DIGITAL MULTIMODAL COMPOSING WITH YOUTH FROM REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT BACKGROUNDS IN A METRO VANCOUVER SECONDARY SCHOOL

by

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submitted by Amir Michalovich in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Language and Literacy Education

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Abstract

Canadian schools welcome increasing numbers of emergent multilingual newcomer youth. However, studies examining graduation data have shown that schools have not been very successful in keeping youth from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds invested in school learning. There is thus an urgent need to understand how these youth can be better supported in Canadian schools to achieve their potential. This qualitative, multi-year, ethnographic case-study research addresses this need, involving nine emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers from refugee and immigrant backgrounds in a Metro Vancouver secondary school. The study explored possibilities for language and literacy learning among these youth through in-school digital multimodal composing (DMC), the use of digital tools to make meaning with multiple modes (e.g., languages, visuals, gestures). Youth inquired, and later shared, about issues of interest and concern to them in DMC activities, specifically video productions, that I facilitated during class time in popular new media genres (e.g., reaction videos, video podcasts). The activities were designed with a role-play-based, dramaturgical pedagogy, and were anchored in curriculum goals. Reflective thematic analysis of text, audio, and video data collected from youth and their teachers was conducted inductively in ATLAS.ti, with a multimodal ethnographic approach. Findings revealed three patterns presented in three manuscripts: (1) a focus on the role-play-based, dramaturgical pedagogy of the project as a case showed how this pedagogical structuring of DMC processes facilitated the nine newcomer students’ investment in classroom learning; (2) a focus on the reaction videos production as a case showed how six youth from refugee backgrounds took ownership of how they were to be perceived by their classmates and teachers; and (3) a focus, as a case, on one emergent
multilingual refugee-background learner with significantly interrupted schooling who had come late to literacy, showed how DMC processes helped him overcome the language barrier, showcase English proficiency, and counter deficit perceptions. The study helps researchers, educators, and teacher-educators better understand how DMC can foster these youth’s investment in school learning.
Lay Summary

In this multi-year study, I explored possibilities for language and literacy learning through in-school, role-play-based video production in popular new media genres (e.g., reaction videos, video podcasts) with nine emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers from refugee and immigrant backgrounds in a Metro Vancouver secondary school. Students playfully assumed different filmmaker roles and inquired about issues of interest to them. I recorded our interactions and my conversations with students and their teachers about their experiences. I found that students meaningfully invested in their video productions to make visible who they wanted to become and to gain social and economic advancement. They playfully presented and situated themselves anew in storylines that troubled common deficit narratives, highlighting themselves as creative and knowledgeable human beings and bringing assets and strengths that could too easily have been overlooked in print-based or language-dominant schoolwork. The study offers insights for language and literacy researchers, teachers, and teacher educators.
Preface

This dissertation is manuscript-based (an acceptable format at the University of British Columbia). As a manuscript-style dissertation, the reader may encounter some repetition between Chapter 2, which extensively unpacks the Literature review, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology, and the three manuscripts in Chapters 3-5. However, I have tried to minimize repetition as much as possible while still reminding the reader about key information relating to the review of literature, the theoretical framing, the methodological aspects, and the context of the study.

The dissertation comprises original work that I have written, with Chapter 4 being a co-authored research article in which I was the lead author, as explained below.


A version of Chapter 3 was published in May 2023 as a single-authored research article in the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*: Michalovich, A. (2023). The social drama of digital multimodal composing: A case study with emergent bi/multilingual newcomer students. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 66(6), 334–343. [https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1286](https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1286).
Chapter 4 was published in 2022 in the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*:
Michalovich, A., Kendrick, M., & Early, M. (2022). Youth from refugee backgrounds positioning their identities through reaction videos. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 1-16. [https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2022.2086556](https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2022.2086556). I led the writing of this article, which was co-authored with my co-supervisors, Dr. Maureen Kendrick and Dr. Margaret Early. As the lead author, I conceived the idea, collected the data, conducted the analysis, and wrote and revised the majority of the article (about 70%). My co-authors contributed to data analysis and the writing and revising of the article (each about 15%). I made slight modifications to the original published manuscript, mostly to avoid repetition.

A version of Chapter 5 is currently under review (first round) as a single-authored research article.

All research contained in this dissertation was approved by the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Certificate Number: H17-01074). Chapter 5 also draws on data collected in a pilot study I conducted in 2019 as part of the course LLED 558 taught by Dr. Maureen Kendrick (Literacy and Multimodality); the pilot study conducted as part of that course was approved by the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Certificate Number: H08-01614).
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List of Abbreviations

BREB – Behavioural Research Ethics Board
DMC – Digital Multimodal Composing
ELL – English Language Learner/Learning
SIFE – Students with Interrupted Formal Education
UBC – University of British Columbia
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To begin, I would like to acknowledge that the research study reported on in this dissertation was conducted on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the kʷikʷəƛ̓əm (Kwikwetlem), səl̓ilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), ʔic̓əy̓ (Katzie), q̓ʷa:n̓ƛ̓’ən̓ (Kwantlen), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), and Stó:lō (Sto:lo) Peoples. These spaces have long been important sites of learning, where culture, history, and tradition have been practiced and passed down through generations. As a learner, teacher, and researcher, I recognize the privilege and obligation I have to support and contribute to the ongoing legacy of learning in these lands, including the work of decolonization and reconciliation. I am honored and humbled to have had the opportunity to learn, research, live, and create on these lands.

Conducting a doctoral research project spanning almost five years is a significant accomplishment, and I could not have initiated or completed it successfully without various forms of invaluable support. My heartiest thanks and appreciation go to my supervisors, Dr. Maureen Kendrick and Dr. Margaret Early, who have helped me pave the way for the success of this journey from day one. Your wise guidance, encouragement, and unwavering support through the complexities of academic spaces, discourses, and practices have made this endeavor possible in a most fundamental and paramount way. I am also greatly indebted to Dr. Bonny Norton, for the many thoughtful and pivotal comments and suggestions you have given me throughout this journey.

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And to Hila, the bright, shining, and cheerful star of my days and nights, my partner in this winding path of life, thank you for the love and grace you have and continue to radiate through the challenges, the joys, and the meanings of being.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation in loving memory of my grandparents, whose fortitude, courage, and love shined through their spoken and unspoken experiences: Mendel Michalovich, Chava Michalovich, Malka Barzilay, and Alexander Barzilay.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 A Hopeful Case Study

One could look at hope as a sort of ‘anchor,’ cast from a stifled, desperate existence, toward a better, freer future. Toward a reality that does not yet exist, which is made up mostly of wishes. Of imagination. When the anchor is cast, it takes hold of the future, and human beings—sometimes an entire society—begin to pull themselves toward it.

The above quote from author David Grossman’s speech (2020) at the opening of the 2020 Frankfurt Book Fair at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, struck a chord with me as I was analyzing data for this qualitative, ethnographic case-study research, spanning more than a year of in-school video production, in-person and online (due to COVID). The study explored possibilities for language and literacy learning through in-school digital multimodal composing (DMC), the use of digital tools to make meaning with multiple modes (e.g., languages, visuals, gestures; Hafner, 2019), among nine emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers from refugee and immigrant backgrounds in a Metro Vancouver secondary school. The quote captured for me an essence of what I was feeling while observing the students’ tenacity as they employed the DMC processes of video production at school to cast anchors, as described in the quote, to their imagined future identities: a sense of hope.

In the following sections of this chapter, I explain my use of terminology for describing participants in the study, along with a note of caution regarding that terminology. I then describe the study, including its goals and research questions. The chapter concludes with an overview of the dissertation.
1.2 What's in a Label: A Note of Caution

The issue of labels and the damage they tend to bring with them (Tuck, 2009) is one that I grappled with throughout this research project in numerous instances. Labels abound in research, including language and literacy education research. Labels range from the description of learners (e.g., ELL/English language learners) to entire areas of study (e.g., second language education). These labels carry stereotypical meanings that can stick to students and may be difficult to remove. The students and teachers I met in this project expressed this in many ways, especially regarding their labelling as ELLs or as refugees. Gunderson (2021, p. 6) cogently argued that:

Acronyms such as ELL, EL, ESL, and EAL represent a category that is unidimensional, defined by the degree to which individuals vary from “normal” English developmental levels as measured by some test. The diversity of those labeled ESL is misrepresented; it is a deficit label that has negative consequences for learners that often last for years.

It is not uncommon to find such labels in deficit-oriented educational approaches that focus mostly on remediation (Emert, 2013; Shapiro et al., 2018). Deficit-oriented approaches de-emphasize the agency, resilience, and the varied social, cultural, semiotic, and intellectual resources that students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds have, i.e., their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 2005).

In contrast, educators and education researchers in Canada and beyond (Chow & Cummins, 2003; Gagné et al., 2017; Moll et al., 2005; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Shapiro et al., 2018; Stewart & Martin, 2018; Tuck, 2009; Warriner et al., 2020) have advocated for asset-based and culturally responsive pedagogies. These pedagogies focus less on what emergent multilingual learners lack (e.g., proficiency in an additional language); rather, they try to access and mobilize
the many intellectual, cultural, social, linguistic, and communicative assets that they bring with them. These include learners’ strengths and coping skills (e.g., perseverance, resilience), as well as their interests and desires around who they want to become (their imagined identities) and the communities to which they hope to belong (their imagined communities) (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2013; Norton & Pavlenko, 2019). These approaches can be understood as desire-centred, in that they account “for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities” (Tuck, 2009, p. 417).

In accordance with an asset-based approach, I subscribe to the notion that students who are at risk of underachievement in school are considered “disadvantaged” only insofar as the school does not recognize their background experiences as valuable and build on them (Cummins, 2014). It is for this reason that I employ the term emergent multilinguals in this project (e.g., instead of second/additional language learners), to emphasize language and literacy learners’ linguistic repertoire as an asset (García, 2009). Similar to Cummins and Early (2015), I sometimes use the term ELL as it is linked with British Columbia policies, programs, and standards, but I remain concerned about the damage it has and may continue to inflict on students.

Furthermore, I use terms such as youth from refugee and immigrant backgrounds throughout this dissertation to acknowledge that the refugee or immigrant condition is “typically—and ideally—a short-term label rather than a permanent identity” (Shapiro et al., 2018, p. 24). While directing the reader to associate these students’ different migration trajectories with their backgrounds rather than with their present selves, I use these terms to focus on the different kinds of educational opportunities and challenges that these youth may experience in school settings due to their backgrounds, as detailed in the body of the dissertation.
In Chapter 4 I use the term *emergent multilingual adolescent SIFE from refugee backgrounds* (emergent multilingual adolescent students from refugee backgrounds with interrupted formal education) to signal a more specific, though still diverse group of students whose experiences in school settings may be different than those of youth from immigrant or refugee backgrounds who have not had their schooling interrupted or did not first learn to read and write as adolescents (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017). Critical consideration of labels and the potential damage they might cause is an ongoing endeavour, which may ultimately render the terms I used here as obsolete in future readings. Yet even if they become obsolete, it is my hope that these labels do not sully the insights I have been able to report on from this project, including many heartening and encouraging insights.

1.3 **Study Description, Goals, and Research Questions**

As Canada sets new immigration records and is increasingly committing to refugee resettlement (Cameron & Labman, 2022; D’Andrea, 2023; Statistics Canada, 2022), there is a growing urgency to understand how newcomers from socio-economically marginalized and refugee backgrounds can be better supported to invest in school learning and achieve their potential. Tracking studies examining graduation data in Canada and the U.S found that newcomer youth from refugee backgrounds, low socio-economic status (SES), or marginalized communities tended to leave schools before graduation more than other student populations (e.g., Gunderson, 2007; Potochnick, 2018; Toohey & Derwing, 2008). Various reasons might explain this: youth from immigrant backgrounds need to learn in a new language, catch up academically with their peers, manage cultural differences, navigate school systems, and cope with discrimination and racism (Cummins, 2021; e.g., Cummins et al., 2012, 2019; DeCapua et al., 2009; Duff, 2015; Mendenhall et al., 2017). If they have limited financial resources, some of
their responsibilities may include caring for siblings and earning money to help support themselves and their families. Youth from refugee backgrounds may face additional difficulties that stem from their forced migration, such as trauma from war, loss of family members, negative and racist stereotypes, and interrupted education. In addition, as explained in the previous section, deficit-oriented educational approaches may be present in schools, ignoring the many assets and strengths these youth bring with them, including valuable real-world experiences, extensive social and cultural knowledge, and diverse communicative and intellectual competencies. All of these aspects may not be well-understood or taken into account in resource allocation by schools in youth’s settlement context and make youth feel unsafe, unsupported, or altogether disengaged (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; Gagné et al., 2018; Malkki, 1996; Shapiro et al., 2018). Whether youth and their families are government-sponsored or privately-sponsored refugees may also factor in to the amount of initial support they receive in settlement processes (Gagné et al., 2018). Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected them, limiting access to much-needed community and school supports (Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network, 2020).

This qualitative ethnographic case-study research of a long-term video project involving nine emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers from refugee and immigrant backgrounds in a Metro Vancouver secondary school is addressing the youth’s language and literacy needs and challenges, but also their intellectual, cultural, and communicative resources. As a participant observer immersed in the field (following a year of volunteer work in the school), I situated the youth as co-investigators of their own lives, inviting them to inquire—and later share—about issues of interest and concern to them through designing videos in popular new media genres (e.g., reaction videos, video podcasts) during class time, and aligned with the BC New Media 10
Curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2018). From January 2020 to March 2021, I facilitated video-making projects among the youth with a role-play-based, dramaturgical pedagogy, to explore what emerged as the following research questions:

1) What are the possibilities afforded by dramaturgically-structured DMC processes for emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students' investment in classroom learning?

2) How do youth from refugee backgrounds position their identities through design choices in their reaction videos produced at school in their settlement context?

3) What are the affordances of in-school video production for emergent multilingual SIFE from refugee backgrounds?

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation

As explained in the Preface, this is a manuscript-based dissertation, an acceptable format at UBC. As such, the reader may come across some repetition between Chapter 2 and the manuscripts in Chapters 3-5. While I have tried to minimize this repetition as much as possible, within each chapter I made sure to remind the reader about relevant information related to the literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, and context of the study, as appropriate for each chapter.

Chapter 2 provides a broad background to this research study. It presents an in-depth review of literature on digital multimodal composing in language and literacy education research, particularly among emergent multilingual learners. The literature review then examines the challenges and limitations that have been reported on in previous research on digital multimodal composing, which have helped identify the research gaps that the current study aims to address. Those gaps include in-school digital multimodal composing processes, particularly
with youth from refugee backgrounds. Chapter 2 also provides a broad introduction to the theoretical framework employed in this research, followed by an extensive description of the methodology, from the design of the study to its limitations. As a manuscript-style dissertation, this dissertation is structured in such a way that aspects pertaining to this background are recursively revisited, deepened, extended, and refined in each of the manuscripts in Chapters 3-5, in accordance with the specific research question of each manuscript.

Chapter 3, the first of the results chapters, explores the possibilities afforded by the dramaturgical pedagogical approach to DMC, as a case, for the nine emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers' investment in classroom learning. It encompasses all four DMC projects and all the nine focal participating students in the study, youth from both refugee and immigrant backgrounds. The chapter addresses the following research question: What are the possibilities afforded by dramaturgically-structured DMC processes for emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students' investment in classroom learning? This chapter is currently under review (second round) as a single-authored research article in the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*.

Chapter 4 explores how six youth from refugee backgrounds positioned their identities through their design choices in composing reaction videos at school in their settlement context. The chapter deepens the inquiry into a particular group of participants and a specific video production as a case, addressing the following research question: How do youth from refugee backgrounds position their identities through design choices in their reaction videos produced at school in their settlement context? A version of this chapter was published as a research article in 2022 in the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*. I led the writing of this article with my co-supervisors as co-authors, Dr. Maureen Kendrick and Dr. Margaret Early. As explained in
the Preface, I conceived the research idea, collected and analyzed the data, and composed and revised the majority of the article, which represents about 70% of the final manuscript.

Chapter 5, the last results chapter, focusing on one emergent multilingual adolescent student with refugee experiences as a case, explores the affordances of video production (across all projects), as a type of DMC, for adolescent learners from refugee backgrounds who come late to literacy, students who have had their schooling significantly interrupted (SIFE), and are at a beginning level of proficiency in the language of schooling. The chapter addresses the following research question: What are the affordances of in-school video production for emergent multilingual SIFE from refugee backgrounds? As indicated in the Preface, a version this chapter is currently under review (first round) as a single-authored research article in the *Canadian Modern Language Review*.

Chapter 6 provides an integrated summary of the findings of the study. It specifies how the study has met the research goals and questions, revisits the study’s strengths and limitations, provides suggestions for future research, and highlights the significance and implications of the study for educators and teacher educators.
Chapter 2: Literature review, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Digital Multimodal Composing in Language and Literacy Education

The past few decades, especially since the beginning of the 21st century, have seen a dramatic rise in the availability, accessibility, and sophistication of digital tools for the consumption, creation, and dissemination of information in language as well in audio and visual modes of meaning making (Kalantzis et al., 2016; Leander et al., 2010; Pandya & Mills, 2019). Some scholars (e.g., Kress, 2003; Mitchell, 1995) have associated these changes with what they called a “turn” (pictorial/visual, or multimodal turn), a shift in the consumption and production of information from primarily texts in language and print form to the increasing dominance of pictorial and audio information in increasingly digital formats (e.g., podcasts, YouTube videos, social media networks). These changes have led to a rethinking of what it means to write in the 21st century (Kalantzis et al., 2016; Lotherington & Jenson, 2011; Siegel, 2006), from a sole focus on composing in written language to a broader focus on composing, often digitally, in multiple modes (e.g., languages, visuals, sounds, gestures).

In their landmark publication from 1996, the New London Group already envisioned a new telos for language and literacy education to foster learners as agentive and creative designers who can strategically, thoughtfully, and critically harness the vast and abundant communicative capabilities afforded by multiple modes of meaning making combined with their diverse social, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to thrive in increasingly digitally-mediated environments crossing national and cultural boundaries (New London Group, 1996). Such an education would involve development of media literacy among learners, i.e., the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce multimodal media (Aufderheide, 1993). It would also
involve digital literacy, which can be understood as grasping the practical applications of digital tools (doing), the various meanings that can be made through multimodal texts (meaning), the ways in which digital tools can facilitate social connections (relating), how perspectives and values may transform or be transformed by digital spaces (thinking), and the means by which digital tools can be used to establish and maintain identities (being) (Jones & Hafner, 2021). Reimagining language and literacy education in this way would be essential if learners are to equitably advance their social power and mobility and participate meaningfully and knowledgeably in civic and political processes both locally and globally (Serafini & Gee, 2017).

One of the key practices associated with such educational endeavors is DMC, a term that describes activities involving the use of digital tools to design multimodal representations with different modes of meaning making (Hafner, 2015, 2019). An extensive body of literature has emerged in recent decades that has documented the various affordances of DMC, including for adolescent learners in school settings (Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2020). Affordances can be understood as possibilities for action that people perceive selectively as they interact with the properties of objects in given situations (Gibson, 1977). For example, video editing software (as an object) is primarily designed for videographers (from beginners to professionals) to edit their videos; it has many properties designed to support such projects. But the software can also be harnessed as a pedagogical tool for language learning; as this study shows, students can edit their recorded voiceover text to create a fluent speech that they might not manage to produce otherwise. Possibilities such as this example of a pedagogical use of video editing software cannot be fully accounted for or predicted by simply listing the properties of objects (e.g., the features of the editing software), since these possibilities emerge when people perceive some
properties of objects as valuable and harness them, often creatively, for their own purposes in specific situations (Barton & Lee, 2013).

Studies have shown how DMC, whether this specific term is used or a similar one (e.g., digital media production), may enable adolescent learners several key affordances. First, learners may become more engaged in learning through DMC as it provides multiple ways to explore, represent, and communicate topics from across the curriculum and beyond it (Smith, 2018, 2019b) and anchors the composing process to real-world, authentic audiences (e.g., Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Goodman, 2010; Mills, 2008; Pandya & Low, 2020).

DMC further allows adolescent learners to express themselves and their ineffable experiences more effectively using a variety of extra-linguistic concrete representations (e.g., Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Kinloch, 2009; Rogers et al., 2010; Smith & Dalton, 2016; Vasudevan, 2006). It is a fruitful ground for developing their identities as competent authors, composers of multimodal texts, and designers, and for establishing their own expert voices (e.g., Hull & Katz, 2006; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Vasudevan, Schultz, et al., 2010). DMC may also help adolescents learn to effectively collaborate with each other as they divide different composing tasks among team-members and meaningfully depend on each other (e.g., Bruce, 2019; Chávez & Soep, 2005; Goodman, 2003, 2018; Smith, 2019a; Vasudevan & Riina-Ferrie, 2019). Lastly, DMC allows learners to harness the communicative potency of multimodal representations to inquire critically about different social, cultural, economic and political issues for the purpose of promoting social change (e.g., DeJaynes & Curmi-Hall, 2019; Goodman, 2018; Mirra & Garcia, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2017).
2.1.2 DMC Among Emergent Multilingual Learners

Studies of DMC have also shown its affordances for emergent multilingual learners of additional languages. Smith et al. (2020), in their systematic review of 70 studies of DMC with emergent bilingual adolescent students, found that identity expression was particularly prevalent as an affordance of DMC among these learners, as DMC projects helped students express and develop their cultural and linguistic identities, share their voices, develop counter narratives, and claim a sense of agency over their learning, lives, and selves (e.g., Danzak, 2011; Goulah, 2017; Honeyford, 2014; Hughes & Morrison, 2014; Skerrett & Bomer, 2013). DMC as a form of writing enabled these learners to powerfully represent and communicate their ideas as well as multiple national and cultural identities through multiple modes of meaning making (e.g., through songs, images), expressing and developing their transnational identities in the classroom.

