight into why questions are asked by teachers. He used his role as a teacher to turn a project prompts into expectations:

> When the professor ask me, I try to just to see what, what is better. For me or for him to give me, to master this one. Because I know he's teacher, I was teacher too. So everybody know what's he going to, you're going to ask me something and I have to give him the right question, I have to give him a lot of ideas, I have to give him a lot of solutions, and to explain him I understand very well this question.

Thinking like a teacher helped Yannick become a more strategic learner. Yannick felt like his time as a teacher allowed him to better anticipate what was expected of him.

He thought like a teacher to determine what would be important on a given project. This guided his reading. Rather than reading everything, he used the questions to guide the readings that he chose: "I don't read all them because I think they give us a lot of resources, and, we have some important resources too, like specifically in the, depend what they ask for me to answer." Yannick used the project prompts to determine additional expectations above and beyond what he was directly asked to do: "Then it's like what I did here, when I see the question I say 'ok, I'm going to go on what they ask me for presentation, I'm going to use some question over there and it's going to help me to do more here.'" By thinking like a teacher, Yannick made connections between different projects and was able to leverage those connections to master future projects.

"I Like to Share My Problems."

Rather than be stuck on a project, Yannick preferred to share his problems. He explained that when he was stuck on a project, he would ask everyone that he could: "I have a lot of resources to go yea, I'm not quiet over there. If I don't know something, I'm going to ask you." He was reluctant to go directly to Anas, the academic coach, because he knew how busy the coaches were: "Sometimes I call him, but you know he has a lot of students." He also had friends both in the community and back in Burkina Faso who he could ask for assistance with particular subjects, including math: "I have one friend. He's really good in maths and if I got stuck, I just send it to him, he text me and we talk on phone." Another friend helped Yannick learn new skills on the computer:

Him is like a brother for me because he was working in my country before

government television. He was working over there. So like, a camera man, yes

and he know how to do it. Yes. He explain me, ok, oh that's easy one. Yea, and

then I did it!

Yannick's social network gave him access to assistance in a variety of subjects, including

math, computers, and writing.

As he navigated the program, Yannick turned to several people from different

social circles. He talked with friends from Burkina Faso, friends at his current job, his

wife, classmates, and the academic coaches. As a child, he had received little support

from his family which continued into adulthood. His mother helped with his education

but was not literate in French and English, which limited her ability to help him. Aside

from taking him in, Yannick explained that his sister and older brother did not support his

education. Since moving to the U.S., Yannick had developed new social networks which

included the classmates and academic coaches at PAIR. When talking about Anas, the

head academic coach, Yannick explained, "Anas, I call him my brother. But when I see,

it's like my family, like my family when I see them, it's like that." These relationships

were valuable sources of knowledge that Yannick turned to when he needed further

explanations on a project, needed to discuss a topic, or when he felt stuck.

"They Explain to Me."

Yannick was also preemptive in turning to others for support. He would ask

around for additional explanations on projects to gather information on how to best

approach the task. He drew on the experiences of his classmates with new projects:

"Before, I got one project, I asked them, do you know the project, how is it? Is it hard, or

good?" This allowed him to gather navigational knowledge on how to approach the task. His classmates had information that was not provided in the directions such as what hidden expectations they discovered.

Similarly, as a college student in Burkina Faso, Yannick used the professors as a resource to learn more about the expectations of an assignment:

> Before you can go to see someone, see like the professor or the teacher, to ask him about something. About, you have like one project or teamwork or something like that and you go to see the professor or teacher to maybe explain more or give you information about some project.

Likewise, when he felt uncertain about a new project in PAIR, Yannick turned to Anas to fill in the details: "Oh my God, you can ask Anas. Yes. I say how you do this one? I don't know." As an academic coach, Anas was able to provide additional information about projects to help Yannick understand how to meet the expectations. When Yannick sought help from the academic coaches it was to understand the projects better and occasionally to help fill in gaps in understanding: "And all this refreshes everything. Yes. And she showed me how to do it. And then, just all of them, I show her again. And it was right. When I send back my third time (snaps) mastered." By gathering additional information on projects, Yannick could more strategically navigate the expectations. His classmates and the academic coaches were able to provide advice on mastering projects.

"You're Just Talking, and After That I Get What I Want."

Yannick used his social network as a sounding board. By engaging in discussion, he could practice English, hear new perspectives, and work out his own thoughts. For example, Yannick engaged his boss in discussion to study for the citizenship exam:

Even at work too, my boss, my boss is like right now I'm studying for my

citizenship and there's some questions I don't understand. When my boss come,

he likes to come and sit down with me, we talk and I ask him, what you think

about this one? How you think about bearing arms. And we talk, we talk, we talk

and, you know it's good and it's helped me a lot to understand more English.

Because, I don't think, so you can speak English, sometimes you speak your

English, it's some words I don't understand. And, I want to understand.

In PAIR, engaging others in discussion was a strategy for Yannick to work through

projects that he was struggling with: "We're talking about some subject; it's a little bit

challenge today and everybody hears his point, and everybody thinks he's right. You

know, it's good, it's nice." Discussion provided Yannick with new perspectives to

understand a topic. With his wife, he liked to engage in debate:

Even at home sometimes when I'm with my wife, and if it's like, a challenge

subject, and I asked her what do you think about GMO? What do you think about

this one? Is it good? When she says good and I tell her it's a bad thing and we

start talking like that.

Debating with his wife helped him practice arguments for his projects and work out his

own position. Yannick's social networks provided him with various perspectives that he

could use to see topics from a new vantage point, which helped him keep the open mind

that he felt was valuable in mastering projects at PAIR.

Experiencing Forced Migration

The experience of forced migration impacted Yannick's plans. The move to the

U.S. disrupted his professional trajectory and forced Yannick to learn a new language and

culture to build a life for his children. He sought a position as a teacher in the local school district but learned that his credentials did not directly transfer. He submitted his transcripts to the State Board of Education to see which credits would transfer. In the meantime, he returned to school to earn a new college degree. PAIR did not offer the degree that Yannick needed to continue teaching, so he was actively reassessing his goals to fit the new trajectory that he was carving out. He had developed an expertise in exercise sciences that he wanted to leverage in forming a new career:

> First, I was physical education and I was a coach, I'm international coach. I'm a personal trainer and I know a lot of stuff in this, in sports and I just want to stay in sports and working with material and logistics in sport. Yes. That's my plan right now.

Yannick decided that he wanted to stay in the field of athletics, so he enrolled in PAIR as a general studies major. As he transitioned into the bachelor's program, general studies was not an option with the degrees offered at PAIR, nor was athletics. There was not a direct connection to his desired field, so he was considering business as a potential path that might lead him close to athletics: "I'm studying logistics and operations. Yes. So, it's helped me a little bit to know a little bit in sport because I want to go just directly into sport, but it's not practice but I just, in the office about material everything like that." For example, he saw himself managing a school athletics department.

This move interrupted his career and also required learning a new language and learning about a new culture. He felt like his past experiences, the positive and the negative, informed how he approached challenges both inside and outside of his studies.

"Confront Culture."

Yannick saw culture as an important component to understanding his experience at PAIR. Yannick told me that he believed that culture informs how people work and study so learning the way things are done in the U.S. was important to understanding how to be a successful student: "If you go to another country, you see the people working on their head, you're going to work on your head too. This is the culture." Adapting to the new culture was important for him but also for his children:

> I leave my country. I left my country. I leave everything over there like my culture, but I still respect my culture. But this is another culture and my kids born here, they have to understand something, I'm not going to tell them hey, in my country we do this. We don't have to this here.

This transition between cultures gave Yannick multiple perspectives to understand his schoolwork: "I can say it's a lot of ways to understand something. It's not like before. Before, it's more like the traditional understand ways." The longer he lived in the U.S., the more he could see different ways of understanding which in turn allowed him to view projects from multiple perspectives.

"It Helped Me to Know How to Work Hard."

Yannick's childhood was marked with loss and poverty. After losing his father at age seven and his mother at age 15, Yannick moved in with his sister where he was more of a worker than a son. He looked back on this experience as a strength because it taught him hard work:

> I have to say that it's like a good education for me because it helped me to know how to work hard, even, I was like a slave with her, but it's ok. It's, it put me like,

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good guys to work, even here when I'm working it's, this one, I can say, she teach me really well about how to work hard.

He felt as if this experience shaped him as an adult: "I was doing that, doing like 10 years with her and it's like, they say in French, it goes in my body and it's like now my daily work when you give me something to do, it's a small thing." Having a hard childhood, or adolescence, prepared Yannick for the experience of leaving his country and starting over. In PAIR, he did not feel daunted by challenging projects, which he credited to his sister:

> I know, today when I sit down and I think about all this thing, I can say it's a good education. Yes. Because, it's, this has allowed me to face the hard things. Even I'm working in the program. When the subject is really hard, I'm not scared about it. Because I know some people, they did it.

Working at his sister's house and finding a way to continue his education prepared Yannick to balance work and college in PAIR. This also helped him to persist despite running into obstacles in pursuing an American college degree.

"I Didn't Plan to Come Here When I Was Working Over There."

As he talked about his past education, Yannick often referred to his past plans and how they did not align with where he found himself in the present. He felt unprepared for his life in the U.S. because it had not been in his plans. This was most pronounced in the effort he put into English class in secondary school: "I did not like much English, you understand me, I didn't plan to come here and, I can't, I can't imagine that one day I will be here." When he looked back, he saw moments where he could have better prepared himself for his life in the U.S.

Even though he felt like he had neglected his first opportunity to learn English, he still felt like his past had helped him be successful in the U.S.: "I think it pay, everything I was doing right, it pay today that's why maybe it's what's helped me to be here today. Yea, if I didn't do it maybe I'm not going to graduate, maybe somewhere still." In Burkina Faso, teachers were assigned to posts at the national level. This meant that they could be sent anywhere in the country and reassigned as needed. Therefore, teachers moved a lot and without a strong say in where they went:

> When I got my first job in physical education, the government send you to the city. And the city, if they have enough teachers over there, then they send you to the village. You get in the village, you're going to see a lot of people, and they don't speak really Eng- or French. You have to understand them in their language. And to give them your message.

As a result, his position as a teacher in Burkina Faso provided experiences moving to new regions and living in places where he did not know the local language. He learned how to communicate in these new places and build communities; both helped him to rebuild a life after leaving Burkina Faso.

Summary

For Yannick, rebuilding trust in the U.S. higher education system was essential. Past postsecondary experiences led Yannick to accelerate through the PAIR in order to finish before he might receive another unforeseen bill. Although his college degree from Burkina Faso did not directly transfer to credentials in the U.S., the strategies that he developed as a college student did transfer. He used YouTube to learn the material in a more condensed form and the internet more broadly provided links to additional

resources when he wanted to compare sources or gather more information. By reading directions as a teacher, he was able to anticipate what was required on an assignment. He used feedback, classmates, and coaches to learn new ways to complete projects.

Cross-Case Analysis

After completing the individual participant analyses, I looked across all six participants in a cross-case analysis. I compiled the representative quotations derived within the individual cases and used a constant comparative method to group these quotations into themes. For example, the thematic quotations "I want to go fast" from Dan and "I just go so fast" from Fleur were grouped into Going Fast. I then returned to all the individual cases to find other instances of this theme. I then aggregated the findings under the two main research questions. As I began to develop themes, I referred back to my research questions and grouped the emerging themes within the salient research question.

Overall, eight themes arose in the cross-case analysis. I categorized these eight themes by the two main research questions. The first four themes offer a response to the first research question: How do students from refugee backgrounds navigate the literacy practices of an American competency-based connected learning college program? Four themes arose addressing this question: Playing the game, alternatives to reading, advanced reading strategies, and social networks. The final four themes offer a response to the second research question: How does the experience of forced migration inform the language and literacy practices that students use in the program? Four themes arose addressing this second question: Going fast, our way versus their way, disrupted plans and dreams, and shifting languages.

In addressing the two sub-questions, I chose not to pull out linguistic resources as a separate theme because language was deeply integrated across the themes presented below. Drawing a clear border between language and literacy resources proved not only impossible but also betrayed my theoretical framework in which I position languages as fluid (Garcia & Leiva, 2014). Rather than position language as a specific resource in the program, participants discussed languages more in the context of migration. Indeed, the theme of language was much more prominent in how students made sense of their educational experience after forced migration. Therefore, I address language more directly in response to the second research question below.