Another key affordance identified in the review was the reshaping of the classroom into a space for challenging ideologies and for promoting social justice (e.g., Bell et al., 2011; De los Ríos, 2018a; Heath, 1996; Honeyford, 2013; Skerrett & Bomer, 2013; Toohey et al., 2012). Since DMC involved authentic audiences, real-world discourses inevitably entered the classroom space, often allowing for empowering discussions of social justice issues, building the classroom community, connecting with other communities, and challenging norms (e.g., around use of languages and their marginalization).

Importantly, DMC also appeared to hold promise for facilitating students’ language learning and expansion of their linguistic repertoire (e.g., through enhancement and enrichment of language-learning tasks with media-based practices), including first and additional languages (e.g., De los Ríos, 2018; Ho et al., 2011; Kim, 2018; Li & Akoto, 2021). Other studies have indicated how DMC can develop increased awareness of the affordances of particular modes and
representations for communicating certain meanings (e.g., Callow, 2006; DeJaynes, 2015; Nelson, 2006; Shin et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2021). Hafner and Miller (2018), summarizing Belcher (2017), further claimed that DMC can facilitate genre awareness through the conscious use of various conventions, characteristics, settings, and styles, and that DMC can encourage independent use of language, contributing to students’ autonomy as learners.

2.1.3 Challenges, Limitations, and Research Gaps Relating to DMC

Importantly, as Hull (2003) suggested, it is crucial to avoid romanticizing DMC in classrooms. Various studies have indicated potential challenges and limitations associated with DMC. First, studies have raised concerns around the amount of resources required for such projects (Smith et al., 2017; Smythe et al., 2016; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010; Vandommele et al., 2017), both in terms of technologies, equipment, cognitive effort (e.g., around choosing appropriate modes; Smith et al., 2022), just-in-time support, but also classroom time for such time-intensive projects. All of these mark the broader requirements posed by DMC for human, social, and economic capital so that learners may reap its benefits (Warschauer, 2017).

Insufficient professional development for teachers in DMC (e.g., Kessler, 2007; Sadik, 2008; Tan & McWilliam, 2009; Yi & Angay-Crowder, 2016) is a crucial factor that is often mentioned as a potential barrier for making the affordances of DMC possible. Challenges around navigating the choice and freedom expected in DMC projects and various constraining pressures, such as educators’ need to retain control (Miller, 2013; Smith, 2014) of content, composing processes (e.g., more structure), and intended audiences, have also been documented. For example, researchers pointed out the need to allow students not only to compose in multiple modes of meaning making, but also structure and scaffold composing processes using extra-
linguistic modes, allowing additional entry points to the composing process beyond language-dominant practices such as written synopses and storyboarding (e.g., Gilje, 2010).

One of the sticky issues faced by teachers that studies have consistently reported on is situations where incongruency exists between the literature supporting DMC and the school and district policies that do not similarly value it, focusing on standardized assessment and/or high-stakes assessment of mostly print-language academic competencies (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011; Smythe et al., 2016; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010). These policies determine what literacy activities and projects teachers will value for promoting their students’ success in school. They can in turn be reflected in students’ perceptions of the value of DMC, which have been shown to affect their motivation to participate meaningfully in such projects (Hellmich et al., 2021). For example, Hellmich et al. (2021) showed, in a high school additional language classroom context, how emergent multilingual language learners perceived DMC as a distraction, unrelated to their learning of language. Warschauer (2017) has also warned, in the context of DMC in language learning classes, against over-emphasizing the technology as a learning objective at the expense of target language objectives. Lastly, researchers exploring collaboration processes in DMC have indicated how inequalities in knowing how to use and compose with digital tools, what Darvin (2018) calls (in)equities of use, constrain certain learners from equal status in DMC collaborative processes (Jocius, 2015; Smith, 2019a).

These challenges and limitations with DMC projects as part of classroom learning require researchers of DMC to carefully map different contexts of its use and among different populations. Although a significant body of literature exploring the benefits of DMC for emergent multilingual adolescent learners is growing, a critical gap exists in relation to in-school DMC processes (Smith et al., 2017), including varied collaborative processes among peers.
(Hellmich et al., 2021; Li & Akoto, 2021; Smith, 2019a), composing processes varying by project type and genre (Smith, 2014), and language learning processes through DMC for learners who have different levels of proficiency in the target language and/or different levels of academic literacy (Smith et al., 2021). A gap also exists in relation to DMC among learners from refugee backgrounds in school settings.

2.1.4 Affordances of DMC for Youth from Refugee Backgrounds

Studies, conducted mostly in out-of-school settings, have suggested that DMC might support youth from refugee backgrounds in uniquely important ways. A recent scoping review (Michalovich, 2021b) of 42 articles published on this topic indicated that DMC may enable youth from refugee backgrounds to take ownership of their representations across different contexts and different times. In the studies showing this pattern, youth engaged in DMC to change how they were perceived by others (e.g., Berman et al., 2001; Jang & Kang, 2019; Leurs, 2017; Robertson, Gifford, et al., 2016; Rogers et al., 2010), defying common negative stereotypes through which they were often represented in the media (e.g., as dangerous, or helpless). For example, Gilhooly and Lee (2014) studied three Karen brothers, aged 15 and 18, who had recently resettled in the US. The study demonstrated how these brothers expertly produced images and videos using multiple languages to depict the political struggle of the Karen people against the Burmese government, share their experiences in refugee camps, and give new life to traditional Karen songs. As youth captured or collected audio and/or visual recordings of different spaces (e.g., favorite beaches, virtual gaming spaces) and times (e.g., their past, present, or imagined future lives), they harnessed the “symbolic power” (Leurs et al., 2018, p. 442) afforded by DMC to inform researchers, educators, and community members about their lives in their homelands, refugee camps, or settlement contexts. It is difficult to overestimate the
importance of such an affordance for a population that has time and again been “stripped of the specificity of culture, place, and history” in media representations (Malkki, 1996, p. 12).

The review also indicated that DMC could support youth from refugee backgrounds in expanding, strengthening, or maintaining social networks. Through DMC, youth were shown to effectively collaborate with others, establishing crucial relationships in settlement contexts and beyond (e.g., Hepple et al., 2014; Karam, 2018; Omerbašić, 2015; Robertson, Wilding, et al., 2016; Vanek et al., 2018). They were shown to maintain and strengthen connections with family and friends from their home countries located at different places around the world, for example, through the editing of images and videos in which they shared their experiences. As an example, Karam (2018) demonstrated that including a video game created by a 14-year-old Iraqi boy who had recently resettled in the United States in his English Language Learning class improved not just his involvement in school and connections with classmates, but also led to new connections with multilingual gamers who watched and commented on his game-streaming videos on YouTube. DMC could thus support youth from refugee backgrounds in feeling that they could belong, feel safe, and build community in the settlement context.

Another affordance of DMC identified in the review was identity work. Youth from refugee backgrounds employed DMC to express and tell their life stories, gain different perspectives on their experiences, and recognize the impact of these experiences on their identities (e.g., De Leeuw & Rydin, 2007; Emert, 2013; Gifford & Wilding, 2013; Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Lems et al., 2016). Exploring their identities through media also provided these youth a chance to envision themselves as part of various professional and online communities. Composing digitally using multiple modes of meaning making helped them cultivate and develop positive self-images as capable individuals (e.g., Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). For
instance, Leurs et al. (2018) showed how 16- to 18-year-old boys and girls, many from the Middle East and resettled in the Netherlands, made video CVs in a transition class, where they articulated their interests, abilities, and career goals. In some cases, these video CVs helped the youth secure admission to college.

DMC was also shown to support youth from refugee backgrounds in making themselves visible to various audiences and engage with them in different ways (e.g., Due et al., 2016; Luchs & Miller, 2016; McBrien & Day, 2012; Rodriguez-Jimenez & Gifford, 2010; Wilding, 2012). Many studies found that the youth were eager to showcase their work to their families, friends, and peers, as well as to larger audiences (e.g., via online distribution). In some studies, presenting the youth's work to live audiences was integrated into the learning process and was seen as beneficial for their language and literacy development, social skills, sense of belonging, and sense of empowerment as advocates for issues they cared about (e.g., Emert, 2014a). For example, Rodriguez-Jimenez and Gifford (2010) conducted a participatory media study where they guided sixteen 14- to 18-year-old Afghan boys who had resettled in Australia two years prior in creating a short film about their settlement experiences. The film received positive and empowering reactions from the audience, including the vice principal and teachers. The authors noted that the film created a platform for the young men's voices to be heard amongst themselves, their families, and the wider Australian community in which they were building their lives.

Lastly, the review indicated that studies of DMC among youth from refugee backgrounds showed its capacity to support them in communication and learning efforts, including language learning. In a series of studies, Emert (2013, 2014a, 2014b) showed how challenging but highly-scaffolded DMC projects involving digital storytelling facilitated youth’s learning of language,
from writing screenplays to practicing conversational language with audience members. Many of the reviewed studies emphasized the importance of expression in modes beyond language as driving the youth's positive and educational involvement in DMC projects (e.g., Emert, 2013, 2014b; Hepple et al., 2014; Jang & Kang, 2019; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Kim et al., 2015; Nunn, 2010). The youth documented images and sounds of tangible objects to communicate their thoughts, often exploring abstract concepts (such as life changes) and emotions, including difficult aspects of their experiences, through these objects. The use of tangible objects and experiences to illustrate abstract concepts, in other words—metaphorical representations (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)—was a key aspect in the articles that explored the youth's multimodal media compositions in detail, and offered insights into their embodied lived experiences. For example, Robertson et al. (2016) showed how 15- to 16-year-old boys and girls from Iraq, Sudan, and Croatia, who had recently resettled in Australia, used concrete visual imagery (e.g., shadows, dark-lit spaces, and empty suburban neighborhoods) to express abstract emotions such as alienation, loneliness, and social isolation. In contrast, other 14- to 16-year-old boys and girls in the study from Iraq, Sudan, and Ethiopia conveyed their sense of belonging and security through brightly colored murals and objects from their home countries. The authors, who generated insightful discussions from these representations in dialogue with participants who made them, believed that these visual representations provided a deeper understanding of the settlement process and allowed for the representation of otherwise unstated experiences.

The review thus specified uniquely important affordances of DMC for youth from refugee backgrounds (Michalovich, 2021b). Fifty-seven percent of the studies were conducted from 2015 to 2019, showing that this is a growing area of study. All the studies employed qualitative methods and most of them involved the use of photography or video. However, only
14% of the reported studies were conducted in school, as part of the curriculum, and they rarely discussed composing processes. The current study contributes to bridging these gaps, as it explores processes of DMC in new media genres among newcomer emergent multilingual learners from refugee and immigrant backgrounds in school settings.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study draws from three major theoretical approaches to literacy. Each is described in detail below. In addition to this broad theoretical framework, additional conceptual perspectives are introduced in Chapters 2 and 3, including their connections to the major perspectives detailed below.

2.2.1 Sociocultural Approach to Literacy

The first theoretical perspective this study employs is a sociocultural approach to literacy. According to this approach, literacy is understood not as a set of autonomous skills that are similar everywhere, but as a social practice that varies across different contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1984). In sociocultural theory, social practices are viewed as interactions between multiple individuals that involve shared cultural goals, repertoires of actions, culturally created tools, and sign systems for communicating meaning (Vadeboncoeur, 2017). In sociocultural theory, these interactions are fundamental to how people develop psychological functions and abilities, because it is through them that people internalize and transform communicative resources and tools and repertoires of actions (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, literacy as a social practice refers to individuals’ learning, use, and further development of cultural tools and communicative resources such as reading and writing through interpersonal relationships within communities and groups of people (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Literacy practices are often developed in a socially-mediated experience known as a Zone of Proximal
Development (ZPD), where social interaction ideally narrows the gap between an individual's current level of understanding, as demonstrated through independent problem-solving, and their potential for development through guidance from an adult or collaboration with more adept peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Literacy practices may thus involve learners performing and practicing new roles and identities that are currently beyond their reach, as a stepping stone to becoming competent in these practices and potentially mastering them, a process that Cazden (1997) first coined as performance before competence.

In literacy practices, the production of meaning is always considered a form of social action. Further, cultural tools and resources play a mediating role in producing and representing meaning through their affordances and limitations, shaping how individuals and groups express that meaning. Inevitably, literacy practices are also imbued with power relations, understood as “relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society are produced, distributed and validated” (Norton, 2013, p. 47).

2.2.2 Multimodal Approach to Literacy

The study further takes a multimodal approach to literacy. According to this approach, literacy is understood not only as reading and writing in language, but as representing and communicating information in multiple modes of meaning making (e.g., visuals, sounds, gestures, and languages, among others) and their combinations in a process of design (New London Group, 1996; Serafini & Gee, 2017). A mode can be understood as a set of culturally and socially developed and organized set of resources for making meaning that has affordances and limitations (Kress, 2014). Kress (1997) further provided an important differentiation between representation and communication. Representation focuses on the creator of a message, including their interests and motivations for presenting information in a certain manner with the
semiotic tools they have at their disposal. On the other hand, communication centers around the audience of a message, considering the norms that dictate how the message can effectively be communicated within specific social and cultural contexts. This distinction encourages educators and researchers to examine both the socially grounded interests and motivations of students representing meaning and the power dynamics that impact the effort different students must put in to comply with certain norms of communication. Specific artifacts are always products of social processes (Kress, 2010), “arising out of and motivated by the cultural, social, and historical experiences and context of the sign maker” (Jewitt et al., 2016, pp. 59–60).

In an age when podcasts, wikis, blogs, vlogs, social networks and many more digital platforms allow individuals to become producers of mass-distributed multimodal information, this theoretical perspective sees literacy education as ideally geared toward fostering designers who creatively apply, combine, and transform conventions across multiple modes of meaning making to powerfully shape meanings, identities, and communities (New London Group, 1996). Designers strategically draw from available resources for meaning (the designed), employ and transform these resources through their meaning making processes (designing) and produce newly fashioned resources (the redesigned). Literacy education and research thus needs to account for how such design processes effectively occur through the deployment of various modes, including in different combinations, rather than singularly focusing on reading and writing in language (Kalantzis et al., 2016).

2.2.3 Identity and Investment in Language and Literacy Learning

Lastly, this study draws significantly from an approach that sees the extent of learners’ participation in language and literacy learning as dependent on whether their identities and investments are acknowledged and affirmed. Norton (2013) defined identity as “the way a person
understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 4). According to this definition, identity is understood as a site of struggle where people assume and withdraw from multiple subject positions. These subject positions affect and are in turn affected by learners’ investment in learning, which can be understood as the social and cultural capital that they bring with them and that which they desire to obtain (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2023). Learners’ subject positions may vary, and they may be in conflict with each other or with other learners’ (or teachers’) subject positions. Within classroom settings, power relations and differentials may strongly influence the extent to which students participate in learning; a learner might be motivated to learn, but if their identity and investment are not affirmed, they may not feel comfortable to participate in language and literacy learning and exercise their right to speak (Norton, 2013). Affirmation of a student’s identity and investment involves valuing the social and cultural capital that they bring and that which they desire to obtain (their investment), as well as the identities they imagine for themselves in the future (imagined identities) and the communities to which they hope to belong (imagined communities) (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2023; Norton, 2013; Norton & Pavlenko, 2019).

Together, these theoretical perspectives guide this study in examining literacy (1) as a social practice that (2) includes but goes much beyond reading and writing in language, encompassing learners’ use of multiple modes of meaning making, and (3) as a social practice driven by learners’ identities and investments in language and literacy classrooms.
2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Study Design

The complexities faced by emergent multilingual learners from refugee and immigrant backgrounds and their educators in school settings critically necessitate research that can untangle them, research that is context- and case-specific, rather than a large-scale endeavor that cannot take into account the unique meanings, contexts, and processes of particular situations. Thus, this study employs a qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2018), with nine emergent multilingual newcomer youth from refugee and immigrant backgrounds in one secondary school in Metro Vancouver.

The study further adopts a multimodal ethnographic approach (Dicks et al., 2006, 2011; Flewitt, 2011). Multimodal ethnography is a methodological approach that integrates the focus of multimodal, social semiotic research (Kress, 2010) on the meanings made in artifacts through multiple modes of meaning-making (e.g., languages, visuals, sounds, gestures), with the focus of ethnography on the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which those artifacts are produced and the processes that bring them about. Analysis of thematic patterns of processes across an ethnographic data set (comprising data types such as text, audio, video, and image) can be joined by analysis of participant-created artifacts to varying degrees (Dicks et al., 2011).

2.3.2 Context and Procedure

The study, which received ethics approval from the university’s Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB) and the local school board, was conducted in a secondary school of approximately 1000 students in a large city in Metro Vancouver. An estimated 15% of the school population was designated as ELLs at the time of the study. According to the School Plan at the time, home languages included English, Tagalog, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Amharic,
In addition to the regular academic programming and course electives offered, the school hosted eight district-wide programs for learners with a range of designated learning needs, including, for example, a literacy and numeracy district-funded program for newcomers and an intensive ELL and social-emotional support district-funded program for learners with varying levels of English who experienced little success in school. These two programs were taught by teachers from the school’s ELL department.

My engagement with the school began in October 2018, after I visited their two district-funded programs supporting newcomer students and ELLs. From January 2019 to January 2020, I volunteered at the school 2-3 times a week to support students in ELL classes and the two district-funded programs during class time. My volunteer work included English tutoring and leading workshops and lessons on digital media production (particularly filming and video editing).

In April and May 2019, I conducted a pilot project with two emergent multilingual learners as part of my coursework (see Appendix A for Behavioral Research Ethics forms for the pilot). I invited all 10 students in an elective Media Skills class, which was offered that year to the intensive English language learning and social-emotional support district-funded program, to participate in a 5-week video production based on the interests of the students. The two students who were interested in the video project also consented to participate in the pilot study. Part of the data collected in this pilot phase was used for the analysis reported in Chapter 5, as it involved Ahmed, a student who later became a focal participant in the main study (see the section Participants in this chapter).

After a year of volunteering in the school, in January 2020 I invited emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students in two English Language Learning (ELL) classes to
participate in video production activities that I led during class time (in small groups). One class was the district funded program that was mandated to provide intensive English language and social-emotional support for learners who had experienced little success in school. Some learners had their schooling interrupted, others had learning differences, and some of them experienced mental health challenges at school. The program was meant to support learners through intensive ELL and social-emotional learning and keep them in the school system. A second class was an ELL Writing (Level 2, Developing\(^1\)) class. Most students in the class came from immigrant backgrounds (including international students); some came from refugee backgrounds and had previously graduated from the district-funded newcomers’ literacy and numeracy program.

From February 2020 to March 2021, I assisted small groups of 2-4 students in producing various kinds of videos, based on their real-world interests and anchored in provincially mandated curricular goals, as detailed below (see the section Curricular Connections). Relying on my previous experience as a professional filmmaker and educator, and armed with cameras, audio recorders, and editing equipment, I led these groups in video production in-person from February to March 2020 and then online (due to COVID-19). When the school began returning to in-person attendance in June 2020, I gave teachers the filming equipment and facilitated the projects remotely, because as a university researcher I was not allowed, as per the district’s COVID-19 regulations and UBC’s BREB guidelines, to visit the school in-person. My in-person interactions with the students occurred 3-4 times a week (full days) when I visited the school in-

\(^1\) Based on a five-level scale of the provincial ELL standards (BC Ministry of Education, 2017), in which level five is the highest level, students at a Developing level (two) will typically be able to use foundational vocabulary to create simple sentences and paragraphs, understand and make personal connections to simple text with a few strategies, and participate in everyday conversations with simple language structures.
person. For the remainder of the project that I facilitated remotely, my interactions with students occurred about twice a week (for the duration of a block or two each day).

Students created four types of videos: (1) reaction videos\(^2\) (the project I led in-person), where participants recorded themselves watching a YouTube video of their choice and communicated their experience and perceptions of the video; (2) visioning videos\(^3\), where participants described their lives in five years’ time on-camera with a green-screen background (later replaced by images of their choice from their future lives); (3) COVID safety videos\(^4\), where participants followed the Public Service Announcement (PSA) genre to communicate COVID-related safety practices; and (4) video podcasts\(^5\), where participants interviewed each other on-camera about their lives, interests, and future goals. We also began working on scripts for a video resume project, which we did not complete due to pandemic-related scheduling difficulties.

The projects provided an opportunity for me to teach participants English along with various skills related to camerawork, video and audio editing, and interviewing practices. The projects also afforded me a unique opportunity to learn about participants’ out-of-school literacy practices, their language, literacy, and educational practices, challenges, and resources. Across projects, youth were invited to interview each other in preparation for or as part of the video production process. For example, in order to choose the video they would react to in the reaction

\(^2\) See, for example, Amna’s reaction video: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x02GCjYkCd_t9eB7kG_V37PiFAullwD1/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x02GCjYkCd_t9eB7kG_V37PiFAullwD1/view?usp=sharing)

\(^3\) See, for example, Abbas’s visioning video: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x82Mqfk70ZhzaWP1gx1U1b-DpGrzUW/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x82Mqfk70ZhzaWP1gx1U1b-DpGrzUW/view?usp=sharing)

\(^4\) See, for example, Ahmed’s COVID Safety video: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wDfWo-uTDb1mdu7kqbi0M4biR2XkNv-/view?usp=drive_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wDfWo-uTDb1mdu7kqbi0M4biR2XkNv-/view?usp=drive_link)

\(^5\) See, for example, Akida’s video podcast: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xHiMa8W9tZYiZ69_paNotUivfk6Q8MwZ/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xHiMa8W9tZYiZ69_paNotUivfk6Q8MwZ/view?usp=sharing)
videos project, I led participants in interviewing each other about their favorite videos; they
drafted the questions, which generated responses pertaining to other aspects of their lives (e.g.,
What do you feel about the video?). As another example, for the video podcasts project,
participants drafted questions that they then asked each other during the filming process, as part
of the video itself (e.g., Where do you see yourself in the future?). The rationale behind this
emphasis on interviews was both to avoid over-involvement on my part in developing the core
content of the students’ videos, as well as to develop the students’ oral production skills and their
familiarity with a common form of discourse in employment contexts.

In each project, participants collaboratively drafted textual scripts in writing workshops. They later recorded these scripts in either audio or video format. Students filmed each other’s performances for the videos, which included spontaneous, “free style” versions. In the final phase, they collaboratively edited each other’s videos on Adobe Premiere Pro with my close guidance (on my laptop in-person or through remote connection).

The projects shared an approach to video production that highlights its reliance on structured planning (e.g., the process of writing voice-over texts in language) and its potential for creative freedom and discovery through unstructured or spontaneous use of camera and audio equipment as well as editing software. Through these projects, I also emphasized the interconnectedness of literacy practices across different modes (e.g., using sounds and visuals to support meaning making in language), as well as the collaborative potential of video production.

A key pedagogical approach that I employed in structuring the learning activities was the use of role-play (Michalovich, 2021a); the explicit assignment of roles (e.g., director, editor) for each student to structure students’ collaboration in DMC. Each student played the role of a director, editor, videographer, interviewer, or interviewee at any given point. For example, as
directors, students had the last word on the final cut, as editors they had a responsibility to offer suggestions to their peer-directors and implement their requests. In taking this play-based pedagogical approach to DMC, I explored whether students’ identity investments can be affirmed in school settings by carving out spaces for play (Fisher et al., 2017). This approach, in line with Cazden’s (1997) notion of performance before competence, arguably enables youth to “perform and practice, in a school setting, new roles and identities that are currently beyond their reach, as a stepping stone to becoming competent in DMC practices” (Michalovich, 2021a, p. 28).

2.3.3 Curricular connections

The video productions addressed a variety of content and competencies from British Columbia’s Curriculum for New Media – Grade 10 (BC Ministry of Education, 2018), as indicated in Table 2.1 below. The rationale for using new media genres (e.g., reaction videos, video podcasts) was that youth were relatively familiar with and showed interest in them, as I was able to gather from my volunteer work. These genres could serve as means to help connect out-of-school literacy practices to school learning. This was also an opportunity to invite learners to shift from a position of media consumers to a position of media producers with regard to such genres, as such skills were rarely addressed in their school setting, let alone in the ELL classes and the district-funded programs.
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<th><strong>Curricular Competencies</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Content (all video types)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehend and Connect</strong></td>
<td>Create and Communicate (writing, speaking, representing)</td>
<td><strong>Text forms and genres</strong> (e.g., digital media texts and genres such as reaction videos, podcast videos, COVID safety videos, visioning videos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(reading, listening, viewing)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, visual, and multimodal texts</strong> (reaction videos in particular; other video types mostly through provision of feedback in filming and editing processes)</td>
<td>Respectfully exchange ideas and viewpoints from diverse perspectives to build shared understanding and extend thinking (all video types)</td>
<td><strong>Features of multimodal texts</strong> (e.g., soundtrack, narration, voiceover, titles, graphics, interview footage, supplementary footage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts</strong> (reaction videos)</td>
<td>Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways (reaction videos, COVID safety videos)</td>
<td><strong>Oral language strategies</strong> (e.g., designing and participating in interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world</strong> (reaction videos, COVID safety videos)</td>
<td>Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful texts for a variety of purposes and audiences (all video types)</td>
<td><strong>Metacognitive strategies</strong> (e.g., planning video productions, summarizing information, monitoring progress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use digital media to collaborate and communicate within the classroom</strong> (all video types)</td>
<td>Writing processes (e.g., pre-writing brainstorming and outlining of ideas for videos, drafting, revising and editing scripts for videos)</td>
<td><strong>New media design processes</strong> (e.g., writing scripts, organizing and participating in film sets, performing written text in front of a camera, providing just-in-time feedback, editing recorded language, music, video footage in software)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Multimedia presentation processes (e.g., participating in screening sessions, including providing feedback, asking and responding to questions)

Conventions (e.g., reaction shot within a reaction video frame, intercutting between interviewer and interviewee in video podcasts, use of green screen to insert inspiring visuals in COVID-safety videos and visioning videos)

The video productions reflected connections to First Peoples’ Principles of Learning (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2007) and anti-racist approaches to teaching and learning (e.g., Kishimoto, 2018). These connections included the way in which the prolonged and multiple video projects exemplified, through their focus on students’ interests, backgrounds, and future aspirations, how learning involves patience and time and explorations of one’s identity, embedded in memory and story. The highly collaborative, multimodal projects, as the results chapters show, also exemplified the way learning is experiential and based upon reciprocal relationships and connectedness.

The video productions also reflected connections to anti-racist approaches to teaching and learning. The projects, as the results chapters show, helped youth position themselves in powerful ways that countered common deficit and racist narratives, highlighting themselves as creative and knowledgeable human beings with many assets and strengths. This was evident on multiple occasions throughout the composing sessions but also during the screening sessions. During screening sessions youth presented videos of their own making, in which they interviewed and showcased themselves, their cultures, and their aspirations in positive and empowering ways. In some cases (e.g., COVID safety videos) they advocated for safe practices.
for school community members as audiences. These projects not only helped create a sense of community through collaborative learning and dialogue among students and teachers, but they also exposed students and teachers to “lives beyond their own” (Kishimoto, 2018, p. 10), particularly the lives of diverse people of color from refugee and immigrant backgrounds. As I mention in the final chapter, there is much more to explore about how DMC may more explicitly dovetail with and augment first peoples’ principles of learning and anti-racist approaches to teaching and learning. This is especially true for aspects in which this study was limited, namely, that awareness raising and engaging in explicit discussions of these topics were not a central focus of the video productions.

2.3.4 Participants

Based on participating teachers’ recommendations and priorities, I invited all students from the two classes to collaboratively plan, improvise, film, and edit videos. The 11 students who wanted to participate in the video projects also consented to participate in the study (see Appendix A for Behavioral Research Ethics consent and assent forms). The COVID Safety videos project also involved additional students from the two district programs who were not participants in the study. Participants are referenced via pseudonyms throughout the dissertation. Table 2.2 below includes information about these students. One of them, Ahmed, participated in the pilot project in 2019 and continued as a participant in the main study. Another participant, Chen, participated only in the short pilot study in 2019; he was therefore not considered a focal participant. Data from his participation is included in Chapter 5 to contextualize findings pertaining to Ahmed. Another student, Pablo, was a visiting international student who was not in the process of immigrating to Canada; he was therefore not considered a focal participant. The study thus included a total of nine focal participants from refugee and immigrant backgrounds. In
conversations with participating students and their teachers, I gathered that the students came from socio-economically marginalized backgrounds. All six teachers from the school’s ELL department consented to participate in the study as well.

Student participation was most prominent in the reaction videos project, as it was conducted in-person prior to COVID-19. Nine students participated in this project (Ahmed, Abbas, Amna, Haafiz, Maia, Maria, Nemesh, Joshua, Pablo). Once COVID-19 forced the fully-remote nature of my facilitation, fewer students were able to participate. Four students (Ahmed, Abbas, Joshua, and Akida) participated in the remotely facilitated visioning videos project. Ahmed, Abbas, and Akida continued to participate in the video podcast and COVID Safety Video projects (Joshua had scheduling conflicts as he began studying in a professional trade program). As indicated above, the latter project also involved other students who were not participants in the study.

### Table 2.2: Study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Migration background</th>
<th>Time in Canada</th>
<th>English writing level*</th>
<th>First language(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbas</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Refugee background</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>Expanding</td>
<td>Arabic, Turkish, **Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Refugee background</td>
<td>4-5 years</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>**Arabic, **Turkish, **Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Refugee background</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Expanding</td>
<td>Arabic, Turkish, **Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haafiz</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Refugee background</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Language(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
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<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Refugee background</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Immigrant background</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemesh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Refugee background</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akida</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>Immigrant background</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Swahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Immigrant background</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Immigrant background</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Consolidating</td>
<td>Tagalog, Ilocano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Visiting international student</td>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on a five-level scale of provincial ELL standards, in which level five is the highest level (BC Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 40):

Beginning (1): “The student uses some simple words and/or repetitive phrases to communicate.”
Developing (2): “The student uses basic vocabulary to create simple sentences or a paragraph.”
Expanding (3): “The student uses a range of vocabulary with some descriptive words to create sentences and paragraphs and communicate ideas.”
Consolidating (4): “The student uses a wide range of descriptive, subject-specific, and academic vocabulary to make connections and communicate ideas in multi-paragraph compositions.”
Bridging (5): “The student uses a broad range of precise, descriptive, subject-specific, and academic vocabulary with clear and coherent details in multi-paragraph compositions.”

** Spoken only

### 2.3.5 Data sources

Data consisted of audio and computer-screen recordings of all composing sessions with youth (from initial brainstorming to final editing sessions), formal (semi-structured) and informal interviews with youth and teachers, a semi-structured focus group with the teachers, daily field-
notes from school visits, collected artifacts (including youth’s videos), and youth’s materials for their compositions (e.g., video interview footage). Each project included informal interviews with youth as they engaged in video production, as well as additional semi-structured interviews after the completion of the project. The latter interviews took place with students after they watched their final videos and included questions such as those in Appendix B (Section 1). All data collection was conducted during school hours.

During the data collection period, daily field-notes were entered as MEMOS⁶ in ATLAS.ti, along with the variety of audio, video, and textual data. During weekends, I reviewed composing sessions to identify questions, potential inferences that could be explored in the following week, as well as ideas for improving pedagogy and considering unanticipated analytic directions.

2.3.6 Data analysis

Data (~75 hours of audio and video data) were imported into ATLAS.ti, including automated verbatim transcripts of all verbal utterances, which were synced with audio or visual data, and then revised (for errors). As mentioned previously, data also included field notes that were developed within ATLAS.ti throughout data collection.

The method of analysis I employed was reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), in a bottom-up, inductive approach. Thematic analysis is a foundational and distinctive method of qualitative analysis that was described as such, including a specific set of procedures, by Braun and Clarke (2006). In their extensively referenced article from 2006, they proposed six consecutive phases for conducting thematic analysis (see Table 2.3). Reflexive thematic analysis,

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⁶ATLAS.ti tools are indicated in SMALL CAPS.
one of several types of thematic analysis, relies on researcher subjectivity as a resource and on “meaning and knowledge as partial, situated and contextual” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 6).

Table 2.3: Six phases of thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2013, 2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familiarization with dataset</td>
<td>Data is transcribed (if necessary), reviewed multiple times. Reflections about the review of the data are documented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Patterns of meaning in the data are systematically tagged with labels that capture commonalities across data segments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating initial themes</td>
<td>Different codes are harnessed for the development of themes, understood as patterns of meaning in the data that are broader, more abstract and/or theoretical than descriptive codes, relevant to the research question, and fairly pervasive in the data. The relevant segments for each theme are gathered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing and reviewing themes</td>
<td>Themes are revisited to check for the extent to which they are sufficiently broad, relevant to the research question, supported by data, and coherent across the dataset.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refining, defining, and naming themes</td>
<td>Themes are refined, defined, and named in writing with the aid of deeper analysis of representative data extracts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing up</td>
<td>The thematic analysis is written up as a scholarly report, with analysis still occurring as an integral part of writing. In a predominantly inductive analysis, thematic patterns may move from a descriptive level to a theoretical or more abstract conceptual level as they are tied to existing frameworks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive coding was directly conducted on audio, video, and textual data through “a progression from description, where the data have simply been organized to show patterns in semantic content […] to interpretation, where there is an attempt to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). Initial
bottom-up and descriptive QUOTATION COMMENTS and CODES were generated directly for audio, video, and textual data to identify, collect, and think about potential emerging patterns. These QUOTATION COMMENTS and CODES were re-read and re-sorted in multiple rounds of coding that included revising CODES and their definitions, as well as attempts to connect emergent patterns with existing literature and theory.

The process of segmenting, decontextualizing the data and organizing it in CODE and CODE categories was thus complemented by a process of identifying connections between the different categories as they manifested in context (e.g., in composing sessions) or across contexts (e.g., different participants or sessions). This dual process of categorizing and connecting strategies (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2013) was iterated until the emerging conceptual-level CODES reflected a number of themes that could be reported in different manuscripts.

Categorizing strategies involved decontextualizing data segments in search of commonalities and differences, i.e., relationships of similarity (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2013). The process began by segmenting the data through units of coding “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. xi). These segments (QUOTATIONS) were collected in CODES. CODES consisted of three general types, a distinction adapted from Maxwell’s (2012b) typology of categories: organizational, substantive, and theoretical CODES. Organizational CODES helped classify segments of data based on anticipated categories (such as a given participant), substantive CODES emerged from data analysis and usually could not be predicted beforehand, and theoretical CODES connected to abstract concepts developed through analysis or found in the literature.

Connecting strategies involved identifying actual connections between things, i.e., contiguity relationships (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2013), either juxtaposed in time and space in the data
(e.g., one segment seemingly influencing another in context) or recontextualized after the categorization of data (e.g., drawing relationships between categories represented by CODES). These connections were predominantly made through displays (see Miles et al., 2020), such as NETWORKS (concept maps in ATLAS.ti), but were also created from matrices (another form of display) that explored intersections between previously-identified categories/CODES, typically in ATLAS.ti TABLES.

Analysis of multimodal ethnographic data, which was rich and extensive, necessitated more than one round across the six analytic phases described by Braun and Clarke (2021). Furthermore, although the phases generally built on each other incrementally, some of them occurred concurrently (e.g., Developing and reviewing themes and Refining, defining, and naming themes). Analysis was conducted in the three following distinct rounds, which were recursive and additive: Round 1: Generating a bird’s eye view of the data set, Round 2: Mapping the data from the bottom up, and Round 3: Excursion into a single thematic cluster. Each of these rounds involved the six analytic phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021).

The first round involved classification and review of the entire data set in the original form of the data (e.g., text, audio, or video), an extensive reflection process in a MEMO, an inductive coding process of the textual fieldnotes and the reflexive MEMO (once they were converted into DOCUMENTS in ATLAS.ti), some cross-tabulations of coded textual data to check for the prevalence of emerging thematic clusters across the data set, and a first draft of a bird’s eye view report of the potential broad thematic clusters in the data set (including a title and short abstract for each cluster). These analytic strategies were all led by the general research goals and directed at finding inspectables, i.e., “content in the recordings or transcripts that needed to be further inspected and reflected upon” (Subramanian et al., 2021, p. 5).
The second round involved extensive segmenting and coding performed directly on all audio and video data (which were synced with automated verbatim transcriptions), to avoid a sensorial distance effect (Pink, 2011). For example, text data were read (e.g., fieldnotes), audio data were listened to (e.g., focus group recording), and video data were viewed (e.g., filming session). Textual units of coding ranged from one sentence to one or two paragraphs (mostly several sentences), while audio and video units of coding ranged from ~10 seconds to ~3 minutes (mostly ~30 seconds). This afforded the ability to discern the social and cultural contexts associated with the development of multimodal artifacts (e.g., reaction videos, video podcasts) by the students in the study, as necessary in a multimodal ethnographic approach (Dicks et al., 2006). This also allowed for a consideration of data in their multimodality, maintaining the sensorial richness of the recordings while developing inferences (Pink, 2015). Importantly, the analysis of these multimodal types of data involved the use of language as a form of anchorage (Barthes, 1977), temporarily fixing the meanings of the multimodal information through analytic gist summaries that were attached as labels to segments of audio/video data (QUOTATIONS). A similar practice was also suggested, to varying degrees, by other researchers conducting direct analysis of audio/video (e.g., Stonehouse, 2019; Subramanian et al., 2021). These analytic gist summaries allowed for the subsequent review and retrieval of audio/video data through text searches. The second round also included extensive reflection in a MEMO. Throughout the analysis, analytic MEMOS supported the development of inferences about the data, including reflection on my positionality and its relationship with these inferences, as well as specific supporting evidence for the inferences from the broad multimodal ethnographic dataset.

The second round further involved cross-tabulations of coded data to check for the prevalence of thematic clusters and their constituent CODES across the data set (e.g., across
participants and video project types). The round culminated in the revision and enhancement of the bird’s eye view report, including development of more specific and distinct research questions for each thematic cluster and references to specific and relevant segments of data. For example, the following title comprised a distinct thematic cluster, which later became Chapter 4: *Youth from refugee backgrounds positioning their identities through reaction videos (Identity positioning)*.

The third round was repeated for the development of every distinct report/manuscript from a given thematic cluster, but for brevity it is presented here in one iteration. In this round, a specific thematic cluster, *Identity positioning*, was explored in depth in collaboration with my dissertation supervisors. CODES and data segments (QUOTATIONS) were reviewed and interrogated for their capacity to address the focused research question of the thematic cluster, followed by collaborative development of themes, a concept map (NETWORK) to connect and organize data segments by theme, and a final write up of the manuscript Michalovich et al., 2022).

Crucial for the third round of analysis were connecting strategies, or the establishment of relationships of contiguity, where, for example, decontextualized data were reconnected to show connections between meanings made in participants’ artifacts and the contexts and processes that brought them about. The multimodal ethnographic approach necessitated that any analysis of multimodal participant-produced artifacts be situated in the specific social and cultural contexts in which the artifacts were designed. In this case, segments of youth’s artifacts (video QUOTATIONS from their final videos) were connected to segments from interviews and focus groups (audio file QUOTATIONS) and video production sessions (video file QUOTATIONS) that
helped explain the contexts and processes that brought about those artifacts. This was done in an interactive concept map called a NETWORK in ATLAS.ti.

2.3.7 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of my findings, I took several steps to mitigate potential threats to validity. My extended involvement (over two years, from January 2019 to March 2021) and deep familiarity with the research setting allowed me to bring a nuanced perspective to analysis. I also utilized a diverse range of rich data types (e.g., textual field notes, audio and video recordings of composing sessions and interviews) and data sources (e.g., students, teachers) collected through multiple projects over more than a year. In addition, I kept reflexive memos throughout the research process (Maxwell, 2012b; Miles et al., 2020) to reflect on my inferences, search for discrepant evidence, and consider my own biases and assumptions as an adult Jewish newcomer to Canada with teaching and filmmaking experience from Israel and without the lived experiences of forced migration. Another key factor was my role as close facilitator in the youth’s DMC processes, which afforded me a more intimate and informed perspective on the composing processes as I participated in the co-construction of the multimodal data (Low & Pandya, 2019).

2.3.8 Positionality

“All view is a view from some perspective, and is therefore shaped by the location (social and theoretical) and lens of the observer” (Maxwell, 2012b, p. 46). Qualitative researchers are not objective observers who are located outside of the social world being studied, but are rather “historically and locally situated within the very processes being studied” (Denzin, 2017, p. 12). Research can thus be understood as a co-constituted, “joint project” of researcher, participants, and their relationships (Finlay, 2002, p. 531). These ideas guided me throughout this research
project to seek ways in which I might gain awareness of my positionality, which can be understood as my relationship as a researcher with the researched, particularly the people involved in the research (Deutsch, 2004).

Research requires a commitment, ethical in nature and one that contributes to the rigor of the undertaking, to monitor the effects of the researcher’s positionality through reflexivity. Although ever a “partial, tentative, provisional account” (Finlay, 2002, pp. 542–543), reflexivity can be understood as “a researcher’s conscious and deliberate effort to be attuned to one’s own reactions to respondents and to the way in which the research account is constructed […] maintain their awareness of themselves as part of the world they study (Berger, 2015, p. 221). In this study, particularly throughout data collection and analysis, I tried to remain reflexive in this sense in my writing of fieldnotes and analytic MEMOS, guided by the following questions (Berger, 2015; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018, p. 72): (1) How does the data move me? How does it make me feel and think?; (2) Why am I feeling and thinking this way?; (2) What am I taking for granted here?; (3) What do I believe to be true in this situation?; (4) What assumptions do I have about the population I am interested in?; (5) What assumptions do I think this population might have about me?

As a Jewish 34-year-old man from European descent who is an immigrant (newcomer) settler in Canada from a middle-class upbringing in Israel, I came to this study with a different lived experience than that of participants in my study, occupying a certain set of social positions that inevitably affected my observations and shaped how participants interacted with me. My social positioning in terms of class, age, nationality, and education rendered me as an outsider to the world of the young participants.
However, as Tavory and Timmermans (2014) argue, positions are more complex than potentially simplistic social categories, and are influenced by specific life histories and biographies. My life experiences have led me to connect with some of the participants in this study in specific ways. One key aspect of this is my close (albeit particular) familiarity with loss and some of its effects within the family; having lost my father to cancer at age four carried with it a host of experiences, some of which were more difficult than others. It is through that lens that I ultimately related to the difficult experiences around loss and separation from family members that I heard from or about some of the participants, particularly Ahmed, who lost his father at an early age and lived in separation from his family. Further, living in the anxiety-producing shadow of geo-political conflict, which manifested in suicide bombings, shootings, stabbings, and missile attacks, is far from being unfamiliar to me, although I was lucky to have had very limited direct physical exposure to it.