Within each theme, I elaborate on the similarities and differences in how the themes manifested across cases. In this section, I focus on the commonalities that appeared overall, but each case was unique. Surrounding this emphasis on parallels, each participant came to the program and the study with unique experiences, and my goal is not to imply that these cases are universally similar. To address the research questions, I chose to focus on themes common across the experiences that each participant shared. As I highlight the themes below, I have elaborated on the similarities but also the occasional divergences that arose.

Research Question One: How do students from refugee backgrounds navigate the literacy practices of an American competency-based connected learning college program?

In response to the first research question, I generated four themes: Playing the game, alternatives to reading, advanced literacy strategies, and social networks. The participants drew on a range of strategies to first decipher expectations and then to meet

them. Playing the game and social networks were most commonly linked to expectations. Participants used alternatives to reading and advanced literacy strategies to make the texts provided within the program more accessible.

Playing the Game

All six participants referred to the notion of playing a game in relation to navigating the academic literacy expectations of the program. Because the expectations often felt vague and seemed to change with each project, participants adopted an array of strategies that helped them game the system. They used the program structure to decipher the rules of the game and thereby win it. For instance, Bahi and Yannick both used the term "game" in reference to completing projects. Yannick described the program as, "It's like a game you're playing and you're looking to understand something like how it's, and when you're going right, you're happy." Likewise, to describe the program, Bahi said, "Studying in the program is like, it's more like a game." Although the other four participants did not use the word "game" in their descriptions, they all described a similar approach. To win, they needed to figure out what the rules were and then conform their work to those rules.

Several of the participants viewed the expectations as obscure. Each grader was different, which meant it was difficult to anticipate what would be valued. Each project presented a new and distinct challenge. The game was thus played by gaming the system such that the graders told them exactly what they wanted. For Tommy, playing the game meant not having to guess. Instead, he turned in drafts quickly and used the feedback to write a more finalized project. Mustak started each project with a guess: "The first time I guess." Both spent minimal time on the first draft and used the feedback to draft a more

thorough submission the second time. All six participants described adopting a similar approach in which they turned in a first draft quickly, without investing too much effort, then used the feedback from the professor to tailor their projects. Fleur explained that this approach meant mastering the project in two or three submissions: "The first time I just write what I think the professor is looking for and they send me feedback, I try to fix it, then like when they send it the third time. I know like what 100% I need to do." Dan expressed a similar sentiment: "Then I finalize my draft, I send it to my professors, and then he will give me comments like, 'hey you did wrong in this part, you did this and that,' then I come back to my paper and, ok, now I can understand what he wants." All of the participants described a very similar approach, allotting their time and energy for the second and third drafts. This approach suggests a willingness to play the game without fully investing in the game itself. Rather than framing their work as mastering the content, the participants talked in terms of receiving "mastered" on the project so that they could move on to the next unit. This approach was never described as learning how to write an academic paper but how to give the graders what they wanted.

Several participants explained that they did not start the program with these gaming approaches. They were developed over time. Bahi, for instance, talked in terms of "figuring out how it works" using the first few projects. Fleur also explained that at first, she did not know what she was supposed to do. For Tommy, Mustak, Dan, and Yannick, spending a lot of time on first drafts and receiving "not yets" (as opposed to "mastered") led them to feel like they could not master a project on the first submission. For example, Tommy reported feeling taken aback by his inability to master projects which led him to reassess his strategies: "Before like, when I do project, I was still

thinking like why are you coming back the first couple projects. But then I got in the mood just send it." Dan also learned that time spent on first submissions did not translate to a mastered project: "Even though you take like ten days to finish up your project and you submit it and you, like 90% of the time it will come back to you, to revise it." This influenced reading as well as writing on projects. Mustak shared that at first, he read all the resources, but he discovered that he did not need to. Instead, the feedback would guide him to the information that he needed. This was likely in response to a perception that their perspectives were devalued. In the beginning, the participants invested in the first submission, but after finding that their ways of completing the projects were always wrong, they changed their strategies.

Alternatives to Reading

The majority of the participants also pushed back on traditional notions of text-based literacy by reaching outside of the provided resources and seeking information in multiple modalities. Tommy, Bahi, and Dan all described themselves as visual learners. Tommy explained, "I'm more like visual or listening learner than writing and reading." He rejected the notion that learning occurred only around reading and writing with traditional texts. Both Bahi and Dan described themselves as visual learners because they learned information best when they could visualize it.

The other participants did not use the term "visual learner" but most expressed a preference for alternative formats. The most popular format was videos, and more specifically, YouTube. Tommy, Yannick, and Bahi all referred to YouTube as a valuable resource. These participants appreciated how videos condensed information down to what Tommy coined "the juice." Videos also provided additional inputs above and

beyond texts. The additional visual and audio elements offered by videos made them easier to understand.

In contrast, Mustak and Fleur did not reveal a strong preference for videos. Instead, both Mustak and Fleur seemed to prefer text to videos because texts provided more information. One example that Fleur offered was when a video provided by the program did not provide enough detail, she searched for additional material online. Contrary to the other participants, Fleur searched for articles and websites that would better explain a video. Mustak did not share a strong preference for one format over another but seemed to prefer text to videos. In comparing videos to websites, he said, "Now this is video, so it's not website, it's just video. So, you don't have a lot of information than website." Mustak was the most reluctant to search for outside resources. When he did use outside resources, it was to put them in comparison with the resources provided in order to clarify a topic.

Advanced Literacy Strategies

To navigate the PAIR program, participants demonstrated a strategic use of diverse skills and knowledge acquired through varied experiences and participation in other Discourses. The strategies that arose across cases were indicative of highly proficient readers. The practices that participants shared in interviews indicated deep-processing strategies, including cross-text comparisons, evaluating sources, and posing guiding questions. In addition, participants regularly inventoried their schemata on topics and identified gaps in order to build schemata that would help them understand the assigned texts. These took place alongside surface-level reading strategies such as

rereading and altering their reading rate, all of which occurred in response to shifting the language of instruction and wanting to finish quickly.

All six participants used guiding questions to gather information. For most participants, the guiding questions were those provided in the project prompt. Fleur, however, created her own questions to search for additional information online. She enjoyed thinking of research questions and researching them outside of school contexts which translated to her academic work. When she needed additional information for a project, she identified what she needed to find before going online: "I know like they both make like people pay low insurance, I was like, what's the difference, what's the point for it?" When reviewing websites, she could quickly confirm if they had the answer to these questions.

Guiding questions most often served as a means of reducing the required reading. For example, Dan started with the questions and used those to guide his reading: "I look at the questions, and then based on the questions I go, I read through the informations." Mustak shared a similar approach to reading: "I go by their what they needed and then I read only their resources. So I save my time." Tommy and Yannick also started with the questions, opting not to read through all of the resources but to figure out which ones answered the questions. Bahi expanded this strategy, using a combination of the questions in the project filtered through what he already knew. Using this strategy of finding what he did not know, Bahi focused his reading to only the most relevant: "The reason I find that way go to what I don't know, what I didn't know. So I just go to, what is that theory are looking for?" In comparison with the other participants, Bahi and Fleur used a slightly more complex strategy to guide their readings. Whereas the others used

the questions to determine what information they needed from the readings, both Fleur and Bahi included the information they already had to further narrow their research.

Another common strategy was inventorying schemata to identify gaps in understanding. Leveraging prior knowledge was more pronounced in three cases: Bahi, Dan, and Mustak. This strategy allowed them to focus their reading and to identify when additional information was needed. The participants demonstrated a nuanced awareness of how their background influenced their reading. For example, Dan often struggled when reading articles from *The New York Times*. To help him understand the articles, he researched the topic. Building foundational knowledge helped him understand articles that used "big words": "It was so difficult to understand, so I used outside resources to learn about Fed, so it gives me an idea about what *The New York Times* is talking about." Whereas Dan sought background information to understand complex texts, Mustak provided an example when cultural information was needed for projects: "I do not know who is Han." An American might catch a reference to Star Wars easily; however, Mustak needed to do more research to understand the relevance of this character.

Another strategy to develop schemata was reading around a text. Both Yannick and Fleur read around a section of relevant text to get more context. For Fleur, this strategy helped her ensure that she did not miss something important when she read quickly through a text: "I read something that like take my attention, just let me read it again very slow and read like the paragraph before, the paragraph after." Yannick's read-around strategy covered a broader text range: "Before, to get on this page, the page before may make an introduction of the next page." Although these are similar strategies,

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their goals differed. Fleur's goal was to make sure she did not miss important information, and Yannick was looking for background on or an introduction to the topic.

Cross-text comparisons were also common across cases. Mustak, Fleur, and Yannick in particular compared texts for a variety of goals. Most used this strategy to build a deeper understanding of a topic and to build insights into how people talked about a topic. Mustak, for example, compared online sources to those provided in the program. Although he was hesitant to use outside resources in his projects, he found that comparing them to the program resources helped him understand the topics better: "I look at several diets for that. What difference that?" Fleur compared texts to build her understanding of the topic: "Sometimes I use two or three websites until I get the main idea about it. Or to get the way how can I understand it?" Comparing across texts helped her find descriptions that she understood. This strategy also helped her narrow her searches: "I click on each one, and I read about each one, I didn't use this cause it didn't make any sense to me." Yannick compared videos when searching on YouTube. This strategy helped him see different ways of explaining something: "It can give you a lot of ideas and how to explain inflation or something else."

Participants indicated an awareness of different language registers. Occasionally this was presented by contrasting academic literacy with others, and it was most pronounced in talking about vocabulary. Tommy, for example, distinguished college words: "All the words not familiar to me, especially like school words, college words." Likewise, Mustak described academic words as less common than their non-academic counterparts: "Commonly and similarly same. The academic words, they're not

common." Dan saw a distinction in the words used in *The New York Times* which made it more difficult to read: "*The New York Times* always has big words and all those things."

This metacognitive awareness also arose in the way they prepared to write. Mustak, for example, researched how other people wrote different types of papers. For an application to college, he said, "I research how other people write it, their writing or when applying to school." Tommy also talked about reading resources to learn how to talk about something: "Let's say I want to write something; this I have difficulty with. Because there, at least I reviewed so many resource. I got so many extra words, so many, I know how they talk about this stuff, how they mention certain things." These examples indicate an awareness of the importance not only of what is written but also the importance of how something is written for different subjects and in different contexts.

Strategies such as rereading and altering reading rates were less common and almost always discussed as a tool to overcome the perceived language obstacles. The most common was rereading. The reading strategy that Fleur described involved reading a text three times, each with a different goal:

> The first time I read it just to have an idea. The second time I read it just to make sure I get more information. The third time I will get the whole thing they are talking about. So I need to do it three times.

Tommy described a very similar strategy that involved reading three times with a different goal for each read: "I read it first quick, just to read it. I read the second time to understand it. I read it third time to see what's most important sentence, or words they use, and how many times they repeat it." In both cases, the first reading was to get a general sense of the text. The second reading targeted comprehension. And the third

reading focused on how the topic was being discussed or presented. Fleur explained that this strategy was necessary because she was not reading in her first language. In Arabic, she would have been able to assess the importance of the text and comprehend it while simultaneously building a metacognitive awareness of the writing conventions promoted in the text. The strategy of reading three times seems contradictory to the goal of going fast, and yet, Fleur described it as necessary to comprehend the text.

Even though participants all went online for additional information for their projects, there was little indication that they were employing strategies to evaluate these resources. Tommy was aware that he should be assessing these sources but felt he could not: "To be honest with you, if I like the video, I feel what they're saying, I go with it. Because, and I cannot tell which one is right, or the best, or bad."

Social Networks

The participants drew on their social networks for a variety of reasons. Participants spoke about various family members and friends, but the most common source of support came from academic coaches and peers in the program. Five participants—everyone except Bahi—referred to the academic coaches as valuable support. Four participants (Mustak, Tommy, Fleur, and Yannick) sought help from coaches at the beginning of a project and again when they received feedback. Academic coaches, and the head coach Anas, in particular, helped the participants decipher the project expectations. At the beginning of the project, participants sought explanations about what they were being asked to do. Once they submitted a project and received feedback, they returned to the academic coaches for explanations about what they were being asked to change. The academic coaches served as an information bridge between

graders and students. They were positioned to help interpret tacit expectations. Over time, all four participants relied less on the academic coaches as they grew more comfortable interpreting the expectations themselves.