Another aspect through which I understand my interest in working with youth from refugee and immigrant backgrounds is my grandparents’ trajectory as immigrants and refugees in the 1930s and 1940s. My maternal grandparents were rushed from Germany and Poland by their parents after the rise of the Nazis in 1933 and hastily escaped to Palestine, leaving behind their belongings and assets. My paternal grandparents, whose entire families (except for one sibling) were murdered in the Holocaust, were both survivors of Auschwitz and arrived as refugees in what came to be known as Israel after the war. These histories, along with their inter-generational effects, are part of my identity, defining my own journey as an immigrant to Canada and my relationship with this research.

As someone who lived most of his life in the Middle East and most recently immigrated to Canada, another aspect of connection with some of the participants’ experiences that I was able to
observe was navigating cultural and linguistic differences in Canada (e.g., differences in turn-taking in conversation, in expression of emotions, in ever-changing self-perceptions around competence in the English language). These affinities provided me with analytic lenses that differed from—and enriched—those of some of the ELL teachers in the school. For example, teachers at times voiced their interpretations of certain behaviors of students to me in a way that we realized was confined by the local social, cultural, and linguistic norms and expectations. On the other hand, the fact that I am Jewish-Israeli heightened my awareness to my potential perception by participants from the Middle East as different, belonging to a nation which has been traditionally considered hostile by government, media, and people in the Middle East. Symbolically, some of that potential duality is made concrete in the contrast between my first and last names, the first being very common in the Middle East and the last in Eastern Europe. My first name is a common name for Arabs and Iranians (but also Jewish Israelis). It often invited questions from participants about whether I am Arab or speak Arabic, to which I responded, “No”, apologetically. In conversations with teachers, they emphasized this duality as an opportunity to help defy stereotypical thinking amongst students, a process that they deemed important for students who engage daily with other students coming from diverse backgrounds (e.g., ethnicities and religious denominations).

An additional key aspect of my positionality is my interest in DMC in educational contexts, which is ultimately rooted in my own experiences as a high school filmmaking student producing videos in the school's Film Department, experiences that were highly collaborative and infused with creative design decisions and identity expression. They inspired my future pursuits as a filmmaker and researcher. In both Israel and Canada, I strived to channel difficult feelings (e.g., uncertainty) into dedicated works of art and research, long-term mentorship relationships, and
community-engaged projects, for the potential appreciation of an audience, for the immense gratification and sense of purpose in creating social impact, and for the ineffable, fleeting moments of powerful connection with people. In my various mentorship positions across filmmaking and education I have strived to foster such a mindset and educate others of the values it upholds. It is a part of my identity and clearly shaped my approach to this project. However, following Glesne and Peshkin (1992, cited in Maxwell, 2012b, p. 45), I do not see this interest as an "affliction", but rather as:

- a strength on which I build. It makes me who I am as a person and as a researcher,
- equipping me with the perspectives and insights that shape all that I do as a researcher [...] Seen as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than to exorcise (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 104)

While collecting data, I reflected through daily memo entries in ATLAS.ti about how students perceived me and how that might have shaped the information they shared with me, based on ongoing experiences in the field. Although students clearly perceived me as a professional adult filmmaker whom they came to know in the many months of volunteer work preceding data collection, I took care to not be in a position of authority comparable to that of a teacher, which students seemed to endorse, allowing for more open and playful behavior (e.g., student pranks about broken equipment) that at times resembled a relationship with an older sibling. These reflections guided my data collection processes and were shared at different times with the participating teachers, who also noted this unique position I occupied, adding the importance of the trust established through a consistent, persistent, and responsive presence. I believe that this level of researcher embeddedness in the field and rapport with participants was key for the success of the projects and for my ability to address the research questions.
In data analysis and the writing of results, I tried to portray, in as accurate a manner I could, participants' experiences and perceptions by incorporating direct quotes from composing sessions and interviews with teachers and students. Further, by centering data collection around DMC processes that were documented through diverse data types and sources, I tried to make sure that participants’ self-expressions and perceptions were maintained and evident throughout data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings.

2.3.9 Methodological positionality

In my inquiry into qualitative research, I have extensively relied upon and sought guidance from the work of Joseph A. Maxwell. His work on causality (Maxwell, 2019), validity (Maxwell, 1992), as well as his critical realist (Maxwell, 2012a) and interactive (Maxwell, 2012b) approach to qualitative research have highly influenced my thinking. As appropriate for the limited scope of this section, I will only briefly address Maxwell’s critical realist and interactive approach to qualitative research and the strengths that this approach highlights in qualitative methodology, as those pertain to this study.

First, a critical realist approach to qualitative research integrates a realist ontology, i.e., a position that recognizes the existence of a real world that is—at least partially—independent of our constructions, with a constructivist epistemology, i.e., “the belief that our knowledge of this world is inevitably our own construction, created from a specific vantage point, and that there is no possibility of our achieving a purely objective account that is independent of all particular perspectives” (Maxwell, 2012a, p. vii). According to such an approach, although we participate in constructing the real to varying degrees, ultimately a stage may come when that real becomes independent—to a sufficient degree—from any representation that we might construct of it:
We act as if the objects in the world (things, events, structures, people, meanings, etc.) exist as independent in some way from our experience with them. We also regard society, institutions, feelings, intelligence, poverty, disability, and so on as being just as real as the toes on our feet and the sun in the sky. (Schwandt, 2007, p. 256)

From this perspective, Maxwell (2016, 2019) explores the key strengths of qualitative research in the three dimensions of meaning, process, and context. As far as the first dimension of meaning is concerned, qualitative research explores participants’ beliefs, values, and understandings in much more depth than quantitative research, making visible and considering as real their complexity and diversity, as well as how they influence participants’ actions.

In terms of process, while quantitative research has the potential to identify the potentially real existence of correlations or causal connections through identification of variables and the relationships between them, i.e., observing regularities in the data (variance theory), qualitative research can explain how potentially real causal connections operate (claims can nevertheless be shown to be wrong or incomplete), and is generally concerned less with variables as with events and processes (process theory), “referring to the actual causal mechanisms and processes that are involved in particular events and situations” (Maxwell, 2010, p. 477).

As regards context, qualitative research emphasizes this dimension in a central way, as it does not usually attempt to generalize across different contexts, but rather situate events and processes in the particular circumstances in which they arise. Indeed, those contexts are central to explaining processes and events in the first place. As such, rather than generalizability to a population, qualitative researchers often emphasize generalization to theory (Yin, 2018), i.e., informing theory that can later be examined (or potentially transferred) to different contexts.
Maxwell’s (2012b) further emphasis on the *interactive* nature of qualitative research designs has been useful for me in thinking about data analysis for this study. This interactive approach stands in contrast to other approaches that envision qualitative research design as a static and fixed top-down instrument that is planned in the outset of the study only to be implemented in an orderly and linear fashion with the phases of data collection and analysis. Maxwell recognizes that qualitative research designs are dynamic and are prone to change in different phases of the study, as the study’s goals, conceptual frameworks, methods, and questions about the validity of inferences made during analysis all interact with real people, events, and processes.

Importantly, the above elements are in constant interaction themselves, and in their centre lies the flexible research question not as “the starting point or controlling piece of the design, to which all the other components must conform” (Maxwell, 2012b, p. 4), but rather as a component that most directly influences and is most directly influenced by the other components. Research questions were thus bound to change in interaction with the above components as they interacted with real people, events, and processes.

Finally, issues related to the validity of inferences made in interactive qualitative research are important (rather than any fixed design) because those inferences might be wrong in how they represent real people, events, or processes. In contrast to quantitative research, in qualitative research it is less possible to subvert validity threats through a fixed research design before analysis begins. Rather, validity-related questions should be recognized as part and parcel of the analysis phase: How might inferences be wrong? What are some possible alternative explanations and how can those be addressed? How are data supporting or challenging the inferences made? Why should readers believe the results of the study?
Moving carefully between different dimensions of validity threats as laid out by Maxwell (1992) helped me consider the above questions throughout the process of data analysis. Those dimensions of validity threats were the following: “descriptive (what happened in specific situations); interpretive (what it meant to the people involved); theoretical (the concepts, and their relationships, used to explain actions and meanings); and evaluative (judgments of the worth or value of actions and meanings)” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 619).

2.3.10 Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, it was bound by the constraints of school life and contemporary local and global events, from the fluidity and complexity of participants’ lives and the school’s schedules to the local and global events that affected Canadian society and educational institutions at the time. For example, students were often called to grade level gatherings during composing sessions without previous notice, which influenced our timelines for the projects. Another example is the fact that my work with students shifted due to the availability of different school spaces for us to conduct our work (e.g., the school library or a specific classroom during the remote collaboration). Finally, additional external processes clearly influenced my plans for conducting the study, namely the shutdown of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the remote, online collaboration that ensued due to the school board’s COVID-19 policies and UBC BREB guidelines. As explained in the Participants section above, this ultimately influenced which students were able to participate in the study during the remotely-facilitated productions, considering the complexity of school schedules and the remote setup of those productions.

Second, the study was limited by the pedagogical aspects of its structure, because study participants were working in small groups of 2-4 students (separately from the main class) and
had an expert filmmaker (myself) as a facilitator. On the one hand, this pedagogical structure limited my ability to argue that the projects in themselves could be applied successfully in different pedagogical contexts (e.g., classes of 20-30 students) with ELL teachers who have much less training as filmmakers. On the other hand, the ability to closely interact with a small group of students for such a long period of time, and closely monitoring the kinds of scaffolds that they needed, provided powerful means to get in-depth and rich understandings of the students’ experiences with DMC, their language, literacy, and educational challenges, practices, and resources, beyond what would be otherwise available in whole-class instruction. These projects also signaled what might be possible if such supportive conditions and scaffolding are put in place.

Third, because of my involvement in the school as a volunteer since January 2019 led to the development of long-term relationships with both teachers and students, it was not possible to neatly tease apart the degree to which these relationships influenced the students’ investment in the projects from other factors. However, patterns of investment remained consistent across participants with whom I had varied strengths of relationships. In addition, attempts on my part to account (in fieldnotes and MEMOS) for the kinds of interactions I had with different participants (e.g., the different lengths of time they had known me) as well as to interrogate the influence of my positionality, have arguably helped manage this limitation. As Atkinson and Hammersley (2007, p. 16) argued:

the fact that as researchers we are likely to have an effect on the people we study does not mean that the validity of our findings is restricted to the data elicitation situations on which we relied. We can minimize reactivity and/or monitor it. But
 [...] how people respond to the presence of the researcher may be as informative as how they react to other situations.

Fourth, additional aspects related to the design of the study may limit its findings. For example, the use of particular DMC activities may have determined (e.g., through generic conventions) the kind of information that I was able to glean related to compositional practices and processes.

Finally, as a qualitative case study, this research is ultimately limited to a particular, multi-layered context, involving specific data types, project (including duration and timing), classes, school, district, country, and researcher, teachers, and students during a certain time in their lives. Nevertheless, I contend that a qualitative case study with an ethnographic approach, if developed in sufficient detail, is a most valuable methodological approach to tease out situated meanings, processes, and contexts (Maxwell, 2012b) associated with classroom practices, particularly DMC and especially with underrepresented populations. This enhanced purview should allow researchers and educators alike to examine the applicability of the findings, and indeed—their limitations—in other contexts and where conditions are different than those of this study: for example, different classes (e.g., mainstream), schools (e.g., community school), researcher positionality (e.g., teacher-researcher), scope of data collection (e.g., including participants’ homes), and the participants themselves (e.g., refugee-background youth from other countries).
Chapter 3: The Social Drama of Digital Multimodal Composing: A Case Study with Emergent Multilingual Newcomer Students

3.1 Introduction

This chapter empirically explores the possibilities afforded by a dramaturgical pedagogical approach to DMC for nine adolescent newcomer students’ investment in classroom learning. Dramaturgy can be understood as the design and study of actions typically presented as a stage drama (Bakke & Lindstøl, 2021; Østern, 2021). The sociologist Ervin Goffman (1959), who studied social life as a theatre, used the term dramaturgy to refer to the design and study of social actions as a drama. In this chapter, the term dramaturgical pedagogical approach (Bakke & Lindstøl, 2021; Østern, 2021) is used to refer to the design and study of teaching and learning, specifically the planning, implementation, and reception of DMC activities, as a social drama. It explores possibilities afforded by this approach to DMC for adolescent newcomers’ investment in classroom learning.

As explained in Chapter 2, investment is a sociological concept developed to understand students’ relationship with learning language and literacy considering socio-historical, power-laden contexts; as a complement to the concept of motivation, it examines whether students will be invested in learning in specific contexts (e.g., particular classrooms), depending on whether these contexts value who students are, who they want to become, and what social and cultural capital they possess and desire to obtain (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2023; Norton, 2013). Students who are highly motivated may not invest, and hence not participate meaningfully, in classrooms that are racist, sexist, anti-immigrant, queerphobic, or intersections of these and other oppressions.
As indicated in Chapter 1, situated in a secondary school in Metro Vancouver, I designed collaborative DMC activities (video productions) with a dramaturgical, play-based approach, whereby authentic roles, such as Director, Editor, Camera Operator, Interviewer, and Interviewee, along with scripts, props, and actions associated with the video production processes, were explicitly assigned to each student on a rotating basis. This chapter is based on a 15-month period of data collection, spanning multiple video productions (reaction videos, video podcasts, visioning videos, COVID safety videos; see Figure 3.1). It contributes a unique analysis, with pedagogical implications, of emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students’ investment in DMC processes during class time as a social drama, highlighting from a dramaturgical sociological perspective how these students’ investment in classroom learning could be fostered through DMC processes.

Figure 3.1: Select still frames from students’ final videos

Haafiz’s reaction video
Amna’s reaction video
Abbas’s video podcast (interviewing Akida)
Ahmed’s video podcast (interviewing Abbas)
3.2 Literature Review

3.2.1 Newcomer Youth and School Learning

Every year, Canadian classrooms include increasing numbers of newcomers from various backgrounds (Early et al., 2017), defined as migrants who have been in the receiving country for 1 to 10 years (Oikonomidoy et al., 2019). As indicated in Chapter 1, tracking studies examining graduation data in Canada and the U.S found that newcomer youth from refugee backgrounds, low socio-economic status (SES), or marginalized communities tended to leave schools before graduation more than other student populations (e.g., Gunderson, 2007; Potochnick, 2018). This can be explained not only by the need to learn in an additional language, but also by difficult experiences such as interrupted schooling or forced migration, including war, continuous lack of nutrition or adult care, separation from or loss of family members, and trauma (e.g., Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017). Studies have also highlighted the detrimental effects of deficit perceptions (e.g.,
that teachers might have) of newcomer students, perceptions that discount their resourcefulness, fortitude, and the value of their social, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual assets, while eroding their sense of self-worth and educational potential (Roy & Roxas, 2011; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). There is thus a need to better understand how these newcomer youth, whom I label here emergent multilinguals, can be better supported to invest cognitively and affectively in school learning and achieve their potential (Kendrick et al., 2022; Michalovich, 2021a; Michalovich et al., 2022), especially through affirming their out-of-school language and literacy practices as assets rather than treating them as deficits. Asset-based perspectives (see Shapiro et al., 2018; Tuck, 2009) acknowledge and value the full spectrum of knowledge that individuals and communities bring and develop in their lived experiences, including the barriers and challenges they confront.

3.2.2 Drama-based Approaches to Additional Language Education

Studies have long argued for the benefits of arts-based educational practices (e.g., drama-based activities) for the sense of belonging, agency, emotional expression, and academic performance of migrant youth, particularly those exposed to traumatic events (see review in Heyeres et al., 2021). Operating on a spectrum (Schewe, 2013) between small-scale forms that employ drama techniques (e.g., improvisation or role-play) and large-scale forms (e.g., staged performances), studies employing drama-based educational approaches in additional language education suggested that they may foster communication competence, embodied and engaged learning, and contextually-situated interactions, all the while promoting identity expression, confidence, and motivation (e.g., Belliveau & Kim, 2013; Cahnmann-Taylor & McGovern, 2021; Ntelioglou, 2011). Studies focusing on immigrant- and refugee-background youth highlighted how drama values non-verbal expression (crucial for language learners), facilitates teamwork, shared responsibilities, and imaginative problem-solving, and enables “to represent
others, to transform oneself, to alter one’s state of consciousness” (Rousseau et al., 2007, p. 453), with substantial possibilities for personal transformation (Wagner & Barnett, 1998). Thus, scholars have repeatedly argued that drama-based activities, small- or large-scale, should be employed across the curriculum to enrich teaching and learning, including the language and literacy education of newcomer learners (Cahnmann-Taylor & McGovern, 2021; Rousseau et al., 2007).

Studies (e.g., Lam, 2000; Østern, 2021) have also called for the use of dramaturgical analytic approaches, particularly those offered by sociologists such as Goffman (1959), to analyse educational interactions as forms of social drama, considering how these interactions play into students’ identity expression and development, as detailed in the conceptual framework. One key area with soaring interest in literacy education (Li & Akoto, 2021) that stands to benefit from drama-based pedagogical and analytic approaches, but which has rarely been explored with these approaches, is digital multimodal composing (DMC).

3.2.3 Dramaturgical Analysis of Newcomer Youth’s In-School DMC Processes

As explained more extensively in Chapter 2, a growing body of studies (see Michalovich, 2021b; Smith et al., 2020) has suggested that DMC can be powerful for emergent multilingual newcomer students’ classroom learning, because of: (1) its expanded, multimodal entry points to learning (Jewitt, 2008), which allow newcomer learners to harness the digital and multiple modes of meaning making in DMC to express their identities and their competencies beyond what they could do at a given point in an additional language (e.g., Kendrick et al., 2022); (2) its potential for collaborative efforts that support relationship building among students (e.g., Smythe et al., 2016), and (3) its inclusion of out-of-school, digitally-mediated language and literacy practices that affirm students’ interests and connects them to school learning (e.g., Michalovich
et al., 2022). However, DMC in second/additional language learning, especially at school, is still underexplored (Li & Akoto, 2021). Further, studies have typically focused on the general benefits of DMC and analysis of artifacts, while fewer studies have focused on DMC processes, e.g., how students collaborate on creating DMC products (Li & Akoto, 2021), including interactional processes (e.g., Smith et al., 2017). Crucially, although play-based pedagogies, which carve out spaces for choice-driven, modally-rich, imaginative, and socially-liberating textual explorations and role-performances, have been suggested as beneficial for learners across the curriculum and beyond early childhood education (e.g., Fisher et al., 2017; Lammers et al., 2022), few studies explored play-based or drama-based approaches to DMC among adolescents, especially in school settings. Those few studies (e.g., Kendrick et al., 2018; Michalovich, 2021a) did show promise, particularly for allowing students to playfully and safely experiment with new identities that would otherwise lie beyond their reach. Finally, a dramaturgical approach to analysis of DMC processes, considering them as a social drama that includes specific roles, props, scripts, and actions, has yet to be explored. The study addresses these four gaps, contributing a dramaturgical analysis of DMC processes to this body of literature on DMC in additional language education. It is guided by the following research question: **What are the possibilities afforded by dramaturgically-structured DMC processes for emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students' investment in classroom learning?**

### 3.3 Conceptual Perspectives

The study draws from three complementary theoretical perspectives to understand the possibilities afforded by dramaturgically-structured DMC processes for adolescent newcomer students' investment in classroom learning: a *sociocultural, multiliteracies approach to literacy,*
an identity investment perspective on participation in learning, and a symbolic interactionist, dramaturgical perspective on social life.

The first, sociocultural, multiliteracies perspective sees 21st century literacy practices not only as reading and writing in language, but as representing and communicating information in multiple modes of meaning making, such as visuals, sounds, gestures, and languages, among others (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; New London Group, 1996). Digital multimodal compositions (e.g., vlogs, podcasts) are also understood as products of social processes, motivated by the experiences and contexts of those who create them, including students (Jewitt, 2008). Therefore, 21st century literacy practices are understood as differing across sociocultural contexts in how literate agents use them to enact social action (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2009). This study is guided by this notion as it examines the social contexts in which DMC processes arise, to better understand how newcomers compose digitally in multiple modes within school contexts.

The second is an identity investment perspective (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2023; Norton, 2013) that sees level of participation in language and literacy learning as dependent not solely on newcomers’ motivation, but also on whether their classrooms value and affirm their identities, the social and cultural capital that they currently possess and that which they desire to obtain, including how they imagine themselves in the future (imagined identities) and the communities to which they hope to belong (imagined communities). The notion of imagined communities was first coined by Anderson (1983) to describe the meticulous construction of imagined communities (e.g., nations) among people who do not know each other, through means such as print texts. In relation to investment, this concept was extended to highlight that learning involves participation in both the immediate environment and imagined communities beyond it; through imagination, learners reach out to expand their range of identities (who they might
become, e.g., videographers) and communities to which they could belong (e.g., YouTubers), beyond the immediate context (Norton & Pavlenko, 2019). Such imagined identities and communities need to be valued by educators to facilitate students’ investment in school learning.