Dan also positioned Anas as a crucial form of support; however, he relied on Anas for motivation and guidance. Unlike the other participants, Dan's main concern was dropping out of the program. In light of this fear, he felt like Anas played an important role in keeping him in the program. Bahi was also a unique case. Compared to the others, he was very independent. Bahi never mentioned the academic coaches in reference to the coursework or support. Instead, he was more likely to turn to the internet when he felt stuck. As a child, he had received minimal support from his family, and thus it is possible that the independence he developed as a younger student carried on into PAIR. Compared to the others, he had also spent the least amount of time in the program so he may have still been developing relationships.

Classmates at PAIR were also a valuable source of support. Students turned to each other to help explain expectations, elucidate hidden expectations, and to provide moral support when the program was challenging. Three participants referred to their classmates as a source of support—Mustak, Fleur, and Yannick. Likewise, Tommy positioned himself as a support for his classmates. As the first student in the program and being further along, Tommy was able to help the newer students through projects he had already completed. This was support that was not available to him since he was the first student enrolled. For Mustak, Fleur, and Yannick, their classmates helped them work through projects where they were struggling. These challenges were associated with figuring out the expectations that needed to be met to master a project. When starting a

new project, Yannick would always ask the group: "Before, I got one project, I asked them, do you know the project, how is it? Is it hard, or good? And they explain to me." Classmates who were further along could offer advice about where they had struggled. In doing so, they could help each other avoid the same obstacles.

Other students also provided affective support. The participants explained sharing in each other's challenges. When one student struggled, they all became involved. For example, when Fleur was stuck on a project she explained, "Everyone try to help me, to be honest with you, because like we all were tired and sick from this project. Like, it was very easy." She reported feeling like the project itself was easy to do. This made not mastering the project particularly frustrating. The other students shared in her struggle through their shared experiences with challenging projects. Often, the challenging projects were common across students, helping build a sense that it was the project that was hard and not the student who was deficient. Strong bonds formed among students. Both Yannick and Mustak referred to their classmates as "like family."

Relatives provided less direct academic guidance for the participants. Only Tommy mentioned turning to his family for specific academic support, asking his son and wife to proofread his papers. Tommy and Yannick both liked to engage in discussion about topics with their wives. This allowed them to talk through ideas and debate different sides of an argument. Dan also received support from his wife but in the form of motivation more than academic assistance. It was Dan's wife who encouraged him to enroll and persist. Finally, Fleur and Yannick spoke of their children as important sources of motivation. They saw their degrees as benefiting their children's futures as much as their own.

Research Question Two: How does the experience of forced migration inform the language and literacy practices that students use in the program?

In response to the second research question, I generated four themes: Going fast, our way versus their way, disrupted plans and dreams, and shifting languages. Forced migration informed the goals that participants set for themselves overall and at PAIR. There was an interplay of ongoing dreams, professional goals, and basic life logistics that informed more program-specific goals such as completion time and degree options. Migration informed priorities, social circles, opportunities, and the resources that arose in the participants stories of education. Forced migration also influenced the motivation behind their goals. These goals and motivations in turn shaped how participants responded to the literacy expectations at PAIR.

Going Fast

Acceleration through the program appeared as a theme in all six cases, though participants had different motivations for wanting to go fast. For some participants, acceleration was a response to immediate life situations. Bahi was seeking asylum which can leave people in a stateless limbo. This status also meant that Bahi did not have access to lawful employment. Earning a U.S. degree was a credential he could transfer despite the asylum outcome and would also prepare him for a higher-earning job when he could look for employment. Yannick was eager to continue working in athletics and was trying to recuperate credentials when his college degree did not transfer from Burkina Faso. Yannick had also lost faith in the higher education system in the U.S. and wanted to finish the program before they could send him another unexpected bill (which had not happened). Dan had dropped out of college twice before. The first time was to support his

parents and the second time because he did not feel supported. He was driven by a need to finish as quickly as possible because time in the program increased the risk of dropping out. Toward the end of the associate degree, his parents decided to move. In order to move with them, he was accelerating his work even more.

For other participants, going fast was more symbolic. The structure of PAIR encouraged students to accelerate. Students were encouraged to work through the competencies as quickly as possible, and two participants internalized this goal. Tommy wanted to be fast because he wanted to be the best student. Being the best within PAIR was framed as progressing the fastest through the competencies. Similarly, Fleur was eager to be a good student and perceived the same message—a good student progresses quickly in the program.

Finally, Mustak's pursuit of a bachelor's degree in chemistry had ended abruptly when he decided to flee. He found his access barred as a non-citizen in his home country of Burma and once again in Malaysia where he sought asylum. He spent over 15 years in this protracted situation. Once he resettled in the U.S. and applied for and received citizenship, Mustak was ready to finish college. At this point in his life, people implied that he was too old: "Sometimes people think, what are you going to be, do? Like age of 40, you are going to school." The opportunity to accelerate created an opportunity to earn a college diploma and achieve this dream more quickly.

Mustak exemplified an underlying motivation that was prevalent across all six cases—participants felt that they had lost precious time due to forced migration. Along with lost time, they had lost a past education that either had or would have led to a degree. The result was a broader goal to be a college graduate and hold a college degree.

In response, participants were eager to finally hold those credentials which motivated them to go faster. Like Mustak, Fleur referred to her age as a barrier to her professional goals: "I'm a little bit old for dentist, to start study for dentist." Tommy also mentioned his age in the interviews, although he argued that it should not be an impediment: "I can get better if I want to, that's why I'm going to school right now. I'm 42 years old, I'm going to school." Dan dropped out of the local community college to support his parents who had limited job opportunities because they lacked valuable language and literacy resources. He critiqued the U.S. immigration system for restricting the rights of his parents. Without the ability to read and write, they could not take the citizenship test: "Technically we are putting them into the jail, that's how I think." During the study, he was talking with local and state representatives to solve this problem and also teaching his mother how to read. Acceleration in PAIR gave Dan another opportunity to earn a degree quickly and continue to support his parents.

The goal of going fast had implications on how the participants navigated the PAIR program. Participants cited the goal of going fast as their motivation behind adopting strategies of *playing the game*. The participants found that the faster they could learn the rules of each specific project, the faster they could beat the game. Going fast informed how the participants chose readings and the strategies that they used to read them. Fleur, for example, looked through resources to find what would be the fastest. Bahi skipped resources altogether and opted instead for the internet. Tommy and Yannick both preferred videos on YouTube that condensed information down to the most essential. Mustak and Dan both adopted the strategy of looking at the question and

reading only to answer those. This strategy allowed them quickly to sift through the resources.

Our Way Versus Their Way

There was a shared sense among the participants that there were different ways of doing and understanding and that their ways of doing and thinking were generally wrong in the program. This was a shift in positioning from their home countries where most of the students felt like good students. All six participants make a direct reference to being good students in high school. For five of the participants, this was at a high school prior to coming to the U.S. The exception was Dan, who talked about being a good student in his American high school: "I came here when I was 15, I was so good in school."

In addition to leaving behind their home countries and communities, forced migration led participants to leave familiar school systems and ways of knowing. This led to a perceived chasm between students and graders. To some extent, this chasm was bridged with help from the academic coaches, but for many students, this had a lingering influence on their investment in the projects. The repeated feeling that their way of doing things was wrong also influenced the participants' decision to adopt a playing-the-game strategy. For example, Tommy explained the rationale behind his strategy of submitting early:

> The first time I do it my best way, I understand the way I understand it. And I send it, and I stop worry about it. Cause I know it's going to come back to me…So when I send it to you, you're going to tell me what you want. I do it the way you want. Cause my point's to master.

Tommy made the distinction between his way and their way but makes no judgment about which way is correct or incorrect. From Tommy's perspective, only one way will lead to the desired result. Participants referred to this dichotomy in varied ways. For example, Mustak talked in terms of forgetting himself: "So that's why, if I try to forget myself." Yannick framed it in terms of right and wrong: "You have to do this one again. no not right. This is no good."

In contrast, Dan, Bahi, and Fleur had a different perspective on the expectations set by the graders. Unlike the other four participants, both Dan and Fleur had experience in American high schools and American community colleges. Bahi had studied in American college programs online in Morocco and on campus in the U.S. These experiences may have helped these three participants better familiarize themselves with common academic Discourses. They still struggled to interpret what the graders wanted but were less likely to refer to a separation of understandings. The perspective of graders remained extremely important, as evidenced in Bahi's framing of academic work: "Something, like more academic you go to what it is that they're looking for." Fleur occasionally struggled with interpreting and giving the graders what they wanted: "It wasn't clear. Like she said something, I tried to do it, but I find she's looking for another thing, so it was hard." She framed the difficulty in terms of deciphering what the grader wanted rather than content or production. This dichotomy was also exacerbated by the online and anonymous format of the feedback. Dan, who had experience in American schools at various levels, felt like he lacked context to help anticipate expectations: "You never see them, you never know that they're expecting even though you take like 10 days to finish up your project and you submit it and you, like 90% of the time it will come

back to you to revise it." Although these three cases do not refer to a similar sort of chasm between ways of understanding, they share a sentiment that the participants' instincts and ways of doing projects were insufficient for mastering projects.

Disrupted Plans and Dreams

The immediate and reverberating impacts of forced migration had disrupted the education of all six participants. For some, this was an obvious disruption and for others, it was more subtle. The disruptions caused by forced migration were not always immediate. For example, Dan mentioned a "second migration." Resettling into a new country did not always mean permanent resettlement. Families continued to seek out communities within their new country. The result was that participants were actively reimagining their plans and dreams even while in the program.

Forced migration led many in search of stability and a home. Both Dan and Yannick had put college on hold to buy a house for their families in the U.S. For Dan, this was for his parents. For Yannick, this was for his children. Home was equated with stability and this quest for home and stability took precedence over academic and professional goals. Dan described dropping out as a sacrifice for his family:

> My family wants their own land and house because they, they have been begging
> that in the refugee camp and now they started here they see the dream that we can
> make our own house and then we decide in our family that my brother was
> finishing his bachelor and my other brother was finishing his associate and I was
> the one just entering into college and so I sacrifice my college to work and then
> buy a house for my whole family.

The experience of displacement and loss seemed to linger for Dan. The language and literacy restrictions associated with citizenship and employment meant that he became the main provider for his family shortly after graduating from high school: "When they asks for their identify, when they ask for their houses, I feel so bad that I think education is nothing for me if I cannot make my parents happy." The conflicting priorities between providing for a family and pursuing college credentials disrupted and delayed postsecondary education for both Dan and Yannick.

Other participants were reconsidering the feasibility of their professional goals. Fleur wanted to be a dentist but felt too old to pursue dental school. Forced migration influenced this disrupted dream in two ways. First, migrating caused her to delay receiving a high school diploma or equivalency. Second, she felt that language slowed her down. She was getting a late start to college, and it was taking her twice as long than it would have in Arabic. Mustak had repeatedly found his pathway to college blocked. Tommy lost a job opportunity because he lacked the credentials: "I have the ability to do the job from everybody else, but I have the thing is they need this level of education to get it. That's one of the requirements." Yannick repeatedly referred to his past plans and how this move had not been a part of them.

The result was that participants were reconsidering their goals. Fleur felt too old to be a dentist, so she considered becoming a math teacher. Dan had explored working in criminal justice and IT during his first stints in college, but after dropping out, Dan found a job in the mental health industry to earn money for a house. When he enrolled in PAIR, he decided that he wanted to use college to advance within that field. When Tommy was denied a job, he opened his own store. Mustak started his college career as a chemistry

major. He became a teacher and school teacher in Malaysia. In the U.S., he tried for several years to return to college before deciding to open his own business instead: "I am trying to do my degree almost five year, it's never happen." When Yannick found out he might not be able to return to teaching, he began exploring careers that would keep him in sports. Unfortunately, the programs available through PAIR were limited, so Yannick was working to fit sports management into a degree in business. If necessary, he had considered pursuing an additional degree from another institution: "I'm going to do physical therapy after if it's not too tight, I'm going to put them together but if it's hard I have to do separately." His career started as a physical education teacher, and he was not thinking about working in logistics and operations or physical therapy.

Bahi was the exception among the participants. He did not articulate a specific professional goal prior to nor after arriving in the U.S. Instead, his focus was on getting a good education: "I don't have a dream job. I would say, a dream education." Bahi was also the youngest participant, so he may have felt fewer confinements resulting from age and obligations. Nevertheless, Bahi's sentiment was common across cases. Although several participants were reconsidering their professional goals, they maintained a more general goal of earning a college degree. Bahi, Mustak, and Tommy all specifically referred to college as a dream in and of itself, rather than a means to a professional goal.