The third perspective recognizes social reality as a precarious accomplishment, continuously under symbolic construction through people’s repeated interactions (Blumer, 1969) as they act in relation to their working consensus about what is going on, i.e., the definition of the situation (Thomas & Thomas, 1928). The definition of the situation refers to how people interpret their social environment, and how this interpretation influences their actions and decisions; if people define a situation (e.g., a film set) as real, it becomes real (e.g., a real film set) in its consequences. Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical sociological theory shares these assumptions, but it employs the metaphor of social life as a theatre, perceiving social actors as actors on a theatrical stage trying to control how they are perceived (e.g., students trying to be and be perceived as academically successful) in the drama of the situation (e.g., teacher-mediated learning activities that can influence students’ academic trajectories), which structures the interaction and can be repeated ritually. Social actors typically control how they are perceived through impression management: the various strategies and techniques that social actors employ to perform their roles, to sustain their self-presentation, and to keep themselves in face, the respectable image of one’s self with implications for one’s status and esteem (Goffman, 1959; Scott, 2016). Actors may employ idealization, a prototypical version of a role that would be easily recognizable to other social actors (e.g., highly-engaged student), and they may co-operate with others to fabricate and collude on a collective group impression—a performance team (e.g., a highly-productive group of students)—sometimes with someone overseeing the smooth running of the show, holding the directive dominance. Such performance teams are thought to
facilitate bonds of reciprocal dependence and familiarity (Goffman, 1959); bonds dependent on the trust created through actors’ support of each other’s idealized performances of their roles as part of the collective group impression and the shared knowledge of and familiarity with each other’s backstage selves, that are typically different from their idealized, frontstage selves. In this study, newcomers involved in school-based DMC processes are seen as social actors involved in impression management and performance teams within redefined social situations (e.g., a classroom learning situation changed into a film set situation).

Through these perspectives, DMC is understood as a central part of how people represent and communicate meaning in the 21st century, and as such, can be used to affirm students’ identities and investment in language and literacy learning. Processes of DMC are viewed as a social drama, involving social actors managing their impressions as individuals and as performance teams.

3.4 Methods and Context

The study employed a case-study methodology (Yin, 2018) with the dramaturgically-structured DMC project as the case, and a multimodal ethnographic approach, attending to how meanings made in multiple modes are situated in specific historical, social, and cultural contexts and processes that bring them about (Dicks et al., 2006, 2011).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, I invited emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students in two English Language Learning (ELL) classes to participate in video production activities that I led during class time (in small groups) between February 2020 to March 2021 (in person and then online, due to COVID). One class was an ELL writing class. The other class was an intensive ELL and social-emotional support district-funded program for learners who had experienced little success in school. I led four video productions with students: (1) reaction
videos; (2) visioning videos; (3) COVID safety videos; and (4) video podcasts. Employing a play-based pedagogical approach to DMC, I strove to create a space where errors, setbacks, spontaneity, risk-taking, as well as enjoyment, exploration, and choice were encouraged.

3.5 Data Sources and Analysis

Nine emergent multilingual newcomer students consented to participate in the study, most of whom were from refugee backgrounds, as well as one visiting international student (see Table 2.2 and Figure 3.1). This chapter focuses on the nine newcomer participants, as per the focus of the study on learners immigrating to Canada rather than visiting. As indicated in Chapter 2, data sources comprised audio and computer-screen recordings of all composing sessions, audio-recording of screening sessions, field-notes, video footage captured by youth, and formal and informal interviews with the youth and their two teachers: Irene, an ELL and music teacher with 20 years of teaching experience who was also the ELL department head, and Jeremy, an ELL teacher with 14 years of teaching experience, with a background in special education. Recordings amounted to ~75 hours. Text, audio, and video data were analyzed in ATLAS.ti 9 and 22, including synced transcripts of audio/visual data.

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was employed inductively (in a bottom-up approach) in ATLAS.ti, culminating in the identification of broad and prevalent patterns of meaning (themes) in the data. Analysis began with familiarization with the data and then followed with collection of data segments (participants’ statements and/or actions) with commonly identified meanings into CODES (virtual containers for data in ATLAS.ti). CODE labels were initially descriptive (e.g., Actions: Giving feedback, Perceptions of project) and subsequently more conceptual (e.g., Impression management, Performance team). Key data segments were linked to and unpacked in analytic MEMOS, carefully exploring and triangulating
interpretations across different data sources. Data segments were then organized, along with codes, into visual thematic clusters in concept maps (ATLAS.ti’s NETWORKS). Themes were continuously developed as their congruity with the data was examined in additional rounds of analysis.

3.6 Findings and Discussion

Analysis led to the identification of three thematic patterns, each of which addresses the research question by highlighting a distinct way in which the dramaturgically-structured DMC processes afforded possibilities for emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students to invest in classroom learning: (1) changing the definition of the situation; (2) reinforcing impression management to gain social and economic capital; and (3) creating bonds of reciprocal dependence and familiarity.

3.6.1 Changing the Definition of the Situation

Following a dramaturgical pedagogical approach, I introduced and re-introduced students to authentic roles, scripts, props, and actions associated with the video production process. Throughout data analysis, I noticed how this practice changed the definition of the situation (Thomas & Thomas, 1928), reorienting our interaction toward specific common goals (e.g., collaboratively recording a student’s performance), while involving specific symbolic objects (e.g., props such as microphones and headphones), meaningful and powerful roles (e.g., Camera Operator) that were markedly different from ordinary school-based roles and indexical of media industry jobs and social and economic capital, along with actions associated with these roles (e.g., providing feedback to the performer on their last take).

Changing the definition of the situation afforded opportunities for students to invest in the composing activities and supported their professional apprenticeship (Goodman, 2010). For
example, the set-etiquette practices of calling out and following specific cues such as “Roll camera”, “Roll sound”, “Action!” or “Cut!” consistently and meaningfully propelled students’ participation and focus in the moment while apprenticing them in professional (e.g., filmmaking) practices, as the following excerpt attests. The excerpt is from a visioning-video filming session (a classroom learning situation changed into a film set), which I facilitated remotely, with Ahmed (17) and Abbas (16), both from refugee backgrounds (Syria), in class with Akida (17), who immigrated from Tanzania, and their teacher Jeremy:

Abbas: Aight, quiet on the set!

Jeremy: No, you can't eat chips while you say 'quiet on the set'.

(All laughing)

Abbas (puts the bag of chips aside): Aight, quiet on set! Quiet, shush!

Akida (to camera): Action! In five years, yeah... No, you should say... (to Ahmed, Camera Operator)

Jeremy: Cut! Cut! We have to start again.

Abbas (to Ahmed, Camera Operator): I said, I said, ehm 'quiet on the set' and you say 'camera rolling'.

Ahmed: No, no, like, you say 'camera rolling'.

Abbas: You say that. I'm gonna say 'quiet on the set', you say 'camera rolling', and then he's (Akida) gonna say 'action' and you—

Jeremy: No, I think, Abbas you're supposed to say… Amir, help us out here, after 'quiet on the set', Abbas continues by saying?

The excerpt shows how the roles (and associated scripts and responsibilities) facilitated students’ investment in the production process; they each had to call out and listen to each
other’s specific lines, as well as adhere to the rules of the film set (e.g., keeping quiet during takes) for this interaction to succeed. Irene, who taught all the participating students, reflected on the engaging quality of these changed situations by highlighting the importance of props:

I can absolutely see how a prop would really dramatically affect their bearing in that situation, right? Like if they had to hold a microphone, or the one being interviewed had to clip one on [...] So I see the role-play as a scaffold for like, inserting, or entering into a, whatever this domain is that they want to be competent in, and they don't yet know if they're competent in it, right? [...] it does effect behaviors.

Irene valued these structured, drama-based activities’ facilitation of sustained attention and participation. Especially, she highlighted how important these activities were for students whose interrupted schooling may have not enabled them to sufficiently practice sustained attention in school settings: “I think the sustained attention is like a muscle that has to get practiced […] but then the kids that Jeremy and I teach, most haven't been in situations where they practiced that.”

Importantly, playfulness and lightheartedness were observable in these redefined situations, as the data excerpts throughout this chapter show. Students playfully and spontaneously referred to their and others’ roles and showed excited take-up of this social drama around DMC, as the following comment from Amna (15) as Director to Maria (16), her reaction-video Editor, attests: "I want to take A2 [audio channel volume] down a little bit and A1 up, please, if you don't mind. [...] Maria, please go to audio, my little lovely worker." Similarly, in a reaction-video filming session, Haafiz (13), who had refugee experiences, grappled with his script as he performed for the camera, while Nemesh (13), also with refugee experiences, who
was managing the set and operating the camera, was finding it hard to keep himself from smiling. In response, I lightheartedly reminded Nemesh of the changed situation and the possibility of getting fired, to which both he and Haafiz enthusiastically responded in-role. Pablo (17), an international student, filmed the process, and I supported the performance team while holding the directive dominance (Goffman, 1959):

Haafiz (to camera): Pause, if you guys don't know what is a refugee, a refugee is basically from around the world, who ran, eh, away from war, because, ehm... Cut, cut, cut, cut.

Nemesh: Who ran, people who ran around the world.

Amir: It was great, just the people...

Haafiz: People... (bursts laughing) People from around the world running...

(laughs and mimics running with his hands and legs)

[...]

Nemesh (to Haafiz): Okay, like, take it quiet, like, you know, take it slowly.

Haafiz (bursts out laughing): Nemesh is making me laugh!

Pablo: Man. Haafiz, please finish it, right now, finish.

Haafiz (to Pablo): Okay, okay, okay, okay.

Nemesh (smiling): Okay! But, take a big breath.

Haafiz (audibly takes a big breath): Nem- why do you laugh behind the camera? Don't smile.

[...]
Amir: If you're laughing behind the-, I'm gonna stand there now, if you're laughing behind the camera (both Haafiz and Nemesh smiling), we will have to fire you—

Nemesh: Okay, okay, okay.

Haafiz: You're gonna get fired dude, you're gonna get fired.


Teachers emphasized the importance of a play-based approach in the social drama of DMC for learners to feel safe in unfamiliar and potentially face-threatening roles. They appreciated my perseverance as a facilitator with directive dominance (Goffman, 1959), as seen in my lighthearted comment to Nemesh. This role, which Jeremy also took up in the remotely-facilitated sessions (e.g., the first excerpt), was crucial for maintaining students’ substantive participation and reminding them of their roles. Changing the situation playfully and utilizing authentic roles, props, scripts, and actions arguably helped energize students to invest in DMC as part of meaningful classroom learning. The sustained attention that they were able to practice in these redefined situations within school settings may have also been beneficial for newcomer learners with interrupted schooling who had not had many opportunities to do so previously.

3.6.2 Reinforcing Impression Management to Gain Social and Economic Capital

Performing different DMC-related roles also afforded students unique opportunities to enhance their impression management (Goffman, 1959) with new role performances that held the promise of imagined identities and imagined communities, along with social and economic capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2023; Norton & Pavlenko, 2019). Recurrent mentions by students of the skills they were developing in the project (e.g., camera operation, editing imagery, audio, and video) evidenced their investment in the project and their perceptions of
their role-performances as promising for helping them gain social and economic capital with these sought-after skills, which were rarely taught to newcomers at their school. Teachers reflected that the school still valued written essays as the ultimate literacy achievement. This, coupled with systemic barriers like economic inequality, meant that upward mobility in digital literacies and professions was not guaranteed for these students. However, creating opportunities for them to aspire beyond the predetermined trajectories set by the school and society was arguably still valuable.

For example, Maia, who came to Canada following her father’s resettlement as a former-refugee who had escaped the Sri Lankan civil war, highlighted in the post-project interview the value of these skills for her future: “in the future, we don't know […] what we're gonna be, if someone ask you for like help, or the, photo editing or video editing, so this one in the future will help me”. Similarly, Akida, who was adopted by a Canadian woman and immigrated to Canada two years prior, was mesmerized by the “magic” involved in editing, e.g., replacing green-screen backgrounds for the visioning videos through chroma-key effects in Premiere Pro, disclosing during his editing session “I want to be like you [Amir], the way, I want to be like, to [know] how to do that”. Abbas, who had come to accept the project as an inherent part of his school learning, reflected on the reason he had told Ahmed, his interviewee in the video podcast, that he should stay in school: “they need to educate and probably be more like me […] like you know, learn, and also become an editor as well, if they want to”. His statement revealed the value he saw in a school environment that allowed students to practice such impression management to gain social and (potentially) economic capital, thereby recognizing, valuing, and fostering their investment in school learning.
The following excerpt from Haafiz’s reaction-video filming session evidences a fundamental way in which students’ impression management in the project fueled their investment in the composing process. For context, Haafiz had escaped with his family from the Syrian civil war to Jordan before resettling in Canada four years prior, and Nemesh moved to Canada from Sri Lanka five years prior, after his father, who had fled the civil war and resettled in Canada, was able to arrange for his family’s immigration. Haafiz reacted to a video about Syrian refugees in Greece, sharing his knowledge about refugee experiences as an asset. The excerpt shows Haafiz’s efforts geared toward showcasing his imagined YouTuber identity in his on-camera performances, and—relatedly—his investment in the reaction-video composing process:

Haafiz (to the camera): Thank you so much for watching. Hopefully you enjoyed this video. Make sure you go down, subscribe, like, and... We'll see you on tomorrow. Bye.

Amir: Great, awesome job.

Nemesh: But, like, I think you should—

Haafiz (ecstatically): I feel like I'm a YouTuber!

Nemesh: But, like, you should have explained the word 'refugee'.

Amir: And I also think—

Haafiz (glumly): Oh, yeah.

Haafiz: Should I just, should we do it again?

This enhanced impression management, that included idealization of role performances (e.g., that of a YouTuber), emphasis on students’ assets, along with real-world props such as professional-grade equipment, as well as authentic scripts and actions, all in a playful and safe
environment, arguably facilitated students’ investment in the composing process. This manifested in students’ expressed desire to prolong editing sessions, finetune their performances, include and refer to their Instagram handles, or reflect on their newfound sense of themselves, such as Haafiz’s cheer “I feel like I'm a YouTuber!” after finishing a take.

Similarly, Abbas and Akida evidenced their investment through their impression management as social media personas (e.g., Instagram influencer). Both students, during the extended engagement time of close to two hours per session, which their teacher Jeremy later referenced as “the longest they've worked uninterrupted”, heavily invested in the DMC processes to accurately represent their identities (e.g., strategically adding their photos and social media handles, as well as specific rap music). Although none of the students uploaded the videos to social media, they evidently harnessed the DMC processes for impression management. The stakes were high, with social and (potentially) economic capital on the line, but they received empowering responses from classmates and teachers at the screening events.

3.6.3 Creating Bonds of Reciprocal Dependence and Familiarity

We were all helping each other—Pablo, Nemesh. Nemesh was, eh, like, he had to write the, like, the, the things for the video, and then I had to write for him.

Pablo had to write for me. […] It was kind of fun. It was like, it was, interesting.  

(Haafiz, in post-project interview)

A predominant thematic pattern in students’ post-project interviews and interactions in video production sessions was the positive relationships they established, maintained, or developed with each other, which sustained their investment in the DMC project; relationships of mutual support, curiosity, encouragement, and affection, which sometimes included their teacher Jeremy and me. The dramaturgically-structured DMC project created a performance team
(Goffman, 1959) for each small group, where collaboration on shared goals through mutually-dependent roles in a playful, safe environment facilitated students’ trust in each other and their mutual knowledge of their collusion in presenting idealized versions of themselves (reciprocal dependence and familiarity; Goffman, 1959). A key example of this dynamic manifested in the following excerpt from a video podcast filming session that I facilitated remotely (during COVID), with Jeremy the teacher as Camera Operator in class with Abbas (16) as Director and Interviewer and Ahmed (17) as Interviewee, as we completed yet another take:

Abbas (as interviewer, on-camera, to Ahmed): Where do you see yourself in the future?

Ahmed (as interviewee): I want to be police in ten years. [long pause] Officer.

Abbas: You want to be a police officer?

Ahmed: Yes.

Abbas: You going to fight the crime?

Ahmed: Yes.

Abbas: My man, my man. Give me a hand, man (offers his hand but then takes his hand back) Covid, Covid.

(Ahmed chuckles)

Abbas (to camera): Aight, aight, aight. Thank you, Ahmed, and thank you everyone, for joining us for this podcast. See you next time. Peace!

Abbas (to Ahmed): Aight, look at this dude.

Jeremy: Oh my gosh, that was huge!

Amir (on-screen, remotely): Alright!

Abbas (to Ahmed): Oh that was amazing, a good one, bro!
Jeremy (to Amir): Too bad we didn't have the camera angle that caught it, because, he did this whole, like, handshake and he pulled out, and he said 'Covid'.

Abbas (to Ahmed): 'Covid', man, haha (chuckles).

Amir: Wait, wait, so we didn't have his face inside? We didn't capture his face?

Jeremy: We didn't capture this thing where it was like, Abbas gave his hand for high-five and then just before Ahmed shook it, he's like, 'Covid, Covid'.

(All laughing)

This excerpt shows how the performance team, generated by this play-based, dramaturgically-structured DMC project, fostered the kinds of shared experiences (including funny mishaps and blunders) of reciprocal dependence and familiarity. As teams performing on film sets, emergent multilingual newcomer students, but also their teachers and me, could safely familiarize each other with different idealized impressions. We colluded on these performance teams, which operated film sets and respected everyone’s idealized versions of themselves within the film sets.

Another example is Maia’s mention of her experience in the role of Editor for Joshua (as Director), who, in her words, “the way he talk, like, with the partner, you know, like, some guys doesn't talk like that, like you know, respectful and be kind to the girls.” Arguably, Maia’s bond with Joshua, but also with Ahmed, who acted as her Editor, were fostered through this dramaturgically-structured project, where they could productively collaborate with each other in assigned roles that were markedly different from their typical school roles. Similarly, Amna (16) and Ahmed (17) arguably strengthened their relationship when, as they played the roles of interviewer and interviewee and asked each other about their lives to generate ideas for videos they might react to, compared each other’s similar experiences of being pulled from Syrian
schools in their first or second grades and never returning until they were in Canada, each already 14 years old. Finally, in many filming situations, students used the feedback component of their roles (e.g., as Camera Operator commenting on the Director’s performance on-camera) to cheer each other in their role-performances, as this excerpt from Nemesh’s reaction-video filming session shows:

Haafiz: Dude, you could, you gotta choose, but don't just say “Hi guys, today we'll react to Nas Daily”, you gotta have energy.

Nemesh (with high-pitched voice): Hi guys...

Haafiz: Nemesh, I say, you got this, c'mon.

Nemesh: Hi guys, ehm, eh, the... (exhales)

Throughout the project, students continually harnessed the redefined situations in which their interdependence was heightened to support their own and each other’s role performances and impression management, especially their idealized versions of themselves—be it as video editors, as speakers of English, or as YouTubers—and as part of a performance team. The dramaturgically-induced mutual dependence and accountability arguably fueled students to consistently and meaningfully participate in the composing processes. Most students mentioned that they got to know each other better, or that they enjoyed working for each other in their roles, often teasing each other amicably as they affirmed each other’s idealized versions of themselves in role-performances. Evident in recordings of video production sessions, reciprocal dependence and familiarity were key for students’ investment.

3.7 Conclusions

This chapter contributes a unique, dramaturgical analysis that makes visible emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students’ investment in DMC processes as a social drama.
The study strengthens some of the findings of previous studies (see Michalovich, 2021a; Smith et al., 2020) that suggested DMC’s capacity to support emergent multilingual students’ expression and affirmation of interests and identities within classrooms, as well as DMC’s capacity to facilitate students’ collaboration (e.g., Smythe et al., 2016). Importantly, the study sheds a unique light on such patterns through the dramaturgical analytic lens it employed (renown but rarely used in the context of DMC) to understand how drama-based activities can facilitate identity expression, learning, teamwork, and shared responsibilities in DMC processes, particularly among emergent multilingual students. The study also contributes to exploring and mapping the possibilities of dramaturgically-structured DMC pedagogies for adolescent newcomer students’ investment (Darvin & Norton, 2023) in classroom learning. It draws on and extends scholarship in drama-based educational approaches for additional language education (e.g., Belliveau & Kim, 2013; Cahnmann-Taylor & McGovern, 2021; Ntelioglou, 2011) to DMC. Future studies could explore other dramaturgically-structured DMC projects (e.g., beyond video) in various additional contexts (e.g., community schools) and student populations (e.g., newcomer youth from other countries).

Highlighting the possibilities afforded by in-school, dramaturgically-structured DMC processes for these students’ investment in classroom learning, the study suggests that, with proper facilitation, dramaturgically-structured DMC projects could help emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students: (1) safely and consistently invest in authentic roles, scripts, props, and actions associated with DMC processes through redefined situations, contributing to their meaningful participation in classroom activities; (2) practice impression management as an integral part of their investment in DMC, through idealized performances in various DMC-related roles that they consider valuable and that could help them gain social and economic
capital; and (3) establish, maintain, and develop relationships of reciprocal dependence and familiarity involving support, curiosity, encouragement, and affection among each other and with their teachers, as part of a performance team.

The study helps language and literacy researchers, educators, and teacher-educators better understand emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students’ substantive investment in DMC processes through the sociological perspective of dramaturgy. Such work is crucial for fostering equity, deepening learning, and valuing (as assets) the out-of-school language and literacy practices of culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse newcomer students in school settings.

3.8 Implications for teachers

This study suggests key practices and questions that teachers could consider when they plan DMC projects for their emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students. First, they could ask students about the kinds of media they consume and their purposes in students’ lives to consider the kinds of DMC artifacts that these projects could result in and how they might help teachers value students’ identities, aspirations, assets, and desired social/cultural capital. Teachers could then explore the learning opportunities these DMC projects might offer for different curricular goals. They could then distill the processes involved in a specific DMC project (e.g., video podcast) and use them to redefine their classroom learning situation(s) as authentic interactions indexical of real-world professional situations (e.g., a film set). Then, teachers could identify and explicitly assign students meaningful and powerful roles that are essential for the interaction to succeed and are different from ordinary, school-based roles (e.g., video editor). Teachers could then facilitate the composing processes through practicing with students authentic scripts (e.g., “Roll camera”, “Roll sound”, “Action!” or “Cut!”) and actions
(e.g., having students provide in-role feedback on takes), while engaging them with various symbolic objects and props (e.g., microphones).