Shifting Languages

One of the broadest impacts that forced migration had on the educational experiences of the participants was the change of the language of instruction. Five of the participants left school systems where they learned in very different languages. The sixth participant, Dan, had attended an English-medium school as a child. Fleur and Tommy

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both learned in their first language, Arabic. Mustak learned in Burmese and as an adult, he both learned and then taught in English and Malay. Bahi, Yannick, and Dan all learned in second and third languages. For Bahi, this was Arabic and then French. Yannick learned in Bambara, then French. For Dan, the language of instruction was English.

For three participants, switching to a new language of instruction was often framed as limiting their potential as students. Yannick, Fleur, and Tommy made comparisons to themselves as students in their home countries to the present English-medium program. Tommy often compared Arabic to English as a way of figuring out where and why he felt stuck: "That's my challenge with spelling. Arabic, either you know how to write it or not. Not like English, you maybe finish college you have a problem with spelling." Fleur often made comparisons between herself as a student in an English program versus her potential if she were learning in her first language: "It is useful but it's harder for me like, if everything was in my language like if my language, my first language was English, I will have my master right now." Yannick also framed English as limiting: "It's different because French is like my language. And I can have more ways to explain something but in English I can be limited." In these three cases, participants saw their learning as limited by the language of instruction and these limits ranged from spelling to being understood. This experience informed how students approached the literacy tasks at PAIR. For instance, both Yannick and Tommy placed importance on learning in and through English. As a result, they also believed that relying on resources in other languages might slow down their progress. This, in turn, informed how they preferred their information. Because they searched for information in English, they shared a preference for videos over written texts because of the additional context

which helped with comprehension. In contrast, Fleur felt like English slowed her down. For her, Arabic was a resource, and she regularly drew on her Arabic to find resources and ask her peers questions to get information quicker.

In contrast, Mustak, Bahi, and Dan did not frame English as a speedbump. These three participants all had more experiences using English prior to coming to resettling. Mustak spoke five languages and each language gave him tools to learn the next: "I learn inside of jail the language because its alphabet is Latin so it's easier to learn. Malay language is they use ABC, same." Using English in Malaysia may have also helped Mustak feel less of a transition into the language of the PAIR program. Dan also enrolled in PAIR having a familiarity with English as a language of instruction. The schools in the refugee camp in Nepal used English as the language of instruction. He both claimed English as a primary language and distanced himself from it in academic contexts: "English is my primary. I love to speak in English rather than my language." He also cited language as a barrier while in an American high school but not while in PAIR. Bahi fostered an interest in languages by learning English independently and attending English-medium workshops in Morocco. Rather than perceiving English as a barrier, he saw his interest in languages as an asset: "I think without being so interested into the language and learning and the culture, I don't think I would even be here, right now." Unlike the other three participants, Mustak, Bahi, and Yannick rarely mentioned strategies directly related to the language shift.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided detailed descriptions of each participant including themes that arose within each individual case. These descriptions focused on the

perceptions that each participant held about the literacy expectations within the program and the strategies that they adopted to meet those expectations. I concluded the chapter with a cross-case analysis in which I pulled out eight themes that were common across cases. I organized these findings by research questions. In terms of navigating literacy practices, I generated four themes: Playing the game, alternatives to reading, advanced reading strategies, and social networks. In looking at the influence of forced migration, I generated four themes: Going fast, our way versus their way, disrupted plans and dreams, and shifting languages. In the next chapter, I discuss the connections across these themes and connect them back to theory and past research.

V. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the findings, how they address the research questions, and how they advance or contradict previous research. The purpose of this study was to understand the literacy practices that students from refugee backgrounds used as they navigated an American connected learning college program. I addressed the following research questions:

1. How do students from refugee backgrounds navigate the literacy practices of an American competency-based connected learning college program?

   a. In what ways, if any, do students draw upon linguistic resources to navigate these literacy practices?

   b. In what ways, if any, do students draw upon social networks while navigating these literacy practices?

2. How does the experience of forced migration inform the language and literacy practices that students use in the program?

I begin this chapter with a summary of the themes from chapter four as they relate to the two main research questions and I situate the thematic findings from the individual and cross-case analyses within existing literature. After reviewing the findings relevant to each main research question, I discuss the connections between the themes. Next, I turn to a discussion of the findings in relation to college readiness, adding to the literature on college literacies, students from refugee backgrounds, and connected learning. I conclude with a discussion of the implications and recommendations for practice and future research.

In framing this discussion, it is important to note that these participants did not represent a homogenous group. Although they share a common status within the U.S., their paths prior to PAIR were quite divergent. Each participant had unique life experiences prior to forced migration; different experiences of migration and resettlement; and different goals, religions, languages, and education. In this section, I attempt to show how their experiences, though divergent, also presented commonalities, both across cases and within extant literature.

Research Question One: Navigating Postsecondary Literacy Practices

In the cross-case analysis, I generated four themes in response to the first research question: playing the game, alternatives to reading, advanced literacy strategies, and social networks. To navigate the literacy practices of the program, all six participants used the strategy of *playing the game*, meaning they adopted strategies to decipher the rules and beat the system. Participants compared the program to games or puzzles and winning the game meant mastering a project. The game was played by submitting drafts quickly and using the feedback to invest time and energy into the parts of the project that held the highest value. Four of the six participants sought out *alternatives to reading*. There was a preference for videos over texts and a belief that videos were easier to understand and provided information in a more condensed format. All of the participants used a variety of *advanced literacy strategies*, including cross-text comparisons, evaluating sources, and posing guiding questions. The most common strategy across cases was the use of guiding questions to navigate readings. Participants imposed a purpose on their reading by first determining the information that they were seeking. To do this, they either used project prompts or assessed their prior knowledge to pose more

targeted questions. The internet was a useful resource that participants drew on to build background knowledge. Finally, *social networks* and building new social networks helped students interpret the expectations.

In examining literacy practices within PAIR, it is important to note that these cases were interconnected. As students in the same program and study group, the participants were a part of one another's social network and strategies were likely shared among them. This sharing of strategies might explain some of the cross-over in how students interpreted and responded to expectations in PAIR.

Sub-Question One: Linguistic Resources

Participants drew on a range of linguistic resources as they navigated the program. For some, their first language was valuable in their interactions with peers and coaches. Fleur, for example, was able to speak in Arabic with both coaches and peers. She also searched for information in Arabic online. Participants also drew on their metalinguistic awareness to navigate English tasks. For instance, Tommy often drew comparisons between his first language (Arabic) and English, which helped him discern where and why he was struggling.

Leveraging alternative modalities allowed participants to transform text into audio. Most of the participants learned English when they came to the U.S. and they learned through interactions with others. The result was that English was learned in conversation and not through text. For participants who learned social English more quickly, alternative formats provided audio input that was more familiar. Indeed, participants explained that videos were easier to understand, especially in English. Tommy, Yannick, Bahi, and Dan had a preference for modalities that combined text with

audio and visual cues. Cummins (2000) drew a distinction between social and academic

proficiency using two continua—the level of cognitive demand and the amount of context

embedded. This offers a useful frame to understand the preference for videos over

traditional texts. The use of audio allowed participants to access information in non-text

formats which in turn allowed them to leverage additional linguistic resources to

understand the information. Participants sought out alternative modalities such as videos,

and in Bahi's case, memes, that included embedded context where the provided texts did

not. Fleur and Mustak also mentioned using the internet to find different explanations of

topics. They both explained this as providing information in a way they understood.

Although they preferred text, the internet gave access to descriptions presented in

different ways and with different words. Because it was the language and not the content

that was confusing, they used the internet to find explanations that were more accessible.

Counter to research on translanguaging, participants, for the most part, opted out,

choosing instead to focus on English. Yannick, in particular, made the intentional

decision to forgo using French in PAIR so that he can more quickly learn English, and, in

turn, teach his children English. The relationships among languages in these cases were

complex and often not explicitly stated. This finding warrants further research into the

perceptions that students hold about their linguistic resources and how that influences the

linguistic decisions that they make.

Sub-Question Two: Social Networks

The majority of participants strategically leaned on their social networks,

primarily the communities they formed within PAIR. Five participants turned to

classmates and the head academic coach to clarify expectations throughout the projects.

Classmates and coaches also provided motivational and emotional support to students. The head academic coach, Anas, appeared across all six cases. Participants often referred to Anas as a crucial resource for them at PAIR. Anas was also a refugee; thus there may have been a sense of solidarity that strengthened his relationship with the participants. Anas was one of two coaches and the only full-time coach so his importance might also be explained by the time he had to invest in building relationships with students compared to the part-time coach. Anas was also in charge of enrollment, meaning he was the first contact that many students had with PAIR. Finally, for Tommy and Fleur, Anas spoke Arabic and was therefore available to help translate when needed. Although the reasons behind Anas' prominent role are many, it was clear that his work as an academic coach served students in both academic and non-academic ways.

The one-on-one targeted support was particularly valuable in scaffolding interactions between students and norms (Gee, 1989). Participants expressed feeling increasingly comfortable, more like insiders, as they progressed at PAIR. Over time they relied less on their coaches to explain expectations. Although this could be the result of participants relying less on initial instructions to gauge expectations, they also relied less on coaches to interpret feedback. It seems that they were learning the rules independently over time. In addition, their shared sense of feeling like insiders suggests that over time they felt less like they were faking certain practices. As they acquired the dispositions of the program, they grew more comfortable with the expectations without a mentor (Gee, 1989).

When entering into a new disciplinary community, students need to be mentored in the norms of the community members, not only reading and writing but also thinking,

doing, and valuing (Gee, 2012). For academic writing, this includes basic writing conventions but also the discipline-specific norms and conventions (Gee, 2012). Academic coaches and peers served an essential function in mentoring students in the norms of PAIR. Most participants relied on their coaches to help make sense of projects and feedback. In doing so, the coaches were helping them learn the norms of PAIR and to apply those to new tasks.

As Tommy progressed, he became a mentor to others. Gee (1989) believed that Discourses are mastered through interactions with those who have already mastered it. Being further along compared to other students, Tommy often attended group study sessions to help other students by sharing what he had learned about grader expectations on specific projects. Having already mastered the strategy of demystifying the expectations at PAIR, he was able to support others as they acquired the new Discourse. Mustak was the only other participant to claim a similar mentoring role. Fleur, in contrast, relied on her peers to help her navigate expectations but did not claim a mentoring role. The active, and frequent, participation of everyone in the group study sessions highlighted the value of peers in scaffolding entrance into new Discourses.

Bahi was a unique case because he portrayed himself as somewhat isolated within the new community. During the study, Bahi had only recently left his family as a result of forced migration. Past research has shown that this can have significant consequences on the educational attainment of students (Naidoo et al., 2018). Family separation can impact larger issues of health and well-being, which can lead to added barriers to pursuing college (Naidoo et al., 2018). Bahi experienced bouts of homelessness while at PAIR putting basic needs in conflict with educational goals. His isolation also influenced

his building of new social networks within the program as he was the only participant that did not refer to other classmates as a resource. He chose instead to remain predominantly independent as a student in PAIR.

Research Question Two: The Influence of Forced Migration

In response to the second research question, I generated four themes: going fast, our way versus their way, disrupted plans and dreams, and shifting languages. The experience of forced migration influenced the challenges that participants felt both before and within the program, their goals, and their perceptions of themselves as students. Because the lives of each participant varied significantly, as did their journey to the U.S., these themes were less universal. Although broad themes were common, their influence on the story of each participant was nuanced. For example, all six participants shared the goal of *going fast* but the motivation underlying this goal differed across cases. Although the underlying motivation varied, the goal of going fast informed many of the strategies that participants adopted in PAIR.

All six participants referred to themselves as good students in the past, but in PAIR they perceived a dichotomy between *our way versus their way.* Half of the participants referenced a chasm between students and graders, particularly around ways of knowing, understanding, and writing. The other three participants, who had prior experiences within American schools, did not talk about a divide but still placed a similar significance on decoding the perspectives of the graders in order to master projects. Rather than forming new literacy practices to a new unspoken standard, participants perceived a dichotomy between their own way and the way of the graders. This affirms Rueda's (2010) assertion that cultural factors and culturally compatible instruction

influence expectancies or how well a student believes they will do on a task. When participants put effort into a project and received "not yets," they responded with decreased motivation on the initial submissions—not necessarily because they felt like they could not do the work, but because they felt like the work they were doing did not match what graders wanted.

Participants were reassessing *disrupted plans and dreams.* There was a common dream of earning a college degree more broadly, but many of the participants were reimagining new plans in the face of the disruptions engendered by forced migration. The shared college aspirations affirmed past research with students from refugee backgrounds (Brownlees & Finch, 2010; Elwyn et al., 2012; Shakya et al., 2010). The results of this study provided more nuance to the story behind those aspirations. The goals shared by participants included both a personal and pragmatic need for credentials. For many, a college degree represented stability and permanence in an abstract sense. It was a credential that participants stated could help them no matter what happened in the future. The desire to earn a degree was shared by all of the participants, but professional goals were in flux. Only four of the participants were pursuing a degree as a means to a professional role, and the desired roles were unclear. This reevaluation of professional goals supported Morrice's (2013) finding that perceived opportunities informed the trajectories of students post-resettlement. Participants in this study were reevaluating their goals based on the financial and time commitments entailed in pursuing college.

Disrupted education did not emerge as salient within this study. Past research with students from refugee backgrounds often foreground periods of disrupted education (Blanton, 2005; Block et al., 2014; Doyle & O'Toole, 2013; Schroeter & James, 2015),

but this was not true in this case study. Instead, these stories support Kerwin's (2011) finding that many refugees arrive with more than 16 years of education. Four participants arrived with some years of college, while the other two resettled during high school. Although participants experienced disruptions in their education, predominantly at the postsecondary level, few made clear links to their current scholarly pursuits. One possible explanation is that the required level of education to enroll in PAIR filtered out those with significant disruptions in past education. The most significant disruptions that were shared occurred after resettlement. Fleur, for instance, felt like she had lost a valuable experience when she aged out of the public school system and had to study independently for the GED. Access to mainstream courses can be beneficial in helping students acquire new Discourses (Gee, 1989; Kanno & Grosik, 2012), but by aging out of the public school system, Fleur lost access to experiences that may have helped her more quickly integrate into college.

A common result of migration was the *shifting languages* which led participants to reevaluate their potential as students and to adopt new strategies to overcome the language barriers that they perceived as students in PAIR. Some of the participants also discussed adjusting their reading strategies to accommodate reading in a new language. Fleur and Yannick both read around the text to help contextualize what they were reading and to ensure that they did not miss essential information. Fleur specifically explained this strategy as necessary in English but not in Arabic.

Although there was evidence of engrained stigma around languages other than English, the format of the program overcame the self-censorship that may arise in response to perceived linguistic barriers (Harklau, 2000; Kanno & Varghese, 2010). For

instance, Fleur felt uncomfortable speaking at the community college, but at PAIR, she felt comfortable talking to her peers because they were all linguistically diverse. This could be the result of such a diverse group of students who all shared a similar background. This could also be associated with the flexible nature of the program, such that it no longer felt like the schedule was based on the work of American students, as Fleur had felt in the community college.

Each of these themes impacted how students navigated the literacy practices within the program. The shifting languages, shifting goals, and shifting positioning as students all informed the decisions that they made. Literacy practices changed as a result of forced migration (Kaur, 2016) for many reasons. Literacy practices shifted as participants came into contact with new Discourses, as participants reassessed their goals, and as they became more proficient in the dominant language.

Connections Across Themes

The themes presented in chapter four were interconnected in many ways and these interconnections further highlighted the connections between the research questions. The desire to go fast was both a response to disrupted education and a means of achieving stability through earning college credentials. Playing the game was the result of feeling like their way was never right and also facilitated the desire to go fast. Alternatives to reading helped students leverage their linguistic resources in the shifting language of instruction. Comparing cases also shows how the experiences of forced migration, both pre- and post-, informed how students experienced the program and how they responded to the perceived expectations. This was most pronounced around language. Students who had attended and/or worked in schools in multiple languages focused less on their

perceptions of language as limiting. Likewise, the participants who had experienced multiple shifts in the language of instruction in their earlier schooling were less likely to frame English as a significant hurdle.

Discussion of College Readiness

The answers to the research questions and the findings in this study culminate in a larger question around the notion of college readiness. Participants in past studies have been steered away from college aspirations because of low expectations (Perry, 2007), a perception that gaps in education may be too much to overcome (Blanton, 2005), or a need for immediate job placement (U.S. Department of State, n.d.-b). Getting into a college often relies too heavily on luck or an act of goodwill on the college itself, like students in Hirano's (2011) study in which a school enrolled students despite not being "college-ready." Yet, the participants in this study drew on a range of practices to navigate the literacy expectations of the program that both indicated they were ready for college literacy tasks, and, like other students attending college, needed additional assistance. In fact, the areas where participants struggled most—deciphering expectations—is not an uncommon obstacle for students more broadly. This leads to a question of how the notion of college readiness, particularly for postsecondary literacies, is conceptualized for different student populations. Why are students from refugee backgrounds more at-risk of being labeled "not college-ready"? How might implicit cultural understandings restrict otherwise resilient college students? And how do narratives of refugees, particularly from positions of power, inform understandings of who is college material?

Though this study focused on the experiences of only six students, the findings align with past research that highlights the interconnected and often complex literacy and linguistic practices that students from refugee backgrounds leverage in pursuit of an education (Blanton, 2005; Hirano, 2015; Kaur, 2016). In many ways, these findings also align with current work in developmental literacy and college reading more broadly. Like students enrolled in developmental reading courses, the participants in this study did not need remediation on basic reading skills; they needed to learn new strategies to navigate new literacy tasks in a new context (Holschuh & Paulson, 2013). In alignment with current literature and assumptions in developmental reading (see Holschuh & Paulson, 2013), the reading portrayed in the study was social, cognitive, metacognitive, and affective. The findings from this study support theoretical perspectives of reading that complicate the process rather than simplify it. The literacies identified in this study were social and contextual (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). The choices made around literacy practices were also informed by social institutions and power relationships (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) which suggests that theoretical perspectives of literacy as merely a technical skill are insufficient to capture the full complexity of literacy practices (Street, 2001).

Certain themes arose as most relevant to college readiness and literacy research and literature more broadly: deciphering expectations, mushfake Discourse, intertextuality, and metacognitive awareness. Finally, given the popularity of the connected learning format for providing postsecondary opportunities to refugees internationally, I discuss findings pertaining to connected learning. A prominent obstacle across cases was deciphering the expectations. Like college students more broadly,

participants did not struggle with how to read, but when, where, and why to use strategies (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009). In response, the participants adapted strategies to have the expectations of each project made more specific. Choices that the participants made around literacy indicated an awareness of Discourses within the program, though not in those terms. Participants accepted, acquired, and resisted the dominant Discourse in strategic ways. Participants drew on their skills and metaknowledge of similar contexts to create a mushfake Discourse. There was also evidence of strategic college reading through the pervasiveness of intertextuality in their practices and in their metacognitive awareness that was most apparent in their ruminations on how their schemas matched or mismatched the assumed schema and in their adoption of strategies to address any gaps in their understanding. Finally, the connected learning format of the program and the availability of additional resources became an important source of information. Participants turned to the internet for alternative explanations of topics, alternative modalities, and contextual information.

Deciphering Expectations

The most common hindrance that participants explained was knowing what they needed to do and how they needed to do it. This aligns with past studies with students from refugee backgrounds in a range of countries including Australia (Harris & Marlowe, 2011), the U.K. (Morrice, 2013), and the U.S. (Curry, 2008; Hirano, 2014, 2015). Students in Hirano's (2014) study with refugee backgrounds also reported struggling most with assignment expectations. Obstacles in this study were rarely presented as a lack of skill or knowledge but more as a mismatch between their understanding of a project and that of the graders. Tommy, for example, talked about how the hard part of a

project was that you had to say it a certain way in order for it to be accepted. This could be the result of embedded discipline-specific conventions, or disciplinary literacies, which Holschuh (2014) described as "the 'secrets' of the discipline" (p. 89). Indeed, the participants seemed to sense a secret set of rules particular to each project. This was further complicated by the program's format in that it did not have traditional course boundaries to signal a change in disciplines. Instead, participants expressed a sense of feeling like each project was a new secret to unpack.

Expectations were a concern around reading as well as writing. Participants strategized on determining what to read from the resources provided. Fleur, for example, noted that reading was like sailing, knowing where she was going helped her stay on course. There was a common belief that it was not necessary to read everything they were given, but knowing what would be important to read was more of a mystery. Fleur turned to the academic coaches when possible. Others used the project prompts to guide them. Bahi ignored the resources altogether in favor of online searches which provided more targeted results. There was also a shared frustration around what seemed like an ambiguous connection between the readings and the projects. Several participants explained that some resources only had a single sentence that was important that was important for their projects. Reading, then, was a treasure hunt. In response, participants adopted various reading strategies, similar to those found in Hirano's (2015) study: not reading, selective reading, and enhanced reading. They either skipped readings, read sections, or asked for help. Most participants claimed that reading was important in the program, but the unclear expectations led them to create individual expectations that integrated reader, text, and purpose (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). Participants

would determine what they needed from the project questions, inventory what they already knew on the topic, and read for any information they still needed to answer the prompts.

Difficulties in deciphering expectations are not unique to this population. Work in the field of developmental education often focuses on expectations and helping students understand them. From a theoretical standpoint, expectations, both knowing them and meeting them, can serve as membership markers within Discourse communities (Gee, 1989). Shanahan and Shanahan's (2012) work extended this to academic contexts, positing that these expectations differ along disciplinary boundaries. This divide has been explained from numerous perspectives including cultural differences (Rueda, 2010), expert-novice differences (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012), linguistic differences (Kanno & Varghese, 2010), generational status, and socioeconomic status (Russell, 2008). The commonality that arises across these dichotomies is a favoring of a dominant Discourse over a non-dominant Discourse. Students from the disenfranchised group within each dichotomy are often those labeled underserved, overlooked, at-risk, and vulnerable. Unfortunately, for students from refugee backgrounds, these disadvantages can intersect.

Past experiences in American schools provided valuable navigational capital that was particularly relevant in deciphering expectations. Working with refugees in the U.K., Morrice (2013) found that students with experience in colonial education systems had forms of capital that more easily transferred to their new experiences. This could explain why Fleur, Bahi, and Dan, who had studied in American schools, did not express a drastic difference in their understandings versus those of the graders. This was in sharp contrast to the other three participants who often referred to a dichotomy between

themselves and the graders. Experiences in other American schools gave Fleur, Bahi, and Dan additional insights into the specific practices that were rewarded (Lea & Street, 2006). Curry (2008) framed prior educational experiences as a valuable form of social capital that informed behaviors around "How to be a student, that is, how to participate in the practices of the course" (p. 283). Likewise, Fleur explained that she did not start in PAIR, she started at a local high school. Her experience in high school and community college gave her insight into the more tacit expectations of PAIR.

Another commonality was the notion of playing the game which entailed starting with a strategy to figure out the rules associated with each project. For most, this meant spending minimal time on the first submission so that they could use the feedback to craft a more tailored second submission. Ashley (2001) found a similar theme among four undergraduates from working-class backgrounds. Like Ashley's study, participants talked about the game in a way that both indicated a willingness to conform and a sense of manipulating the system. Such similar findings within different populations—both of which tend to be underrepresented in higher education—suggests that gaming may be both an effective response and an act of resistance to dominant Discourses.

Mushfake Discourse

All six cases highlighted the ways in which participants were deliberately changing their literacy practices as they interacted with a new dominant Discourse in a deliberate way. With a common goal of going fast, participants adopted strategies that would accelerate their progress while still maintaining a distinction between their beliefs and those of the graders. Participants used the feedback system to clarify the rules which allowed them to spend time on what mattered to the graders. In doing so, participants

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were engaged in the game of program but also a much larger game. Naidoo and colleagues (2018) described this as the "game of power":

> Learning to play (and master) the "game" of power (Bourdieu, 1990) in the university context requires learning a new logic of practice. It is a knowledge that includes proficiency in the language registers required for academic success, that is, the distinct and specialized knowledge of a variety of academic subjects, as well as effective communication and participation within the university system. It requires recognising and negotiating the hidden curriculum of assessment and learning, and accessing and investing in the kinds of social capital that will allow refugee background students to gain access to information, power and identity (Adler & Kwon, 2000) (p. 107).

The game described by the participants shared many elements with Naidoo et al.'s game of power. Much of the work that participants concentrated on was focused on unveiling the hidden curriculum which included what to say and how to say it. Participants brought rich schemata with them to PAIR from their previous experiences in and out of school. In some cases, skills transferred easily such as the metacognitive awareness that students had of their own learning and their positioning at PAIR. However, they also expressed a sense that their linguistic resources were not valued but rather a hindrance to their pursuit of a college degree.