Importantly, teachers could use the dramaturgical pedagogical lens to examine what opportunities such DMC projects, with the roles, scripts, actions, and props, might hold for their students’ investment in school learning: Could students harness DMC processes to improve their self-presentation and create idealized, front-stage versions of themselves? (impression management)? Would the redefined situations involve apprenticeship in DMC-related professional interactions? Would these interactions require students to cooperate with each other to develop collective group impressions? Would this collaboration familiarize students with each other’s idealized versions of themselves? Would the interaction’s success depend on their reciprocal respect and protection of these idealized selves? Would any of the students or the teacher have opportunities to take up the directive dominance within the performance team(s)? Would learners be made to feel safe in unfamiliar and potentially face-threatening roles?

These set of practical questions and practices, guided by the findings of this study, are offered as tools, with unique meta-language, to support teachers in employing the dramaturgical pedagogical lens to reimagine their newcomer students’ DMC projects as social dramas that may facilitate their investment in school learning.
Chapter 4: Youth from Refugee Backgrounds Positioning their Identities through Reaction Videos

4.1 Introduction

This chapter empirically explores how six youth from refugee backgrounds positioned their identities through their design choices in composing reaction videos at school in their settlement context in Metro Vancouver. Reaction videos are a popular genre on YouTube, where typically young people record themselves watching a video for the first time to communicate their experience of the video (Kim, 2016). Reaction videos are a form of DMC. We view the out-of-school literacy practices of youth from refugee backgrounds as foundational to their literacy engagement in school, and believe that the school needs to recognize students’ background experiences as valuable and expand upon them (Cummins, 2014; Cummins et al., 2015). The study was guided by the following research question: How do youth from refugee backgrounds position their identities through design choices in their reaction videos produced at school in their settlement context? We present our findings for the benefit of language and literacy researchers, educators, and teacher-educators who seek creative ways for schools to respond appropriately to the background experiences of youth from refugee backgrounds in their settlement contexts.

4.2 Literature Review

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a critical need in Canada to understand the diverse multiliterate practices, resources, and challenges of learners from refugee backgrounds, so they can be better supported to engage cognitively and affectively in school learning and achieve their potential. This is urgent as Canada is increasingly committing to refugee resettlement (Cameron
Youth from refugee backgrounds constitute a unique heterogeneous population of emergent multilingual students in Canadian classrooms, who have diverse experiences of schooling, levels of literacy in their first languages(s), and proficiency and literacy in additional languages (Warriner et al., 2020).

We use the term ‘youth from refugee backgrounds’ to acknowledge that this diverse population may face particularly grave educational challenges—as compared to youth from other migrant backgrounds—due to the forced nature of their migration and due to the likelihood of difficult experiences, such as war, interrupted schooling, and resettlement, among others (e.g., McBrien, 2005). Importantly, youth from refugee backgrounds may experience deficit perceptions of their identities at school in their settlement context (Roy & Roxas, 2011). Such deficit perspectives, as discussed in Chapter 1, usually focus on what youth lack, devaluing what they bring with them and who they are, and diminishing their self-perceptions and educational opportunities. As also mentioned in Chapter 1, scholars and educators (e.g., Shapiro et al., 2018; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017; Warriner et al., 2020) have called for asset-based and desire-centered educational approaches that focus on the resources of youth from refugee backgrounds as unique and powerful assets. Attending to how students from refugee backgrounds are discursively positioned or position themselves in settlement-context classrooms is of particular importance for such pedagogies (Cun, 2020; Karam et al., 2020), as repeated positionings from a deficit perspective can diminish students while incremental positionings from an asset perspective can empower them (Golden & Pandya, 2019).

In a Canadian study documenting stakeholders’ perceptions of what evidence-based approaches lead to successful outcomes for learners from refugee backgrounds in the Vancouver Lower Mainland, Barber (2019) found that while acquiring English as soon as possible is the
first priority, helping learners develop a range of skills including digital literacies should be emphasized. In a large-scale Canadian study focused on supporting newcomer and refugee-background youth, Stewart and Martin (2018) reported that a key component of culturally safe and responsive teaching is engaging students’ survival stories rather than their trauma stories.

A growing body of research, including in Canada (Cummins et al., 2015; Cummins & Early, 2011; Darvin & Norton, 2014; Early & Kendrick, 2020; Kendrick et al., 2022), suggests that pedagogies that employ forms of multimodal composing, including digital multimodal composing (DMC), engage emergent multilingual students’ in language and content learning, empower them, and affirm their identities (see review in Smith et al., 2020). These pedagogies are powerful in that they draw on and cultivate emergent multilingual students’ communicative repertoires, including their literacy practices across national, cultural, and geopolitical boundaries (their transnational literacies; Duff, 2015; Lam & Warriner, 2012). As detailed in Chapter 2, studies (see review in Michalovich, 2021b) have shown that youth from refugee backgrounds may harness the digital and multiple modes of meaning making in DMC to express their identities and their competencies, strengthen their social networks, as well as frame their own representations of themselves, often challenging stereotypical conceptions (e.g., Emert, 2013; Leurs et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2012). Johnson and Kendrick (2017) showed how digital storytelling, a form of DMC, offered unique opportunities for refugee-background youth in a Western Canadian school-district’s transitional class to communicate complex feelings and difficult personal experiences, while affirming their identities. As the challenges associated with adjusting to life in a new country can be tough topics in classrooms, DMC may support refugee-background students in recognizing themselves as composers with experiences, identities, and stories worth sharing (Pacheco et al., 2021).
Studies have also shown that a play-based pedagogical approach to DMC affords adolescent learners opportunities to perform imagined identities and explore new perspectives (e.g., Kendrick et al., 2018). For example, a study of newcomer youth in a Canadian school showed how they were able to experiment with and take on different imagined identities through role-play in different filmmaking roles, such as video editors (Michalovich, 2021a). However, few studies have explored how youth from refugee backgrounds employ DMC at school in their settlement contexts to position their identities, especially employing popular YouTube genres such as the reaction video. Addressing this gap in the context of asset-based approaches to the education of youth from refugee backgrounds is the study’s core objective.

4.3 Conceptual Framework

We draw from complementary theoretical perspectives in understanding DMC as a literacy practice. First, we take a sociocultural, multimodal approach to literacy, according to which literate agents draw from and negotiate various socio-historically provided communicative resources, which mediate how they enact meaning as social action (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2009). We understand DMC as an umbrella term for digital design processes that harness some of these communicative resources (Hafner, 2019), taking an expanded multimodal view of literacy as ranging over multiple modes of meaning making, such as the linguistic (including multiple languages), visual, spatial, gestural and audial modes (New London Group, 1996). Furthermore, since composers draw on their interests and desires in how they express meaning in their multimodal texts, we understand design choices in DMC as mediated actions that reflect some of the complexity of composers’ identities in particular moments in time. Therefore, multimodal texts serve as rich artifacts for exploring composers’ identities, provided that researchers have apt access to the composing contexts and processes.
For this reason, we also draw on a discursive and relational understanding of *identity as positioning* (Golden & Pandya, 2019; Harré & Langenhove, 1991), with positioning defined as “the discursive construction of stories and relationships that build meaning and make an individual person’s actions intelligible” (Golden & Pandya, 2019, p. 212). Importantly, when a person takes a position, there are responsibilities, duties, and rights (a moral order) associated with that position (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003).

An identity-as-positioning approach links how people are positioned or position themselves in various contexts (Harré & Langenhove, 1991) with their identity, i.e., “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2013, p. 4). As discussed in Chapter 2, identity is understood as dynamic and changing over time, a site of struggle where people assume and withdraw from multiple subject positions that might conflict with each other. Importantly, DMC may echo not only composers’ identity positionings, but also their identity investments (Norton, 2013), i.e., the social and cultural capital that learners currently possess and that which they desire to obtain, as well as their imagined identities and imagined communities (Anderson, 1983).

This conceptual framework couples a *sociocultural, multimodal approach to literacy* with an understanding of design choices and processes in DMC as mediated actions that employ multimodal communicative resources for *identity investment* and *positioning*. The perspectives are complementary in that they guide us in tracing how and why youth from refugee backgrounds positioned their identities through their design decisions in their DMC processes at a particular moment in their lives.
4.4 Methodology

4.4.1 Study Design

The study is based on a qualitative case study design with a multimodal ethnographic approach, attending to how multiple modes of communication are used in particular social and cultural contexts (Dicks et al., 2011). It is part of a multiyear study led by Amir (Author 1) with youth from refugee and immigrant backgrounds at a secondary school in Metro Vancouver. Furthermore, the study is situated in the context of a larger research project, led by Maureen (Author 2) in collaboration with Margaret (Author 3), involving a team of researchers exploring the language and literacy needs, challenges, and practices of children and youth from refugee backgrounds in classrooms across Canada.

4.4.2 Context and Participants

As explained in Chapter 2, the study was conducted in a secondary school with approximately 15% of the school population designated as English Language Learners (ELLs) at the time of the study. Based on participating teachers’ recommendations and priorities, students from two classes were invited to collaboratively plan, improvise, film, and edit videos in which they reacted to and commented on videos of their choice. One class was an intensive English language learning and social-emotional support district-funded program for learners with varying levels of English who have experienced little success in school. The other class was an ELL level-two (BC Ministry of Education, 2017) writing class for students showing progress in developing their English language skills.

In this chapter, we focus on the reaction videos project as a case of a DMC project for youth from refugee backgrounds and share illustrative and telling examples from six participating students, including commentary from their teachers (all participants are identified
with pseudonyms). We selected those six students from the larger group of students who gave consent because they all came from refugee backgrounds (students from other backgrounds are identified in the chapter as peers).

Table 4.1: Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Time in Settlement Context</th>
<th>English Writing Level*</th>
<th>First Language(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbas</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Arabic, Turkish, **Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>**Arabic, **Turkish, **Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Arabic, Turkish, **Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haafiz</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemesh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on a five-level scale of provincial ELL standards, in which level five is the highest level; see Table 2.2 for descriptors (BC Ministry of Education, 2017)

** Spoken only

Haafiz, Abbas, Amna, and Ahmed had their schooling interrupted (between 2-7 years) as they escaped with their families from the Syrian civil war to Jordan or Turkey and were eventually resettled in Canada. Nemesh and Maia did not have their schooling interrupted. Their fathers left for Canada because of the civil war in Sri Lanka and they joined later with the rest of their family members.
4.4.3 Procedure

In this study, two English language teachers and one researcher (Amir) invited emergent multilingual students from ELL classes to compose their reaction videos during class time. The project was anchored in provincially mandated English Language Arts curriculum goals, such as “to enable students to become competent and effective users and creators of a wide variety of texts in diverse contexts, including digital texts” (BC Ministry of Education, 2018). Therefore, the project did not replace other activities for participating students, but rather enhanced them. All learners who chose to participate in the project were joined by Amir, an experienced filmmaker, who guided them in rotating groups of 2-4 students throughout the project, spanning 40 hour-long sessions between February-March 2020. The non-participating students worked on print literacy tasks with the classroom teacher.

For each group of 2-4 students accompanied by Amir, the project consisted of the following steps: (1) participants played the roles of interviewer, interviewee, and notetaker, asking each other questions to help them brainstorm ideas for topics of videos that they could react to (e.g., What kinds of videos do you like to watch? What would you like to see changed in the world?); (2) participants shared possible videos in relation to their interests, challenges, and aspirations, from which they then chose one video to react to; (3) participants played the roles of interviewer, interviewee, and notetaker, asking each other questions about their chosen video and taking notes (e.g., Who is the audience for the video? What do you feel about the video?); (4) Amir facilitated writing workshops, in which participants supported each other in developing written scripts from the notes (1-3 paragraphs) for their reaction videos; (5) participants played film-set roles (e.g., director, videographer) as they filmed their reaction videos; (6) participants played the roles of editor and director as they edited each other’s reaction videos in Adobe
Premiere Pro; (7) the videos were presented to teachers and other students in an online screening (due to COVID-19).

4.4.4 Data Sources

Data sources were collected throughout the project (February-March 2020) and during follow-up post-projects interviews (March-June 2020), a screening session (June 2020), and a focus group (with teachers; June 2020). Data comprised audio and computer-screen recordings of all composing sessions (including students’ interviews with each other), youth’s video and audio footage, field-notes, and audio-recordings of the online screening session and formal and informal conversations with youth and teachers.

The formal, post-project interviews with the youth (30-60 minutes each) were held online in English through Microsoft Teams (used by the school), due to the COVID-19 lockdown (except for the interview with Nemesh, held in school before the lockdown). Students connected either from home (during lockdown) or from school (post-lockdown). Questions were mostly about the project (e.g., What do you like best about your video? Why? What was hard for you while working on this project? Why?), with some questions related to students’ background (e.g., How has it been for you living in Canada?).

Data also included commentary from the youth’s teachers, two of whom taught the students from the district-funded program (Jeremy and Irene) and one taught the students in the ELL writing class (Robert). Teachers’ commentary was generated in informal conversations throughout the project, in the online screening session (~70 minutes) and a focus group (~90 minutes) held by Amir (with questions about their perceptions and practices teaching refugee-background youth).
4.4.5 Data Analysis

We employed reflexive thematic analysis in ATLAS.ti 9 with an inductive approach, following the six stages of thematic analysis as specified by Braun and Clarke (2021): (1) Amir familiarized us with the data through viewing, reading, listening to the data, as well as annotating and writing analytic memos about data relevant to our research question; (2) Amir generated initial codes to collect pieces of data that were similar (e.g., Design choices: Revealing the set); (3) together, we began developing themes that might group codes together in clusters of prevalent data (e.g., Knowledge brokering); we followed Braun and Clarke’s (2021) definition of themes as patterns of meaning in the data that are broader, more abstract and/or conceptual than descriptive codes, relevant to the research question, and fairly pervasive in the data; (4) we reviewed potential themes (and supporting data) repeatedly as a group, looking for how they reflected through each participant; (5) we defined and named the themes (e.g., Playfully disrupting cohesion); and (6) we produced the manuscript.

We acknowledge our positionality as researchers who engage with youth from refugee backgrounds without the lived experiences of forced migration, and we have sought to approach the information they shared with us with utmost respect and humility. All three authors have a history of volunteering in the school. Amir is a researcher and filmmaker who recently immigrated to Canada from Israel. Maureen and Margaret are Canadian researchers with considerable experience working with children and youth in Canada and East Africa.

To data analysis we brought our shared interests in exploring the affordances and limitations of multimodal (including multilingual) forms of meaning making for learners resettling in Canadian schools, and in our personal investment and involvement in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion in education systems in Canada and beyond. Amir’s
embeddedness in the field was complemented by the perspectives of Maureen and Margaret as researchers working with youth from refugee backgrounds in other contexts. Our reflexive thematic analysis consisted of negotiated interpretations; in-depth and continual interrogations of emerging inferences, taking care to examine, question, and ultimately justify them through our different positionalities.

4.5 Findings

Analysis led to the identification of three thematic patterns of how youth positioned their identities in the classroom through their design choices in composing their reaction videos. Each pattern highlights a distinct way in which youth took ownership of how they were to be perceived by their classmates and teachers at this moment in their lives.

4.5.1 Knowledge Brokering

Producing their own reactions to their chosen videos allowed learners from refugee backgrounds to position themselves to their classmates and teachers as knowledge brokers, agentive learners who have assets to contribute to others, rather than deficits to overcome (Roy & Roxas, 2011). By collaboratively discussing, writing, filming, and editing their reactions to their chosen videos, youth positioned themselves as expert knowledge brokers (see Figure 4.1), be it on music and culture from their home country (Amna), politics or conflicts of their home country (Nemesh), their experience of being a refugee (Haafiz), or their understandings of aspects of their settlement context’s culture, such as forms and styles of fitness and well-being (Ahmed), time management (Maia) or camping stereotypes (Abbas).
Amna was particularly agentive in positioning herself as an expert, as she used her reaction video to translate (from Arabic to English) and explain a Syrian music video. In her reaction video, she also explained how singing and listening to such music contributed to her wellbeing. Indeed, throughout the planning, writing, filming, and editing sessions, Amna would continuously hum various songs in Arabic, a fact that speaks to the potential of DMC to harness students’ investment in and enthusiasm for multiple modes of meaning making (including multiple languages). In the opening sequence, Amna performed a paragraph that she had written collaboratively with Ahmed and Amir:

Today we're gonna watch a video that is, uh, about love and loss [...] The mood that the video invokes is sadness. The boys are from Syria [...] they speak Kurdish, Arabic, or Turkish. Maybe a little, little bit of English. They write their own lyrics. [...] I like their music because when I get angry I watch the video and it makes me calm down. Those boys are heroes because when they sing a song, they make people calm down and make them feel better. They choose their words carefully, and those
words resonate with people. I am going to give you some examples from lyrics. [...] every word, it has meaning in it, has a thousand meanings in it. So, like, let’s begin the video.

Amna received enthusiastic and affirming responses to her reaction video from students and teachers, which supported her positioning as a knowledge broker. One example is the feedback she received from her teacher, Jeremy, during the online screening event:

I really love that she opened up this musical genre to me, right? [...] that's something we don't really see in our Western music, right? Like, informal music being played like that [...] and I really got to feel the emotions of those singers through Amna's translation, really like deep and hard subject matter to talk about or to translate, so she did a great job with that.

The other students also positioned themselves as knowledge brokers through their reaction videos. Maia, for example, shared her growing interest and knowledge about time management, which helped support her busy life and many responsibilities—caring for younger siblings at home, working to help support her family, studying at school, and participating in a community-based youth leadership program. Nemesh reacted to a one-minute video about Sri Lanka, his home country, by the Israeli-Palestinian YouTuber Nas Daily. He explained the generic conventions of Nas Daily’s videos, for example that he visits different countries to share one-minute videos about them and includes many local people in his final shots. Yet Nemesh also vocally expressed his criticism of Nas Daily’s video in his reaction video: “He only shows the parts where it [Sri Lanka] is developing and he does not show the parts where it is not developing.” Nemesh highlighted that the developing parts are mostly those that the Sinhalese people inhabit, whereas his people—Tamils—live in poor conditions, especially since the civil
Importantly, some students seemed to develop a sense of themselves as knowledge brokers as the project evolved. Haafiz, for example, sought to replace the video to which he had initially planned to react (a game-stream video). Following the choice his close friend Nemesh made, Haafiz searched for a video by Nas Daily about Syria, his home country, which he had not visited for seven years. However, Haafiz could only find a Nas Daily video about Syrian refugees in Greece. It was only when Nemesh and Amir mentioned to Haafiz that his experiences as a Syrian refugee were of much interest that Haafiz decided to react to Nas Daily’s video about Syrian refugees. By the time Amir held the post-project interview with Haafiz, he had already positioned himself as a knowledge broker about refugee experiences: “I'm a refugee and the, the, like the people around the video is a refugee so... And I know how they feel, like when somebody leaves their home because of war.” Haafiz’s positioning of his identity as a knowledge broker was also affirmed during the online screening session, when one of the teachers invited him to share and talk about his video with her students.

Whether they were sharing their knowledge on time management, their refugee experiences, fitness and wellbeing, camping stereotypes, or the conflicts or cultures of their home countries, all six students positioned their identities to their peers and teachers—through their reaction videos—as knowledge brokers, agentive learners with assets to contribute rather than deficits to overcome.

4.5.2 Navigating Gaze

During the video production process, it became evident that through their reaction videos, students not only positioned themselves as knowledge brokers; arguably, they also positioned themselves as transnational navigators in a particular moment in time. In their choice of design
and development of the content for their videos, they navigated their own gaze and the gaze of
the viewers toward certain communities and cultures to which they gravitated (at the time) with
respect to their cultural identities, including as youth from refugee backgrounds. Some students
left their migration and cultural backgrounds “out of frame”, seemingly expressing a wish for
assimilation (a type of acculturation strategy; Berry, 2019) in an imagined settlement-context
identity. Others incorporated their cultural and refugee backgrounds “in frame”, seemingly
expressing a form of integration (another type of acculturation strategy; Berry, 2019), seeking to
maintain those backgrounds as central to their imagined identities but leaving room for social
and cultural influences of the settlement context. As explained below, this pattern raised
important questions among teachers about the potential reasons for students’ positioning of their
refugee experiences and cultural backgrounds as part (or not) of their identities in the classroom
at given times. For us, these design choices represented students’ positioning of themselves as
transnational navigators, negotiating their multiple connections to different cultures and spaces
(Duff, 2015) and pulling themselves toward or away from certain imagined identities and
communities in different spaces and times.

Navigating gaze was most evident in the stark differences between Amna and her twin
brother Abbas. While Amna reacted to a Syrian music video in Arabic, Abbas reacted to a
popular video by an American sports and comedy group (Dude Perfect) mocking camping
stereotypes. Amna’s expression of attachment to Syrian culture and music through her reaction
video was already mentioned in the previous theme. Conversely, Abbas shared in his video his
knowledge about outdoor experiences (which he gathered in the settlement context), his favorite
parts of the video, and his critique of some of the stereotypical campers ridiculed in the video.
He also visibly laughed with the YouTubers performing the funny camping stereotypes. It almost
seemed like Abbas, who was wearing a t-shirt on which the word “Canada” was printed, was seeking a seat at this group’s table, paralleling Amna’s reference to the Syrian boys as “heroes” and her apparent wish to sit and sing by their side.