There was a common belief that the skills PAIR valued did not match the skills that participants currently had. When they encountered this dichotomy between their way and the graders' way of thinking, many participants pushed back, choosing to play along rather than fully integrate into the graders' worldview. Several participants spoke in

terms of needing to give the graders what they wanted, and they also expressed a sense

that their way of understanding did not match those of the graders. This overarching

notion of playing the game and the various strategies that the participants adopted to do

so can be likened to what Gee (1989) termed, "mushfake" Discourse or "partial

acquisition coupled with meta-knowledge and strategies to 'make-do'" (p. 13). Because

participants did not know the desired ways of doing, being, and saying within the

Discourse of PAIR, they each found a way to be told what those rules were so that they

could replicate them. Although participants articulated their gaming strategies in different

ways, there was a commonality of goals in the strategies they employed to learn the

expectations of each project. Instead of spending time to perfect first submissions,

participants turned in drafts and put effort into addressing the feedback.

Participants were using their meta-knowledge of schooling, and PAIR in

particular, to identify what was being valued in their work (Gee, 2012). Language arose

as a mediator in the ways that participants described their work at PAIR. For example,

both Fleur and Tommy expressed that, if given the opportunity to complete tasks in

Arabic, they could more easily succeed. They used the skills they had and their meta-

knowledge to advance in the program while still acquiring the new student Discourse

(Gee, 1989). In playing the game, participants were not simply "making do," they were

using additional strategies to navigate PAIR as they continued to improve on their writing

and reading skills in English.

There was a shared sense that expectations were occasionally vague, particularly

around reading requirements. As participants relied more on outside resources, they

integrated more intertextuality into their study practices as a way to build their understanding and connect back into the provided resources.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality emerged as a central feature of the strategies identified across cases. The thematic findings on advanced literacy strategies and alternatives to reading both connected to intertextuality. Participants highlighted various strategies about when, where, and how to gather additional sources. Armstrong and Newman (2011) conceptualized intertextuality as an

> instructional approach where instructors offer multiple texts and materials of a wide variety of genres to give students the opportunity to increase background knowledge; make connections across and among texts; develop multiple perspectives, interpretations, and a broader picture of a topic; and develop their critical thinking skills (p. 9).

This definition highlights several of the activities that participants used to help with comprehension of resources. The program provided multiple resources, often text-based but occasionally videos. When these were insufficient, the participants went online to find additional sources. Thus, although Armstrong and Newman discuss intertextuality as an instructional approach, this study showed the ways that students may draw on intertextuality individually. Armstrong and Newman framed intertextuality as a schema-building approach such that supplemental materials were included in a course to build schemata. Likewise, participants found supplemental materials online when they identified a gap in their prior knowledge. Intertextuality was a strategy for schema building.

In college reading, intertextuality has been proposed as a means of helping students become more active readers to meet the demands of college literacy tasks (Armstrong & Newman, 2011). An underlying assumption is that entering college students need to develop intertextuality skills. However, the participants in this study were already using intertextuality, indicating that in some ways they were prepared for their college coursework. Unfortunately, there may be a tendency to overlook these strategies because of an overemphasis on English (Callahan et al., 2010). Perhaps expectations of clean and perfect writing should be replaced with an expectation of revised writing. Doing so would take the focus off of grammar and punctuation and place it on strategies and resources for more effective revision. This could, in turn, position revision as the norm above monolingual English. As Mustak's case suggests, this would mean not only helping students find resources for revising but also building student agency when they risk being silenced.

The decisions that participants made with resources entailed advanced literacy strategies. The findings from individual cases highlighted a variety of deep-processing strategies, including cross-text comparisons, evaluating sources, and seeking alternative representations. These are in line with Alexander's (2005) definition of highly competent readers as having a "rich repertoire of surface-level and deep-processing strategies to apply to a range of text-based tasks they encounter" (p. 427). Intertextuality played a large role across these strategies. For example, both Dan and Bahi started projects by inventorying their prior knowledge, identifying gaps, and using those to guide their reading. Mustak, Yannick, and Fleur discussed visiting multiple websites in order to

compare descriptions and information. This helped them simultaneously assess sources against one another and to develop a broader understanding of the topic.

Participants often turned to the internet to find alternatives to text, of which the most popular were YouTube videos. Participants cited the inclusion of additional context clues in videos as useful for learning information in English. This finding resonates with Cummins' (2000) work on social and academic proficiency in which he posited that academic language often lacked context compared to social language. Participants, with the exception of Mustak and Fleur, showed a preference for videos that provided visual, audio, and text input.

Yannick also preferred online resources because they linked to other websites which made it easier to find more information. The inclusion of hyperlinks changes the nature of reading because digital texts become non-linear unlike traditional print-based texts (Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2018). To navigate digital texts, students need to use macro-strategies such as forming questions, evaluating sources, and synthesizing information (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009; Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2018). Indeed, these strategies all arose within this study. As participants turned to the internet for additional sources, they either formed their own questions or used the project prompts as guiding questions. They compared websites to assess usefulness and identify new information, and they combined information from multiple sources to create projects. For online reading, the findings highlighted the prevalence of intertextuality as well as self-regulated learning strategies and metacognition to identify gaps in prior knowledge, assess resources, and adjust strategies.

Metacognitive Awareness

Metacognition has received attention in both the literature on postsecondary literacy and digital media particularly in reference to a reader's ability to monitor their learning (Holschuh & Aultman, 2008). Literature in developmental education has positioned metacognitive awareness as a key issue to address in developmental reading courses (Holschuh & Paulson, 2013; Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2018). Furthermore, metacognitive processes may be increasingly important for reading and learning when navigating computer-based environments (Greene et al., 2011). Contrary to Lee's (2016) work with students from refugee backgrounds, the findings from this study showed that the students brought metacognitive knowledge to PAIR that spanned from an awareness of their knowledge and experiences to how those interacted within the college program. Similar to Mulcahy-Ernt and Caverly's (2009) description of successful college students as knowing both what and how to study, the participants made reading decisions about what to read, how much to read, and when to seek alternatives to reading. While reading, participants utilized a number of strategies to monitor their learning, such as actively identifying gaps in their understanding and/or schema and using additional resources to support their reading. Participants leveraged their prior knowledge and project prompts when selecting texts and determining how closely they needed to read.

Tudor's (2013) work on the four metacognitive competencies for language learning may be useful in framing these findings. The four competencies included assessing language skills, setting realistic goals, identifying one's own strengths as a learning, and using relevant learning materials. Fleur, for example, assessed her comfort with reading in English and adapted her reading strategies to accommodate a slower

reading rate. Dan, Tommy, and Yannick decided that they were better listeners than readers in English and chose materials accordingly.

The use of metacognitive strategies while reading was neither universal nor complete. In addition to an awareness of one's own knowledge and abilities, metacognition includes regulation, such as the ability to detect contradictions (Holschuh & Aultman, 2008). The findings in this study revealed minimal indication that participants were assessing the credibility of online sources. The most common strategy for evaluating online information was the extent to which it matched what they already knew. Some participants looked at multiple websites before choosing one but did not explain any active evaluation of the websites.

Past research has suggested that competency-based education promotes the development of metacognitive awareness (Simonds et al., 2017; Tudor, 2013; Yang, 2012). In addition, Greene et al. (2011) suggested that self-regulation—the "ability to monitor and control their cognition, motivation, behavior, context, and emotion in a dynamic manner" (p. 107)—is essential to learning in computer-based environments. This is also evident in theories of multiliteracies. The New London Group (1996) theorized that, "When learners juxtapose different languages, discourses, styles, and approaches, they gain substantively in meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic abilities," which was evident in the experiences of the six participants at PAIR. In this study, there was strong evidence of metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness across cases, but the question remains open as to whether students entered with the requisite metacognitive abilities or developed them through the program.

Connected Learning

The connected learning format of the program was not the direct focus of this study, but in many ways, it was relevant to the decisions that participants made in the program. Participants often highlighted the ways in which the flexibility of the connected learning format helped overcome barriers that often impede access to a postsecondary education for students from refugee backgrounds, including information barriers (Bajwa et al., 2017; Shakya et al., 2010), lack of required credentials (Anselme & Hands, 2010; Bajwa et al., 2017; Doyle & O'Toole, 2013), linguistic barriers (Harklau, 2000; Kanno & Varghese, 2010), disruptions in education (Blanton, 2005), and external pressures (Harris & Marlowe, 2011). It was impossible to fully distinguish between the benefits conferred by the competency-based format and those of the academic support component. Many of the benefits such as flexibility and lower cost were associated with the online format, but the in-person support was essential in apprenticing participants into the program.

The competency-based format created a feedback loop that participants manipulated to learn expectations. By allowing students to submit drafts until they were deemed "mastered," participants were able to digitally and asynchronously interact with otherwise anonymous graders. Cultural reproduction theory suggests that practices and the meanings ascribed to them are formed through interactions (Bourdieu, 1991; Gee, 2013). In the connected learning format, students interacted with academic coaches and their classmates. However, their only interaction with the graders was through feedback online. This provided limited context for the feedback that participants were receiving. In response, many of the participants adjusted their practices to get a passing score. Instead

of using this as an opportunity to master a new Discourse, they developed strategies to game the system while being able to keep their literacy practices intact.

In the competency-based format, there were no clear disciplinary boundaries, contrary to traditional college programs. Each competency equated to different course credits, but for students, these distinctions were not highlighted. This lack of distinction may have complicated the ability to navigate the metadiscursive properties of different disciplines. Similar to the findings from Bharuthram and McKenna's (2012) study, participants in this study felt like expectations were opaque. Perhaps it was more difficult to unpack the secrets of different disciplines (Holschuh, 2014) when there was no clear acknowledgment that such disciplinary boundaries existed. Tommy, for instance, indicated a meta-awareness of Discourse norms in his awareness that there was an importance in knowing how to say the right thing, in the right way, for the right audience. He would read a text several times with the goal of comprehension but also to see how people talked about the topic. He determined boundaries by topic and project rather than by course.

The format of the program and messaging from the staff may have fueled the desire to accelerate through the program. Students perceived finishing quickly as a central goal of PAIR, and the staff actively brainstormed strategies to motivate students to accelerate. Regardless of the origin, the need to accelerate seemed to align with the students' goals as well. The format both allowed students to either speed up or slow down. A competency-based approach allowed participants to practice at their own pace (Yang, 2012). Fleur, for example, appreciated that she was no longer held to a monolingual timeframe as she had been in a community college. She could take the time

she needed to read and understand the texts. Yet, she also strived to finish each project as quickly as possible. The result was late nights for many of the participants.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The implications from this study touch on several aspects of postsecondary education. As such, I have organized implications for practice into the various relevant fields, including higher education, community colleges, developmental education, and teaching linguistically diverse learnings. For each field, I start with a discussion of implications followed by recommendations.

Implications for Higher Education

The findings from this study suggest that current metrics of college readiness are ill-equipped to measure students from refugee backgrounds and linguistically diverse students more broadly. Several of the participants described their first experiences trying to go to college in the U.S. as starting and ending in an ESL class. The students felt like the courses did not address their actual needs. In comparison to research in postsecondary literacy, the participants in this study demonstrated college-ready literacy practices that might be overlooked by traditional benchmarks. This is particularly true for those who arrive in adolescence or adulthood. It can take up to seven years for students to acquire the academic literacy levels needed to reach a level of average performance on standardized tests (Cummins, 2000). This means that students from refugee backgrounds are being narrowly assessed on language which necessitates a question asking what is not being accurately measured. Their emerging academic English may confound standardized test scores and they may have limited or no American high school GPA, but these numbers (or lack thereof) do not conclusively indicate that these students do not have the

ability to navigate college courses. Indeed, the participants in this study used complex literacy strategies that drew on intertextuality, prior knowledge, and metacognitive awareness.

The academic support embedded in the PAIR program was essential in helping the participants succeed. The support provided by PAIR was personalized and flexible in ways that are not always prevalent in postsecondary institutions. The participants all worked and had family obligations, which meant that their studying often took place at late hours. Having access to 24-hour online tutoring and having a dedicated coach available outside of standard school hours, gave participants support in the hours that they needed it.

Recommendations for Higher Education

First, institutions of higher education should consider alternative readiness markers for students who have experienced forced migration. Participants were often measured on language rather than other metrics of college readiness. Lack of past educational documentation and incomplete high school records may further complicate the admissions process. This recommendation aligns with a current push for institutions to move towards multiple measures for placement policies that go beyond placement exams (see Barnett et al., 2018). Admissions policies might draw from current work in that area to devise multiple measures to consider admissions for students from refugee backgrounds. These may include self-reported grade-level, interviews with advisors, and noncognitive assessments that measure motivation and problem-solving skills (Cullinan et al., 2018). Second, given the complex lives of students, academic support services need to be flexible, accessible, and personalized. This could mean ensuring that academic

support centers have extended hours or after-hours support. Academic support should also be offered in multiple formats to increase accessibility.

The skills and knowledge to navigate college institutions are also important to success. The participants often lacked access to navigational capitals within their familial and social networks which is a trait shared with many first-generation students. Institutions should begin to support college readiness before a student arrives on campus by adopting bridge programs and college success programs that can help students identify informational resources on campus and build social networks within their new academic communities.

Implications for Community Colleges

The stories of both Dan and Fleur highlight the unique obstacles for individuals who arrive in adolescence. Dan acquired valuable navigational capital in his American high school experience, whereas Fleur felt like she was not allowed adequate time in the local high school. Fleur's experience aging out of high school is not uncommon and supports Hirano's (2011) argument that "all the odds seem to be against refugee students who arrive in this country as an adolescent" (p. 264). Community colleges are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between high school and college. After aging out, students must opt for a GED and lose access to social and environmental supports where they could learn the rules of academia. Community colleges are already forming bridges with high schools in the form of early college high schools that give college experiences to high-achieving high school students, but similar structures may also help ease the transition into college for students from refugee backgrounds who age out of the public school system.

Recommendations for Community Colleges

First, community colleges with a mission of supporting the students of their community should consider expanding bridge programs for students from refugee backgrounds who are at risk of falling between the cracks of high school and college. Bridge programs targeting students from refugee backgrounds would help ease the transition from high school to college for students who age out of public school systems.

Second, refugees and asylum seekers often rebuild their lives in the U.S. from a position of poverty that creates additional barriers to college such as cost and conflicting priorities (Batalova et al., 2008). To meet the needs of students from refugee backgrounds, colleges need to develop flexible programs that combine a path to a degree with a combination of online learning, in-person support, and community building. More specifically, colleges should consider implementing competency-based programs that allow student to progress at their own pace but access the resources and supports of the college. One of the strengths of PAIR was that it made online learning a personal experience. Even though the coursework was online and asynchronous, participants had the opportunity to build a community with other students and expand their social networks.

Finally, institutions, and community colleges more specifically, should consider implementing or expanding academic coaching programs. Naidoo and colleagues (2018) referred to this as building an enabling learning culture within institutions of higher education that reject deficit orientations of students at the institutional level by viewing students and their needs holistically. This perspective requires that asset-based framings of students must transcend classroom boundaries. It is not only instructors who must see

students holistically, but also support staff, peers, and the wider community. The participants from this study often relied on academic coaches for support in their academic work as well as in self-regulation and motivation.

Implications for Developmental Education

The field of developmental education focuses on support structures designed to help students transition into postsecondary coursework. The predominant form of developmental education in the study was academic coaching. However, the findings can also inform pedagogical perspectives on college reading. For developmental education, and developmental reading more specifically, it is important to note that all of the participants knew how to read in the traditional sense. The support that they needed around reading, and often writing, was not what is generally considered remediation in that participants did not need to relearn basic skills. The support that participants sought most was help with deciphering the expectations. Although students from refugee backgrounds may need additional support with vocabulary and grammar, they also need to learn how to read assignment prompts and anticipate the expectations inherent to different disciplines.

Academic coaching was particularly successful in this study because the coaching went beyond academics. Coaching involved motivation, regular check-ins, and problem solving with classwork but also with financial aid and registration. The personalized nature of academic coaching allows coaches to see the full student and the obstacles that arise outside of the academic program. The relationship of academic coaching must go both ways. The academic coaches were proactive, monitoring student progress and reaching out to students, rather than waiting to be contacted. The academic coaches were

particularly valuable to the participants because of the flexibility they offered. In addition to scheduled meetings, academic coaches would meet with students throughout the week as needed and were also available by phone or email at any time.

Course-based developmental education was not the focus of this study; nevertheless, the findings make a case for the use of asset-based pedagogies in developmental education classes. The participants leveraged skills and past experiences to develop effective coping strategies. How can mushfake Discourses be leveraged for students in developmental education? Asset-based approaches would help instructors and students build on skills while developing coping strategies to navigate new literacy tasks.

Recommendations for Developmental Education

Academic coaching might be particularly beneficial when paired with online courses because it provides a bridge between instructors and students when interactions occur remotely. In digital contexts, deciphering expectations may feel even more mysterious, and academic coaches are best positioned to elucidate expectations. This coaching can occur face-to-face, as seen in this study, but also remotely by phone. Participants appreciated having someone who checked in with them by phone and whom they could call when they felt stuck. Most of the participants had a preference for videos because of the added context clues. In designing supports for linguistically diverse students, programs should consider the benefits of video conferencing over phone calls given that videos provide visual as well as audio input.

In addition, coaching should be proactive by checking in with students, monitoring student progress, and reaching out regularly without prompting. The nature of coaching may change over time, but the use of proactive and regular academic coaching

helped build relationships and made participants feel supported. For academic coaching to be most effective, it needs to be available when students are. For participants, having access to coaches as they worked on projects made the academic coaching more valuable.

For college courses, college reading assignments should be intentional. The reading strategies of the participants changed over time as they saw less value in the assigned readings. Similar findings have arisen in more traditional contexts (Hirano, 2012). In addition, the belief that only certain sections of assigned readings are actually pertinent is a common complaint among college students (Armstrong et al., 2016). For students from refugee backgrounds, and linguistically diverse students overall, the effort and time commitment of in-depth reading can be high. To support these students, instructors should be intentional about the readings they assign. In addition, they should be explicit about how the readings will be used.

Information literacy should be considered a foundational skill for college readers. As seen in these cases, students will turn to the internet for additional sources, even when they are purely supplemental. With this knowledge, instructors should equip students with the skills and strategies needed to evaluate the sources they are using. Alongside building these skills, instructors should consider allowing and even encouraging the use of outside resources. Participants sought outside sources to build schemata for understanding assigned texts and to find more accessible formats. Gone are the days when information traveled through curated channels of information, carefully validated within academic realms. Instead, students have access to infinite sources of information presented in a multitude of formats. By embracing this, instructors can also support

students in leveraging their linguistic and multimodal literacy resources. However, this must be coupled with guidance on critiquing information garnered through the internet.

Implications for Teaching Linguistically Diverse Students

Narratives around language learning and refugees often lean towards deficit identities (Uptin et al., 2016) that can be counterintuitive to learning and motivation for learning. Participants in this study often self-imposed English-only rules, essentially restricting their linguistic resources. These norms were developed through both past and present experiences. Instructional images of language learners and refugees impacted student engagement in the course (Harklau, 2000), including self-censorship (Kanno & Varghese, 2010), which can be seen in Fleur's experience at the community college.

The participants may have continued to feel like English learners, but they were already competent language users in a range of languages. How would teaching look different if we saw such students as language experts rather than limiting institutional definitions to English proficiency? Tommy, for example, used his metalinguistic awareness to make sense of academic English and seek out targeted support. Where he lacked expertise in English, he leveraged his understandings of how languages work more broadly.

Building on the influence of ideologies, the findings in this study highlighted the limits of equating language acquisition with a lack of knowledge. Similar to past research (Naidoo et al., 2018), this study revealed the variety of navigational strategies students used and the linguistic awareness that they were able to leverage to learn English and also learn in English. Participants engaged in advanced literacy strategies to navigate the program and demonstrated acute metacognitive awareness of the choices that they were

making. Participants also brought with them rich schemata developed across continents and careers. When their work was rejected because of punctuation and grammar, they responded with decreased engagement.

When working with students from refugee backgrounds, instructors should work towards understanding the influence of prior experiences and the ways that these inform a student's perceptions of their education and strategies that they adopt. All six students wanted to accelerate their progress. This was not driven by apathy toward learning but instead by personal and professional goals that they had held on to for years.

Recommendations for Teaching Linguistically Diverse Students

To begin, it is important that instructors build an awareness of monolingual norms and how they influence teaching and learning. Educators should remain cognizant that any interactions that students have within an academic context may influence language ideologies, just as Mustak felt censored by a tutor who suggested he learn English. Although instructors cannot control the academic environment, instructors of college-preparation-oriented courses, in particular, can use their courses as spaces to interrogate these experiences and help students develop greater agency. Asking students to write reflections on their college experiences throughout the semester can help instructors remain aware of the outside aspects that may influence a student's learning.

In addition, to balance supporting students' academic language acquisition while also validating the strengths of students, instructors should consider integrating competency-based approaches in the classroom that focus on feedback over final grades. This shift in focus makes each submission less high-stakes and can encourage the practice of revision.

Finally, asset-based pedagogies, and language leveraging more specifically, may help to combat deficit-perspectives around language. By framing students and language experts, their language expertise could be leveraged as a tool for learning English and content as well.

Implications and Recommendations for Research

Below are implications for research recommendations for future research based on the findings of this study.

Implications for Research

For participants in this study, the experience of forced migration informed how the choices they made around literacy. The diverse pathways engendered by forced migration further influenced the way that participants interpreted and responded to expectations. This suggests that research grouping students from refugee backgrounds in a broader population of linguistically diverse students fails to capture the full complexity of this student population.

Research on college readiness, particularly with a focus on students from refugee backgrounds, should be cognizant that English language proficiency is only one metric of academic proficiency. Participants often described their linguistic resources as limits and burdens. An overemphasis on language may fail to capture other strategies, skills, and behaviors that signal college readiness. The participants in this study showed acumen in adopting strategies to succeed and to cope with challenges when they arose. Future research in this area would be more fruitful if it captured the contextual nature of language and language use in academic settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings revealed that deciphering expectations was a central component of how participants chose and adapted strategies. Each new project entailed a distinct set of implicit expectations. Where scholars of disciplinary literacies have examined distinctions between expectations across disciplines in more structured school settings, more research is needed in online and competency-based formats. In particular, how are literacy expectations shaped in the absence of disciplinary boundaries?

There are several directions for research in developmental education. There is a need to better understand if and how students in developmental reading and writing courses use external literacy practices in navigating their coursework. Based on the finding about a dichotomy between what participants and graders valued in projects, future research should examine cultural influences on academic literacies such as cultural differences in understandings of arguments and how those beliefs inform practice.

Motivation also served an important role in the decisions that participants made. Future research should look more closely at the role of motivation in the pursuit of a postsecondary education among students from refugee backgrounds. And building on that, future research could examine how motivation is influenced by experiences of forced migration.

In PAIR, students did not interact with graders outside of receiving feedback. Therefore, this research was limited by the access to predominantly student perspectives. Given the prominence of the grader expectations in student framings of projects, future research should compare the perceived expectations of graders, coaches, and students to

build a better understanding of the extent to which expectations are commonly understood across stakeholders.

The findings from this study highlighted the importance of metacognitive skills, but it was unclear if and how those developed as a result of the program. Longitudinal studies would help clarify the role of metacognitive awareness in connected learning and competency-based programs. Participants in the study often talked about the format of the program as supportive of their learning, but it was outside the scope of the study to examine the role of the competency-based structure and the coupled learning supports. Research should also compare strictly competency-based programs with connected learning programs to better understand the role of academic support embedded in the connected learning design.

Two of the participants went to community colleges and dropped out before joining PAIR. Two more participants sought out college programs and quit before completing the ESL course sequence. Given that community colleges offer an affordable and accessible path into higher education, more research is needed on the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds in community colleges. This study found that deciphering expectations was an important strategy for participants, but this study focused on a unique college structure. Future research should consider how students from refugee backgrounds interpret and adapt to expectations within traditional college settings, particularly when they have more interactions with those who assign grades. Academic coaching and peer support emerged as valuable resources for the participants in this study, and more research is needed on the role of academic resources and help-

seeking for students from refugee backgrounds who are enrolled in community colleges and universities.

Due to the timeframe and timing of this study, all six participants were in the associate degree program. Future research should work with students from refugee backgrounds in bachelor's programs and more advanced degrees. Such research would further elucidate the long-term academic literacy development of students after forced migration.