Importantly, while both Amna and Abbas used YouTube for learning purposes, Amna said that most of the videos she would watch were in Arabic or Turkish, because “we are Muslim, we read Kuran, we pray”, and Abbas said that he mostly watched videos in English—tutorials, comedy sketches, trick shots, and others. In the post-project interviews, while Amna mentioned the exhilarating sense of affirmation that she experienced from telling her migration story in different school contexts and expressed an interest in doing that in a future film project, Abbas explicitly mentioned his preference at the time not to share his migration story in a future film project. This echoed a comment Abbas had previously made to his peer-interviewer in the early stages of the project: “don’t go way too deep [with the questions]”, Abbas had said. This divergent approach to dwelling on their past experiences, especially as refugees, which was evident in Amna and Abbas’s choice of videos and development of content for their videos, was particularly explicit in that same early-stage interviewing session, when Amna pressured Abbas’s peer to ask him “what causes him to come to Canada”, and Abbas immediately responded “Nothing, I’m just, nothing, I’m just a refugee”. When Abbas’s peer then stated the question to Abbas in his voice, the following dialogue ensued:

Peer: What made you come to Canada?

Abbas: Ah, I don't know about that, but my family knows.

Amna: Here's the thing. They brought us here—

Abbas: They brought us here to be safe.
Amna: Our future. To be safe. And hard was life, eh, hard, hard, life was, eh, hard, in Turkey and Syria. And in Turkey there were nothing. Like, there were no job for Syrian people, especially Syrian. And they were mean to everybody. Some of them they were nice, but they were mean. And also, like, more than one time somebody stole my dad's money. They stole his phone. They stole a lot of things from him.

These remarks all provide meaningful and crucial context for understanding Amna and Abbas’s design choices in their reaction videos as means to position their identities with regard to their migration and cultural backgrounds. As Amna turned her gaze toward her past experiences in Syria and Turkey, she also navigated the gaze of her reaction-video viewers to her home culture. Contrarily, as Abbas turned his gaze away from his past experiences as a refugee, mostly avoiding discussion of it in the classroom, he also navigated the gaze of his reaction-video viewers to the North-American male culture represented by Dude Perfect, which might have represented a part of his imagined settlement-context identity. We argue that through such direction of their own gaze and the viewers’ gaze, these youth positioned themselves as transnational navigators, looking into different places and times to anchor their imagined identities and communities, sometimes with significant efforts that implied potential tensions about aspects of their experiences and identities that they wanted to move away from.

Other students exhibited similar approaches in navigating gaze toward or away from aspects of their cultural and refugee backgrounds. Ahmed and Maia tended to navigate their and the viewers’ gaze to their imagined settlement culture(s) by exploring, respectively, a video by the American professional bodybuilder Steve Cook (about fitness and wellbeing) and a video by the American YouTuber Amy Landino (about time management). In his video, Ahmed compared his life (post-settlement) to Cook’s life, with no mention of his pre-settlement experiences or
culture(s). Similarly, Maia focused in her video on her adoration of Landino’s time management tips. Conversely, Nemesh focused on his home country, Sri Lanka, in his reaction video, and Haafiz discussed his unique knowledge as a refugee in his reaction video. Through their design choices, students positioned their identities as transnational navigators, maneuvering and steering their own and the viewers’ gaze to different cultural artifacts and practices and to different spaces and times. In doing so, they tried to pull themselves toward or away from certain imagined identities and communities in different places and times.

Teachers speculated about potential reasons for students turning their and the viewers’ gaze toward or away from certain cultures and migration-related experiences. For example, Irene raised the possibility that students anchored their attachments to cultures and experiences in their home countries to be seen and affirmed, or to use their story as social capital (“currency”). She also suggested that anchoring their attachments to settlement cultures and experiences might be rooted in the emotional precariousness of evoking difficult knowledge from their refugee backgrounds, a limited sense of safety to share, the degree of communicative competencies (especially in English) to share their stories, or whether the events occurred when the students were too young to remember in detail. For varying and complex reasons, students positioned their identities in the classroom through their reaction videos as transnational navigators, dropping their anchors in different places and moments in time to pull themselves toward or away from certain aspects of cultures and migration-related experiences.

4.5.3 Playfully Disrupting Cohesion

All students conformed to the scripts and conventions of YouTuber videos, which were familiar to them, including a variety of gestures to capture and sustain the attention of viewers and remarks such as “Hello guys, welcome back to my channel.” Furthermore, all students
displayed playful and lighthearted behavior in their interactions, including the filming of mistakes and playful takes, carnivalesque texts that are traditionally edited out of the central media product (Pandya & Mills, 2019). However, two boys (Ahmed and Abbas) and one girl (Amna) explicitly sought to include such bloopers and playful takes within their final cuts.

All three students included the “action” or “cut” remarks from the beginning or ending of takes. Also, Amna included moments in which she was fiddling with the microphone’s wind muff on camera, Abbas and Amna included idle moments in which they seemed distracted, and Amna and Ahmed included moments in which they sought or received assistance out of frame (from Amir or their peer-videographer). In Amna’s editing sessions with her peer-editor and Amir, Amna made more and more agentive choices to include playful or blooper moments in her video, resolutely responding to Amir’s questions about whether she wanted to include such takes with a resounding “Yes”, even when her peer-editor suggested otherwise so as not to disrupt the cohesion of the video. This design choice was consistent; the following excerpt from an editing session shows Amna agentively insisting to include a moment in which Amir assisted her out of frame:

Amna (in video): And he’s saying [the singer in the video] “you were all my life in this world. Why… you have been cheated again? Why?”

Amir (in video; off screen): Why have you cheated?

Amna (in video; smiling to camera): Why have you cheated?

Amna and her peer-editor burst out laughing in the editing room.

Amir: You want to keep this or?

Amna (laughing): Yes.

Amir: You don't want to cut this?
Amna: *(laughing)* No, no, no, I like it's good.

Amir: 'Cause it's funny?

Amna: *(laughing)* Yeah.

Moving to Ahmed, beyond including his “Action!” and “Cut, bro!” remarks (similar to Amna and Abbas), Ahmed also insisted on including a music track in low-volume (“Skechers”, by the Pakistani-American YouTuber DripReport) that had nothing to do with the topic or tone of his video. However, the popular track, which described a boy’s sexual interest in a girl through his obsession with her light-up Skechers, clearly served to balance the serious tone with which Ahmed verbally introduced himself and the video he was going to react to. Furthermore, at the end of Ahmed’s reaction video, he agentively requested to include “my dance”, footage of him imitating dance moves from the Skechers music video, accompanied by the music in full volume. Ahmed’s teacher, Jeremy, interpreted this design choice as Ahmed’s attempt to position himself as a playful, sexual person: “Ahmed, you know, never really displays himself as a, like, a sexual person, but [...] the only times are those little playful dances that he does, right?”

By including playful and blooper moments in their final cuts, the three students disrupted the cohesion of their videos, reminding viewers of the constructed nature of the film set (breaking the fourth wall), and resisted their potential positioning as fully-on-task composers or “good students” (Brooke, 1987). Moreover, through these design choices, they were able to bring forward their playful personalities to the center stage of the composition, positioning themselves to their classmates and teachers as lighthearted and humorous, and in this way gain more social capital among them while engaging in a meaningful language and literacy learning experience. This inference was further supported by both Amna and Haafiz, who especially appreciated the funny moments included in other students’ videos, but also by two teachers’ comments (Jeremy,
Robert) in the screening session, as they appreciated how the videos conveyed, through their multimodality (especially the visual, sonic, and gestural modes), each student’s “unique style”, “personality”, “humour”, “energy” and “presence”. By playfully disrupting the cohesion of their videos, students pushed back frames that might fix or essentialize their identity-positions in a uniform way, positioning their identities as playful, humorous, and dynamic.

4.6 Discussion

Our analysis of youth’s design choices shows three ways they established their identities in the classroom through reaction videos: knowledge brokering, navigating gaze, and playfully disrupting cohesion. Drawing from a sociocultural, multimodal approach to literacy (New London Group, 1996), we understand youth’s reaction videos as artifacts, identity texts (Cummins et al., 2015; Cummins & Early, 2011) that echo their identity positions (McVee et al., 2021) and investments (Norton, 2013). As the youth shared their knowledge multimodally on real-world issues, they were able to position themselves as knowledge brokers, to perceive their knowledge as a form of expertise, as social and cultural capital they possessed, which also explained their investment in this DMC project. This finding aligns with similar studies that highlighted how youth from refugee and immigrant backgrounds could be cast as experts or knowledge holders once their cultural, linguistic, and experiential knowledge is valued as a classroom asset (e.g., Emert, 2013; Wilson et al., 2012).

Our participants also positioned themselves as transnational navigators through their design choices to direct their own and the viewers’ gaze to different places and times, navigating different imagined identities and communities. Previous studies have shown how youth from refugee backgrounds employed digital media production to maintain their connections to family and friends across national boundaries (see Michalovich, 2021b). Leurs et al. (2018) showed how
such transnational practices may present tensions for youth, as our study has shown through youth’s divergent design choices in DMC (e.g., Amna and Abbas). As youth traversed these sometimes troubled waters—whether and how to situate themselves with regard to their refugee experiences and aspects of their cultural backgrounds—they positioned themselves as navigators setting their and the viewers’ eyes on anchors that they chose for their identities (their identity investments). These anchors, also representing the social and cultural capital youth aspired to further develop, were made tangible through multiple modes in their reaction videos. Arguably, they also encapsulated students’ anticipation of how others might perceive them, and their attempt to fit or resist such perceptions. Navigating these multiple connections and ties to different cultures, spaces, and times is common for transnational students (Duff, 2015), especially when they try to ascertain the extent to which their transnational experiential knowledge is acceptable in classroom literacy practices (Lam & Warriner, 2012). The extent to which their transnational identities are affirmed in the classroom may influence their investment in learning (Darvin & Norton, 2014) and the kinds of acculturation strategies (Berry, 2019) their DMC artifacts might imply, as evident with Abbas and Amna’s divergent design choices.

In relation to the play-based pedagogical approach to DMC, we argue that reducing the seriousness of consequences of errors and setbacks, and carving out spaces for play and experimentation strongly facilitated the identified patterns, but especially the third one, playfully disrupting cohesion. As youth designed their reaction videos in an environment that allowed for playfulness and experimentation, they were able to position themselves as lighthearted and humorous, resisting their potential positioning as fully-on-task composers and disrupting what Pandya and Mills (2019) called the “silence and solemnity of schooling” (p. 13). It may be that similar to what Pandya (2019) reported in her study of children’s DMC in a dual language
context, youth’s positioning as playful, humorous resist-ers also served to liberate them from “other, more weighty, emotions” (p. 55) and from social orders that might essentialize or lock them in undesired positions. This thematic pattern also echoes previous studies’ mention of strong audience awareness and enhanced engagement among young composers as tied to moments of humor (including blooper videos) either incorporated (or not) in learners’ DMC artifacts (e.g., Hellmich et al., 2021; Pandya, 2019). Our study shows that through a play-based DMC environment, youth’s investment in their social capital among peers and teachers was affirmed, further enhancing their engagement in designing their reaction videos.

Lastly, positioning theory guides us not only to employ the location metaphor to identify how people discursively position themselves in various contexts (including through multimodal artifacts; McVee et al., 2021), but also to explore the potential storylines and rights and duties (moral orders) associated with these positions (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; McVee et al., 2021). We argue that knowledge broker positioning afforded students possibilities to craft storylines in which their past, present, and future experiences and strengths could be connected and fostered. In such storylines, they have unique contributions to make in their classroom settings for the benefit of themselves and keen audiences who might seek their expertise on these topics in future interactions. Yet this positioning also entailed a level of duty and responsibility for the accuracy of the information shared, for representing it faithfully, and for communicating it successfully. It might thus be that entering this moral order of rights and duties afforded youth not only an asset-based perspective on their knowledge, but also stimulation to deepen and expand it to better represent and communicate it.

We also contend that as youth positioned themselves as transnational navigators, they sketched a storyline, temporary and unstable as it may be, about their acculturation strategies
and how they envisaged their relationships to different cultures, experiences, spaces and times across national boundaries (Duff, 2015). This positioning also entailed rights and duties, as youth directed, maneuvered, and steered their own and the viewers’ gaze to different cultural artifacts, practices, spaces and times. On the one hand, students claimed their right to different imagined identities and communities (Norton, 2013), but also bore the responsibility for the tensions raised, such as the pushback that Abbas experienced from Amna with regard to what he knew about his refugee background or was willing to dwell on.

Lastly, we argue that by positioning themselves as playful, resolute, resisters who contest essentialization, the youth laid out a storyline in which they were no different from others in their lightheartedness, humour, and desires for connection, friendship, and intimacy with others. Indeed, by disrupting the cohesion of their videos through their design choices, youth not only positioned themselves as lighthearted and humorous, but also claimed their right to be playful in their learning (Fisher et al., 2017), to compose multimodally and playfully in their language and literacy learning at school. Aligned with that claim was a responsibility to keep an out-of-school genre such as the reaction video playful and flexible, and not institutionalized by schooling practices to the point where it loses its allure or locks them in the role of the “good student” (Brooke, 1987).

4.7 Conclusions

The study contributes to helping language and literacy researchers, educators, and teacher-educators better understand how digitally composing in YouTube genres such as reaction videos can be used to affirm the identities of youth from refugee backgrounds in school settings. We illuminated how youth’s design choices in producing their reactions videos highlighted the
diverse and rich ways they chose to position their identities in their classrooms, including the associated storylines, rights, and duties.

Youth designed their reaction videos in ways that positioned them as knowledge brokers, transnational navigators, and playful, resolute, resisters who contested essentialization. These identity positions: (1) highlighted the youth as agentive learners with assets to contribute rather than deficits to overcome; (2) emphasized the importance of asking how and why youth from refugee backgrounds, as transnational navigators, maneuver and steer toward or away from certain imagined identities and communities at certain moments in time; and (3) reinforced the importance of play-based approaches to DMC that afford youth opportunities to learn and reimagine themselves through play, bolstering their relationships with peers and teachers and circumventing the fixity and essentialization that can often circumscribe classroom literacy practices.

Thus, we recommend that educators design units of study exploring digital multimodal composing in safe and playful learning spaces. We encourage exploration of innovative pedagogies that bridge in- and out-of-school literacies and afford teachers opportunities to know their learners, including their often-invisible assets and imagined identities. DMC in YouTube genres is one such practice that can be powerful both in enabling youth from refugee backgrounds to position their identities through producing authentic multimodal digital artifacts, but also for language and literacy researchers and educators to see them beyond a deficit-oriented perspective as the agentive human beings they are, bringing rich arrays of social, cultural, semiotic, and intellectual assets to the classroom. We recommend that schools, programs, and classrooms explore culturally responsive policies and pedagogies that draw innovatively through DMC on refugee-background youth’s interests and full range of communicative repertoires,
helping them to safely and playfully position themselves anew in storylines that go beyond common deficit narratives and trauma stories, strengthen their identity investment in language and literacy learning, and foster their sense of belonging in their settlement contexts.

Given the need for appropriately responding to the background experiences of culturally, linguistically, racially, and ethnically diverse youth, so that they will no longer be entrapped in the position of “disadvantaged”, there is much promise and importance for language and literacy researchers and educators to learn how youth from refugee backgrounds can be empowered in novel and creative ways through DMC.
Chapter 5: The Affordances of In-School Video Production for an Emergent Multilingual Refugee-background Adolescent who had Come Late to Literacy: A Case Study

5.1 Introduction

The qualitative ethnographic case study in this chapter explores the affordances of in-school video production for emergent multilingual SIFE from refugee backgrounds. It does so through the case of Ahmed, an emergent multilingual adolescent learner with refugee experiences and significantly interrupted schooling, who had begun learning to read and write when he arrived in a Western Canadian school at age 14. He was at a beginning level\(^7\) of proficiency in English, based on provincial standards.

As indicated in Chapter 1, following key publications in this area (e.g., Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2009), I use the term SIFE, students with interrupted formal education, to indicate that these students may have not had the opportunity to participate in schooling or learn to read and write due to various factors, including refugee experiences. Following García (2009), I use the term emergent multilingual to emphasize the linguistic assets these students typically bring with them to language and literacy learning (e.g., speaking more than one language). The chapter focuses on Ahmed’s DMC processes across multiple video productions over two years, guided by the following research question: What are the

\(^7\) Based on a five-level scale of the provincial ELL standards (BC Ministry of Education, 2017), where five is the highest level, students at a Beginning level (one) will typically have a basic ability to write using simple words and phrases. They can recognize common words and begin to understand simple text, and they can understand and respond to simple statements and questions in familiar situations.
affordances of in-school video production for emergent multilingual SIFE from refugee backgrounds?

The urgent need to understand how youth from refugee backgrounds can be supported to achieve their full potential in Canadian schools is especially crucial for those who have not had the opportunity to participate in schooling, learn to read and write in their first language, or learn the language(s) of schooling in Canada (English/French). Such students may be underestimated and underchallenged academically and intellectually (Emert, 2014b; Harris, 2011) by well-intentioned pedagogies meant to avoid overwhelming and frustrating them due to their language barrier. The study helps educators and teacher-educators in Canada and beyond to better understand the affordances of video production, as a type of DMC, specifically for these learners, and when its inclusion in programs supporting them in settlement context schools might be warranted.

5.2 Literature Review

5.2.1 Challenges and Assets of Adolescent SIFE from Refugee Backgrounds

As explained in more detail in Chapter 2, although far from being a homogenous group with identical experiences, youth from refugee backgrounds may share many of the challenges that youth from other migration backgrounds face in secondary schools, such as the need to learn curricular content in an additional language and catch up to their grade level peers in both conversational and academic language (Cummins, 2021; Cummins et al., 2012, 2019), negotiate multiple connections and ties to different cultures and spaces (Duff, 2015), and cope with experiences of othering, discrimination, devaluation, and racism (Mendenhall et al., 2017). Those who come from socio-economically marginalized backgrounds may need to earn a living to contribute to their own and their families' financial well-being, and may not have the
economic, social, and cultural capital to strategically navigate education systems for their social mobility (DeCapua et al., 2009).

Youth from refugee backgrounds may also experience additional challenges that derive from their forced migration, such as difficult experiences associated with war, separation from or loss of family members, and trauma (Shapiro et al., 2018), as well as negative stereotypical perceptions that frame them as helpless or dangerous (Leurs et al., 2018; Malkki, 1996). Furthermore, their schooling may be significantly interrupted, sometimes to the extent that they reach adolescence without knowing how to read or write in their first language(s) (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017). All these factors may make high school graduation ever more difficult for these youth compared to other language learners, especially if schools do not support them adequately; indeed, as discussed in Chapter 1, tracking studies in Canada (and the U.S) have repeatedly shown that they have been less likely to graduate (Gunderson, 2007; Potochnick, 2018; Toohey & Derwing, 2008).

In Canada, adolescent SIFE are typically placed in sheltered classes or programs (e.g., English for Literacy Development or ELD) meant to provide an accelerated path toward reading, writing, and numeracy skills in English or French, before they can move into the regular additional language learning program (Gagné & Levi, 2023; Van Viegen, 2020). As SIFE may take longer to attain academic language, especially if they arrive as adolescents (Cummins et al., 2019), they may also age out of Canadian education systems before they can reach graduation, as they are typically allowed to go to school only until they are 19. And while they can attend school, they may not receive the necessary supports to help them transition into adult education and job placement programs (Barber, 2019). Schools may fail to thoughtfully support them, empower them, engage them cognitively and affectively in school learning, or otherwise see
them beyond their level of proficiency in the settlement context’s dominant language (Cummins, 2014; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Shapiro et al., 2018).

As discussed in Chapter 1, scholars and educators have strongly promoted pedagogies that prioritize cultural responsiveness and asset-based pedagogical approaches (Moll et al., 2005; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Shapiro et al., 2018; Stewart & Martin, 2018; Tuck, 2009; Warriner et al., 2020). Increasingly, these pedagogies have been shown to engage emergent multilingual learners cognitively and affectively in content and language learning at school, particularly through projects that allow them to express themselves in meaning making that goes beyond language, often involving digital platforms (Cummins et al., 2015; Cummins & Early, 2011; Early et al., 2015; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Ntelioglou et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2020). Yet not many studies have focused on exploring these pedagogies specifically with youth from refugee backgrounds at school in their settlement context (Michalovich, 2021b), particularly SIFE. Teachers and researchers may avoid such pedagogies out of fear of overburdening these learners with language-intensive environments before they reach a higher level of language proficiency.

5.2.2 Affordances of Digital Multimodal Composing for Emergent Multilingual Learners from Refugee Backgrounds

As discussed extensively in Chapter 2, a substantial body of literature has suggested affordances of DMC for emergent multilingual learners. This includes a recent review of research in language and literacy education scholarship, spanning 70 studies (Smith et al., 2020), which suggested that DMC in secondary classrooms may afford emergent multilingual adolescent learners enhanced opportunities for: (1) self-representation, (2) identity expression, (3) development of competent designer identities, (4) expansion of their linguistic repertoire, (5) learning of content through multiple modes of meaning making, and (6) reshaping of their
classrooms to challenge ideologies that marginalize non-dominant languages and extra-linguistic modes of expression. However, the reviewed studies rarely focused on learners with interrupted schooling who had come late to literacy and were at a beginning level of additional language proficiency. This denotes a gap in the literature around the potential affordances of in-school DMC for these learners.