Finally, this study asked how migration informed practices, but additional research is needed within countries of first asylum where the majority of refugees currently reside. The experiences with other American institutions provided valuable navigation capital to the participants. A growth of similar connected learning programs in countries of first asylum must be matched with research in these international programs. The participants in this study drew on their experiences in American institutions, including schools, community centers, and workplaces as they navigated the program. How would this experience be different for students who are using the same online program but living in different cultural contexts?

This study was situated within intersecting theories of literacies, languages, and social power hierarchies. Each alone was insufficient to fully capture these experiences, and perhaps even together fail to capture important perspectives. The literacies of the participants were both social and multimodal. Even though these theories informed the study from its outset, participants themselves pushed back on what counted as literacy, objecting to what counted as valuable. The beliefs shared by the participants were shaped by their communities of practice but also by larger social structures within which they

have grown up, been educated, and been moved around. The lives of refugees can be complex and can lead to multiple forms of marginalization as the result of language, culture, education, and resettlement into poverty. Still, each experience is unique. In the face of such complexity, perhaps no one theory is sufficient in framing the literacy practices of students from refugee backgrounds.

Conclusion

The stories presented in this dissertation go beyond a focal population and help to complicate both notions of linguistically diverse students and college readiness more broadly. There was an obvious appreciation of the academic support provided by PAIR, but the participants also showed a nuanced understanding of when and how to lean on these supports. In some sense, this indicates that the participants were ready for college. The stories outlined strategic college learning in many ways. Where readiness needed to be bolstered was in deciphering expectations, and yet, scholars of developmental education would argue that these are common obstacles in postsecondary education. Students from refugee backgrounds are indeed more susceptible to deficit-oriented labels because of language, socio-economic status, and past education but that does not necessarily mean that these students are deficient. Quite the contrary, the participants showed themselves to be quite strategic in their learning.

Furthermore, these participants were not unique in their struggles within college spaces. And yet, refugees are so often turned away from college pursuits and encouraged to find employment. If these participants shared similar struggles faced by many college students, why are they more likely to be blamed for their inability to get ahead? They showed tenacious dedication to the pursuit of a college degree. They portrayed these

credentials as a means of providing for themselves, their families, and their communities. This case study offers a glimpse into the possibilities that arise when the community supports these aspirations. Yet, programs like PAIR are rare, particularly in the U.S.

Often the participants were held up by discrete language features of their speaking and writing. They labeled themselves and assessed their own strengths as students through a lens of language as an obstacle. If these participants brought with them such rich experiences and diverse strategies for learning new information, why did they feel so restricted by language? Perhaps it is the result of being told repeatedly that their work did not matter if the commas were not in the right place. This leads to a broader question about what other strengths hid beneath imperfect English of students. What additional burdens to we place on students when we label them English learners?

Connected learning approaches provided solutions to the recurring obstacles that students encountered when pursuing a college degree. So often these obstacles were framed as language requirements. Students opted out when they were repeatedly told their language was problematic. Others found that their priorities conflicted with course offerings and the financial burden of attending college. How can community colleges, a common gateway to higher education, learn from these approaches and open their doors even wider to the students in their communities?

These new perspectives begin to complicate the experiences and resources that students from refugee backgrounds bring with them. Too often refugees are defined in deficit terms and these narratives are then used to limit their movement geographically, academically, and professionally. Narratives that frame refugees as low-skilled, as burdens, as less than human exacerbate narratives of refugees as not college material

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while doing nothing to fix the policies that restrict college access. These narratives strengthen perspectives of refugees as lacking basic skills. Far from illiterate and undereducated, the participants showed a nuanced understanding of the rules and norms that shaped their interactions within the program. Students from refugee backgrounds have mastered the process of starting over, particularly those who, like the participants in this study, resettled during adolescence and adulthood. Perhaps this provides them with an acute awareness of the unspoken rules they encounter with each transition. Without knowing the right combinations of words and dispositions, the participants nevertheless showed that they had numerous skills as well as the knowledge needed to navigate the unknown and to do so successfully. To accept these counter-narratives is to recognize literacy as not only reading and writing, but adapting, strategizing, and surviving.

APPENDIX SECTION

Interview Protocols: Participants

Participant Interview One

Where are you from?
How long have you been in the US?
What level of education did you have before coming to the US?

Background **(**Adapted from the Cultural Practices of Literacy Study by Purcell-Gates, 2007)
1. Tell me about your experiences in school up until now.
    - Where did you go to school? (primary, secondary, postsecondary, etc…)
    - What languages did you use while in school?
    - What language did you first learn to read in?
    - What language did you first learn to write in?
    - Were any other languages important for you as a student? When, why?
    - Was there anyone who supported your learning? Your language learning?
2. What do you remember about learning to read and write? Can you tell me a story about when you were learning to read and write?
3. When did you first start learning English? Who helped you learn? How did you learn? Why did you first decide to learn English?
4. When you were younger, what kinds of things did people in your family/community read?
    - Where was reading done? (work, home, school, place of worship, etc…)
    - Why was the reading done? (shopping, work, pleasure, education, etc…)
    - Who do you remember reading? (mother, father, sibling, neighbor, self, etc...)
    - What languages did they read in?
5. When you were younger, what kinds of things did people in your family/community write?
    - Where were these things written? (work, home, school, place of worship, etc…)
    - Why were they written? (shopping, work, pleasure, education, etc…)
    - Who do you remember writing? (mother, father, sibling, neighbor, self, etc...)
    - What languages did they write in?
6. Let's talk about your life now. Do you read outside of school work? Why/why not?
    - What do you read? (fun, work, with family) How often? In what language?
    - What do you write outside of school work? How often? For what purpose?

Current Program
1. Where are you in the program right now?
   - What are you studying?
2. Why did you choose this program? What factors did you consider?
3. How do you feel about the program?
   - In what areas do you feel comfortable with? In what areas do you think you will need to work harder on?
   - Do you have any concerns about the assignments you are expected to do?
   - How many times do you usually submit a project? What is the most common reason it is sent back?
4. Tell me about a project that you have found particularly interesting in this program. What did you do when you had a problem with this project? Who do you ask when you have problems?
   - Where/When did you learn to do that? Was there anyone who helped you?
5. Tell me about a project that you have found particularly difficult in this program. What strategies did you use to do the project?
   - Where/When did you learn to do that? Was there anyone who helped you?
6. Earlier, you told me that you used to do __X__, how does relate/influence your work in this program? Have you learned anything in the past that has helped you here?
7. How do you think this program is different from your past learning experiences?
   - How are interactions with your peers different from past learning? How are interactions with your teachers and coaches different?
8. How do you think you have changed as a student while in this program? Has your English changed? How? Has your studying/writing/reading changed? How?
   i. How has your English changed?
9. What experiences have influenced your progress in the program? How has migration played a role? How are is learning in the United States different from past experiences? Can you give examples?

Is there anything else that I missed that you want to share?

Metaphors: (Offer to let them take this home)
1. Can you finish the following sentence for me: "Academic reading is like…"
   - Why or how?
2. Can you finish the following sentence for me: "Academic writing is like…"
   - Why or how?

Reminder, ask for a pseudonym
For our final interview, please bring an example of a project that you are currently working on. Please choose a project that requires reading, writing, or a combination of both.

Participant Interview Two

Studying **(**Adapted from Leki, 2007)
1. When you are studying, what does that look like? What do you do when you study?
2. When you have problems with a project what do you do to solve them? Who do you ask for help?
3. When you need more information about something, where do you look for it? What kind of sources?
4. In the last interview, you told me that you used to do __X__, how does relate/influence your work in this program?
   i. You told me in our last meeting that you would get beat for not doing your homework. How does this influence how you study now?
5. Last time you told me that you were really interested in _____. Can you search for more information on that topic and tell me about the choices that you make?
6. I have heard you all talk about Blue and Purple projects. What does that mean?

Reading **(**Adapted from Leki, 2007)
7. Describe the reading you do for this program.
   - How did you decide what to read for each project?
   - How much time do you spend reading for school (daily/weekly)?
   - How is reading for this program similar to or different from other reading you do?
   - Where do you read? (Online/Printed). What do you do while you are reading?
9. How do you feel about the amount of reading?
10. How important is reading to do well on projects?
11. If there is something in the reading that you don't understand well, what do you do about it?
    a. Do you ever ask for help with reading? If so, who do you ask? When do you decide to ask?
12. What do you usually do when you read for school? (read every word, look up every unknown word, just skim, take notes, etc.)
13. Has your reading changed since you began the program? If so, how? Why do you think you have made these changes?
14. In the last interview, you told me that you used to do __X__, how does relate/influence your work in this program?
15. How is reading online different from reading printed text like books?

Writing **(**Adapted from Leki, 2007)
13. Describe the writing that you do for this program.
    - How is writing in this program similar to or different from other writing you do?
    - How much time do you spend writing for school (daily/weekly)?
14. How do you feel about the amount of writing?

15. How important is writing to do well on projects?
16. If you have trouble writing, what do you do to solve these problems? Who do you ask for help?
17. What do you usually do when you write for school? (outline, make notes, etc.)
18. In the last interview, you told me that you used to do __X__, how does relate/influence your work in this program?

Collaborative artifact analysis (Adapted from Retrospective Metaphor Interviews by Armstrong, 2015). For the questions below, participants will be asked to bring reading and writing assignments they want to focus on during the interview.
1. Tell me about this project. Why did you choose this one to share?
    a. How did you do it? Who did you do it with?
    b. What is something that you read for this? (Look it up if you can). What is something that you had to create for this?
    c. What, if any, extra information did you need? Where did you search for it? (online? Library, etc…)
    d. What did you need to learn for this project? How did you learn those things?
    e. What did you already know that helped you on this project?
    f. Have you had any experiences that helped you do this? If so, what are some examples?
2. Last time we met, you said "academic reading is like…" please tell me about the project that you brought and tell me whether that happens.
3. How was the reading you did for this different from other types of reading? Do you think this was academic reading? Why or why not. Please give some examples.
4. Last time we met, you said "academic writing is like…" is there any place in your project where that happens?
5. Is your work on this project an example of academic writing? Why or why not? Please give some specific examples.
6. In the last interview, you told me that you used to do __X__, how does relate/influence your work in this program?

Concluding thoughts
19. You've told me about your story over the last two interviews. Can you tell me about how you think that your experiences around migration have affected your education in this program?
    ▪ How has it been a challenge?
    ▪ How has it been a resource?
    ▪ Were there any gaps in your education? If so, how did you learn during these time?
20. Is there anything that you would like to add that we have not discussed?

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol: Academic Coaches

1. Tell me about the program here. What does the curriculum look like? What are these projects?
   - How is this program unique? How do you think this impacts the students? What is expected in the program?
   - What, in your opinion, do students need to be successful? Where do the supports they draw on serve them and where do they not?
2. What changes have you seen in *the student's* work? What do you attribute that to?
3. What strategies does *the student* use? How has this changed over time?
4. Who do you see *them* relying on for the program? How do you think that your role has helped the student progress?
5. Where, if at all, do *they* struggle and how do *they* solve problems?
6. How do the students navigate the online format? What do you think they are reading online for their projects?
7. What languages are they using? (with coaches, peers, reading/writing)

Add in questions particular to each student.

APPENDIX C

Assignments and Descriptions

Assignment	Description	Mentioned by
Art Presentation	Create a PowerPoint describing provided paintings and comparing two paintings. Complete a Cornell Note-Taking worksheet using videos about paintings.	Yannick
Body Mass Index	Calculate BMIs.	Dan
Budget	Create a budget with a spreadsheet and written description. Students had two options, either create a travel budget or a conference budget.	Yannick
Ethos, Pathos, Logos	Create PowerPoint presentation. Find, analyze and explain ethos, pathos, and logos in the media.	Fleur Mustak
Genetically Modified Organisms	Read different positions on GMOs. Write an argument in the form of an Op-Ed on whether or not GMOs are harmful.	Dan Fleur Tommy Yannick
Healthcare	Write a letter to an aunt explaining the differences between Medicare, Medicaid, and Obamacare. Write office memo.	Fleur
Marketing	Write an essay that includes pictures, designs, and statistics. Invent a new product and the marketing for it. Done as a team.	Bahi
Personal Letters	Write a letter describing your reasons for pursuing a college degree. Turned in prior to beginning the program.	Anas (academic coach)
Psychology	Watch videos and read articles. Create a video talking about the notion of right and wrong.	Tommy
The Fed	Read articles and write essay about the Fed.	Dan
Torture	Read texts on torture, compare and contrast texts, write an essay.	Mustak

Note. Descriptions were derived from conversations with coaches and participants and do not reflect the descriptions provided in project prompts.

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