As discussed more extensively in Chapter 2, a more recent review of research (Michalovich, 2021b) has illustrated the affordances of DMC specifically for youth from refugee backgrounds in and out of school, shedding additional light on the affordances reported by Smith et al., (2020) and extending beyond them. The review elucidated how youth from refugee backgrounds may employ DMC to exercise symbolic power as media creators (Leurs et al., 2018) and take ownership, while countering various stereotypes, of how they are represented across different spaces (e.g., refugee camps, settlement locations) and times (e.g., their past, future). The review also indicated how youth may employ DMC to narrate their life experiences, communicate complex and ineffable feelings and ideas effectively and in an embodied manner through extra-linguistic modes of meaning making. Youth have also been shown to employ DMC to engage with and make themselves visible to various audiences and expand or maintain relationships in different contexts (e.g., home countries, places of refuge, location of settlement). However, the review indicated that only a limited number of studies involved in-school DMC, suggesting the need for more studies to explore these affordances among youth from refugee-backgrounds as part of school learning.

DMC has also been shown to support language learning in educational contexts (Vandommele et al., 2017), challenging the conceptual binary (Miller & McVee, 2013) between traditional literacies (reading and writing in language) and multimodal literacies (communicating
in and beyond language). A recent study in an English as a Foreign Language university context (Jiang, 2017) highlighted the affordances of video production to enhance learners’ ability to: (1) revise, replay, and exhibit the target language within digital compositions; (2) communicate more clearly in the spoken target language; (3) use the target language in authentic, real-world contexts; (4) alleviate their fear of failure; and (5) gain a sense of relevance, recognition, community, and belonging.

Relatedly, Emert (2013, 2014a, 2014b) has shown, in a series of studies, how composing across modes through video production with digital tools afforded refugee-background adolescent learners in school the opportunity to authentically develop and showcase their target language learning, propelling them to participate further in the hard work of academic language and literacy learning at school, as also suggested by Smyth and Neufeld (2010), Michalovich (2021a) and Kendrick et al. (2022). Another key study (Boisvert & Rao, 2015) showed the capacity of video production, in this case led by teachers, to facilitate adolescent refugee-background SIFE’s English reading skills. It employed video self-modeling, whereby teachers edited videos of learners’ successful moments of reading texts aloud (scaffolded by the teachers outside of the frame) so that learners could experience a fluent future version of themselves. The researchers suggested that the video self-modeling, along with culturally responsive methods of instruction, had helped build learners’ positive self-images and self-efficacy and could account for the observed improvements in reading fluency documented over the course of six weeks. As Robertson et al. (2016) suggested in their study of digital media production among young people from refugee backgrounds outside of school settings, it is possible that affordances such as these could be linked to the capacity of DMC to capture, concretely represent, and forge together moments in time, lending them a “penetrating certainty” (Pinney, 2008, cited in Robertson,
Wilding, et al., 2016), bringing the future selves of learners into direct dialogue with their present selves.

There is a critical need to support youth from refugee backgrounds in Canada to participate meaningfully in school learning and achieve their potential. There is also a paucity of research exploring the above and other potential affordances of DMC for emergent multilingual SIFE from refugee backgrounds in school settings. The current study contributes to addressing these gaps by exploring the affordances of in-school video production for emergent multilingual SIFE from refugee backgrounds.

5.3 Conceptual Framework

The study is guided by a framework of three complementary theoretical perspectives in understanding the affordances of video production, as a type of DMC, for an emergent multilingual SIFE with refugee experiences.

The first perspective is a multimodal approach to literacy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2005; Kress, 2010) that challenges the centrality of language in meaning making. According to this approach, being literate, especially in the 21st century, is understood as going much beyond the ability to read and write in language; it encompasses the ability to represent and communicate meaning in multiple modes such as the visual, audial, spatial, and gestural, among others, and through their varied possible orchestrations into ensembles in multimodal compositions (Kress, 2010).

The second perspective is a sociocultural approach to literacy (Street, 1984), according to which literacy is understood not as an exclusively cognitive skill existing autonomously, independent of any social context within an individual mind, but rather as a social practice that involves continued interactions among two or more individuals with culturally constructed tools
and sign systems for communicating meaning (Vadeboncoeur, 2017), which in turn form social action (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2009).

The third perspective postulates that for language and literacy learning to occur and for learners to be able to claim their right to speak in classrooms and participate in learning, learners’ identities need to be affirmed (Norton, 2013). This includes affirmation of who learners want to become (their imagined identities), the communities to which they hope to belong (their imagined communities), and their investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2023) in language and literacy learning, i.e., learners’ current and desired cultural and social capital (Norton & Pavlenko, 2019).

Through the lens of these perspectives, DMC is understood as a central part of how people represent and communicate meaning in the 21st century, a set of key literacy practices that are mediated by social interactions and socio-historically provided communicative resources, and as such, can be used to affirm students’ identities and investments in language and literacy learning and enable them to claim their right to speak in the classroom and beyond.

5.4 Methods and Context

The study employed an ethnographic, qualitative case-study design (Yin, 2018) to offer thorough, context- and case-specific data that is rich in detail. It follows Cummins and Early’s (2011) conviction that “actuality implies possibility” (p. 19), the idea that detailed, in-depth, and theoretically-grounded case studies of successful pedagogical practices are invaluable to researchers and practitioners in that they evidence what is possible and can open the door for their potential application or adaptation in other settings.
5.4.1 The Case of Ahmed

This chapter focuses on one emergent multilingual SIFE with refugee experiences, Ahmed, as a case, exploring all of his DMC processes and products within the multi-year study exploring video production with newcomer adolescent students in a Western Canadian school. Ahmed arrived in Canada in 2016 at age 14, was enrolled in the school’s ELD program and the intensive, sheltered English language program since he was 14, after moving with his family from another Canadian city in the area. Prior to arrival in Canada, Ahmed, who had lost his father in Syria, spent 4-5 years in Turkey after escaping with his mother and siblings from Aleppo, Syria. As a child, he worked in Syria sewing clothes with his aunt, and in Turkey, he worked as a busser and later as a cook.

Ahmed said he had spent only about 1-3 months in first grade in Syria before the war forced him to leave. He spoke Turkish, some Arabic, and was hoping to retrieve his lost spoken Kurdish. He was not able to read and write in those languages, but he was learning to read and write in English, which was considered by the provincial ELL standards at a Level 1 (Beginning) for much of the duration of the project, though he was certainly progressing. Ahmed’s teachers shared that in his first two years at school he was silent, and often showed signs of sweating and brain fog, which they interpreted as potentially a result of stress and economic insecurity. Upon request of his teachers, an assessment was made and showed that he had no intellectual disability. When he was 16, Ahmed moved to live with a foster family, which his teachers said coincided with an improved ability to focus at school.

The various videos Ahmed made during the project reflected his enjoyment of working out in the gym (e.g., in his reaction video, he compared his life to that of a professional bodybuilder who shared his daily routine) and his interest in becoming a police officer. I met
Ahmed in October 2018 as a volunteer tutor in the intensive English program and had a chance to get to know him months before he joined the pilot project in April 2019. He was the student I had spent the most time with in this entire project.

To contextualize findings as they relate to Ahmed, I draw on data from four other participating students within this chapter: Abbas (aged 15-16 during the study), who was forcibly displaced from Syria and moved to Canada with his family three years prior to the start of his participation in the study (languages: Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, English), Akida (aged 17), who immigrated from Tanzania two years prior (language: Swahili, English), Maia (aged 17), who immigrated from Sri Lanka five years prior, after her father was granted asylum in Canada (languages: Tamil, English), and Chen, who immigrated from China two and a half years prior (languages: Cantonese, Mandarin, English). All four were at a Level 2 (Developing) of proficiency in English reading and writing. Akida’s and Abbas’s oral English language was at a Level 3 (Expanding), and Chen’s and Maia’s was at a Level 2 (Developing), according to the provincial ELL standards (BC Ministry of Education, 2017).

5.4.2 Data Sources and Analysis

Data sources comprised audio and computer-screen recordings of all composing sessions (~43 hours) in which Ahmed participated, audio-recording of screening sessions, field-notes, Ahmed’s video footage, and formal and informal interviews with Ahmed and his teachers, Jeremy (the teacher leading the intensive English program) and Irene (the teacher leading the Literacy program and the head of the ELL department).

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021) was conducted inductively in ATLAS.ti. As explained more extensively in Chapter 2, I reviewed the data, commented on segments relevant to the research question, and wrote potential inferences in analytic MEMOS.
Considering the explicit meanings of statements and actions, I coded the segments for actions and issues discussed in the data. After reviews and revisions of CODES and queries of their intersections, I interrogated the data for the implicit meanings of statements or actions. Subsequently, I connected different CODES and CODE combinations in concept maps and identified thematic patterns that addressed the research question and appeared across or within different DMC activities in which Ahmed participated.

5.5 Findings

Analysis led to the identification of three thematic patterns. Each pattern highlights a distinct affordance of the video productions for Ahmed’s language and literacy learning at school.

5.5.1 Overcoming the Language Barrier

An important pattern across the different video productions involved Ahmed’s gradual success in learning and developing filming and video editing skills despite the English-intensive composing activities (e.g., scriptwriting) and digital environments (e.g., high-grade professional editing software). When I first started working with Ahmed in April 2019, his English and digital literacy skills were at a beginning level and he was learning to read and write for the first time while navigating language-rich software environments (e.g., Microsoft Office) that were also new to him. The following excerpt from an early video editing session in April 2019, involving both Ahmed as Editor (aged 16) and Chen as Director (aged 16), shows just how steadfast Ahmed was in learning, in this case, the digital practice of dragging a video playhead, as he was learning the language associated with the content and as he was facing impatience from his partner Chen.

Chen: Left more, left more.
Ahmed: How, man?
Chen: L-e-f-t m-o-r-e. Maybe...
Amir: Yeah, drag it.
Chen: Just more.
Amir: Drag the...
Chen: Drag it, drag it.
Ahmed: How dragging man? Show me!
Chen: Hold. Hold this thing. Hold this to here.
Amir: The blue thing. You see the blue playhead?
Ahmed: Yeah.
Amir: You can drag it. Click and drag. See?
Ahmed: Saw it.

Although these digital practices agitated Ahmed initially, as they involved unfamiliar spoken and written language on top of new content, over time he gained increased confidence in these practices. The following excerpt from an editing session of Abbas’s COVID Safety video in December 2020 shows how, with (remote) support, Ahmed (aged 18) was able to navigate the language-intensive environment of Adobe Premiere Pro despite knowing few words in this digital space. Prior to the excerpt, Ahmed had already been able to replace the green screen background behind Abbas (aged 16) with a photo of the school’s entrance, itself a major feat involving manipulation of unique effects and specialized terms such as “Chroma Key”. After the successful replacement of the green screen with the background photo, Jeremy, Ahmed’s teacher, indicated that the photo was crooked, so I guided Ahmed in changing the angle of the photo. Figure 5.1 shows a visual snapshot of this moment, including my remote support.
Amir: So, you can work with "Position", right? We actually don't care about that right now, "Position". And you can work with "Scale", which is the size, right?
Ahmed: Yes, I did that one.
Amir: We did that one already. So what about "Rotation"?
Ahmed: Rotation. No.
Amir: You know what “Rotation” means?

*Abbas, who is also listening, creates circles in the air with his finger to indicate through gesture what rotation means.*

Amir: Turning, right? That's rotate. To turn.
Ahmed: Yeah yeah yeah, like, making like, rotate, circle.
Amir: So if you play with the number next to "Rotation", you might fix what Mr. Beaver wants you to fix.
Ahmed: This one or? *(points to "Rotation")*
Amir: Yeah, this one.

*Mr. Beaver / Jeremy: (looking at the projected screen on the wall): Perfect!*

*Ahmed smiles as he jokingly adjusts the background image's rotation behind Abbas to different crooked angles. He finally lands on a good “Rotation” value.*

Ahmed: How about this one, Mr. Beaver?

*Mr. Beaver / Jeremy: Yeah, this is much better, a little too high.*

Ahmed *(adjusts the image's rotation further):* Like that.

*Mr. Beaver / Jeremy: That would do it.*

*In the ensuing minute, Jeremy explains that he wanted the background image of the school to be "Level", and Ahmed repeats that word.*
With close scaffolding and support, Ahmed was able to overcome the language barrier, demonstrating that he could attain complex professional skills despite this barrier and use these newfound skills to impress his peers. The following excerpt, from a February 2020 session in which Ahmed (aged 17) edited Maia’s reaction video, shows this gained expertise and pride, despite the language barrier, as Ahmed helped fix Maia’s recorded speech through the editing of sound clips of her recording (moving her recorded words “my activities” elsewhere):

Maia (in video): Put it in my calendar, my activities, what I do-

Amir: My activities. We’re gonna start with "my activities". We need to see with the waveform when she starts saying "my activities".

Ahmed moves the playhead left.

Amir: Zoom in I would say, Zoom in, Ahmed.

Ahmed: Zoom in. [Zooming in]

Amir: Mmm hmm. No, that's too much. There, there you go. Okay?

Maia (in video): My activities.

Amir: Oh! See that? (referring to the waveform representation of Maia’s words)

Ahmed: Yeah, I saw, saw it. (Cutting clip representing these words) To here.

Amir: So Ahmed is like the most expert editor right now.
Maia: Yeah.

Amir: ‘Cause he's had a lot of experience last year, so... He's our expert editor.

Ahmed moves "my activities" to a different place.

Amir: Okay. Now, Zoom out.


Ahmed: Do you see Maia?

Maia: Yeah.

Ahmed: You like me next time (chuckles).

Because of the value Ahmed ascribed to these digital practices and the centrality of extra-linguistic modes in them (e.g., sequencing audio waveforms of short pieces of recorded spoken language or ordering visual images in line with musical rhythms), he could find in DMC an area of fast-growing competence, expertise, and symbolic capital that was not blocked by the language barrier. This included the development of disciplinary language in digital media production.

5.5.2 Showcasing Fluency

Another prevalent pattern entailed Ahmed’s strategic use of DMC projects to create fluent versions of his speech and performance by carefully editing voiceover and video. In my first post-project interview with Ahmed in May 2019, when he was 16, he shared that the most challenging part was being filmed, including speaking in front of the camera, but that the memorable learning outcome was the ability to fix issues in editing: “Like how cutting, putting there music or speak. Like this I’m learning. Fixing”. In the projects that came after, this awareness of the possibility to better his performance through editing meant that he could plan his revision strategies while he was performing in front of the camera, which arguably helped
him face that challenge, particularly in relation to spoken language production. The following excerpt from November 2020 shows Ahmed (aged 18) recording his questions for the interview with Abbas (aged 16) on camera, so that those would be edited into his video podcast. As Ahmed struggled with pronouncing the word “future” and with Abbas’s impatience, he exhibited his steadfastness again to get the pronunciation right while indicating his plan to edit the rest of his speech together with his correct pronunciation of the word “future” so that it will sound fluent:

Ahmed: Okay. Where, do you, see, yourself in the—

Abbas: Future

Ahmed: Fuu, ture.

Abbas: Future.

Ahmed: Fu-ture. Future, okay. (chuckles). Where do you see yourself in future?

*Abbas and Ahmed chuckle. Abbas imitates Ahmed’s pronunciation of “future”.*

Amir: Good, that's good. Where do you see yourself in the future.

Ahmed: Okay, I want to say again. I want to say again.

Abbas: Future, future.

Ahmed: Where did you see yourself in fu— (both Ahmed and Abbas start laughing)

Ahmed: No, I want to say aga—fea, fea—

Abbas: Okay, okay, okay. Say with me. Fuu.

Ahmed: Fuu.

Abbas: Ture.

Ahmed: Ture.

*Abbas and Ahmed together: Future.*
Abbas: Very good man. Now say it.

Ahmed: Okay, one, where did you see yourself in fu, future.

Abbas (chuckles): Okay, alright.

Amir: Abbas, Abbas, you have to be patient.

Abbas: I'm trying every day but—

Ahmed: Okay, in the... In the fu—future.

Amir: Yeah.

Abbas: Fuuuuuture

Ahmed: Fuuuuuture. In the future.

Amir: Yeah, amazing, that's good!

Ahmed: We we, cut that thing. We can cut that thing, yeah.

Ahmed exhibited careful attention and awareness of his speech during filming and editing, as he repeated recorded words out loud and put together different parts of his recorded speech in a grammatically correct fashion. In the excerpt above, he strategically planned to cut his successful recorded pronunciation of “future” and paste it in editing within a successful recording of the rest of the sentence. This careful attention to language was also evident when the videos were presented to classmates, as the following comment attests, which Ahmed made to the class during the October 2020 screening of his visioning video: “I like the video, but I want to do maybe new one. [...] The voice is coming like a little, ah, slowly, and a little hard.”

This strategy of editing and improving his recorded speech was continually reinforced as Ahmed received encouraging comments from his teachers, celebrating how Ahmed spoke so much and so well in the videos. The following excerpt shows Jeremy congratulating Ahmed for his fluent performance in his reaction video at the online screening event in June 2020:
Ahmed, like, usually, when I talk to you, it's always I'm asking you questions and then you, you reply. But in this video, I got to see you speak the w-h-o-l-e time, right? And it's always you actively speaking. And, to me, it kind of, it seems like a different Ahmed in the video, right? When I see this like, you kind of took me inside your world, right? Or comparison of the world from the video guy and your world. And that was really interesting to have you just share it without having to be, like, asked those kinds of questions. So that was, that was g-r-e-a-t.

This fluency was in stark contrast to Ahmed’s communication in his first two years at school, which he described in the following way during my interview with him in May 2020: “Like, t-three years ago, nobody is, can understand me. But now, everybody is, maybe they understand me, maybe.” Jeremy likened his view of Ahmed during his first two years in the school (ages 14-16) to being in “flight mode”, which he claimed was later transformed into fluency in the videos, when Ahmed “sounded very confident here [in the visioning video], and the editing helped him speak much more clearly.” Daily reading and writing, supported by DMC practices and positive developments in Ahmed’s life, such as his move to foster care, arguably enabled him to increase his production of language, while he strategically used the video productions to film multiple takes and vigorously fix his performance in editing, thereby visibly and tangibly manifesting his imagined identity (and competence) as a proficient and literate user of English.

5.5.3 Countering Deficit Perceptions

A third pattern was the ever-growing recognition among anyone who collaborated on or observed Ahmed’s DMC processes (including teachers, peers, and me) that behind Ahmed’s
limited communication in English, lay an array of strengths and competencies that could too
easily have been overlooked in print-based or language-dominant schoolwork. In an interview in
December 2020, Jeremy called this a “role reversal” for Ahmed: “I think it was a great role-
reversal for Ahmed. [...] Because Ahmed is always the, the one, the slowest. Slowest to read.
Slowest to do math, slowest... you know? And that was not the case in this, with the editing”.

The DMC processes meaningfully revealed and highlighted how resilient, resourceful,
thoughtful, diligent, and determined Ahmed was. Those qualities became increasingly evident as
Ahmed repeatedly asked for additional takes in recording his performances and steadfastly
finetuned the edits of his videos and his peers’ videos (sometimes well beyond 90-minute
sessions). As Jeremy indicated in an interview in December 2020, he experienced a shift in how
he viewed Ahmed’s capabilities because of the DMC projects:

You know, I really enjoyed seeing the sustained effort and concentration and
determination from the students. You know? Like, the work that you got out of
Ahmed is really impressive. You know? They were, like, almost an hour and
forty-five minute sessions, right? Editing and sitting down in front of a computer
in an environment where, you know, he probably couldn't read most of the stuff.
But he was just so determined to do well and, and master and improve that you
got so much great work out of him [...] Just like I think it really counters my
narrative of, of, kids coming with interrupted education or trauma and their
ability to focus.

Ahmed also showed admirable maturity and tolerance, especially in light of some
condescending behavior from some peer collaborators. As the following excerpt shows, Akida
(aged 17), whose overall English proficiency was more developed at the time, initially treated
Ahmed with impatience after what he thought was a subpar performance of reading and spoken English in a take of Ahmed’s recording of his questions for his podcast video (interviewing Abbas) in November 2020:

Amir: Alright. Any comments?
Ahmed: Nothing.
Akida: He has to read [the questions from the board] properly. Even better. He needs to say even better.
Abbas: Shut up man.
Abbas: He's trying his best.
Akida: I know, I'm just—
Ahmed: I'm doing, I'm trying my best man, look at this dude.
Akida: Read books.

Interestingly, when Ahmed shared his childhood work experience for the video resume script he and Akida were writing with me in February 2021, Akida began to see him in a different light:

Akida: Like, I could say he's pretty, I don't know, smart, for the things that he did, like in the past. Like he didn't have. He didn't have. He didn't go to school but he still wanted to, like, do work. I don't know.
Amir: But was still able to get work, right?
Akida: Yeah, because like, when he was a kid, like, as he said, he never went to school, like he didn't go to school, but like, he didn't have the time to sit down and like do that, and like, they had war and stuff, so it's like, like, he's like, like,
in his head he was thinking maybe if I don't have that, maybe I want to work for someone, and probably when he was like, I don't know, how old were you when you started working? How old were you when you started working?

Ahmed: I was like, I was like eight.

Amir: Eight, that's incredible.

Akida: That's pretty like, smart for like an eight-year-old kid.

The shift in attitude toward Ahmed happened among his peers both as they got to know him beyond his use of English and as they observed his performance as a videographer and editor in the DMC activities. Indeed, the video productions highlighted and fostered Ahmed’s major strengths, which lay hidden behind his communicative challenges. The latter made it all too easy for others, including myself, to view Ahmed from a deficit perspective. The way teachers view students like Ahmed can make a major difference in their lives; Jeremy mentioned that his changed perception of Ahmed helped fuel his support and advocacy on Ahmed’s behalf for his application to a district-funded professional trades program (auto repair and refinishing), which ended up being successful.

5.6 Discussion and Conclusions

This in-depth, ethnographic qualitative case study showed three affordances of in-school video production for an emergent multilingual refugee-background adolescent learner who had come late to literacy, with significantly interrupted education and a beginning level of proficiency in the language of schooling in his settlement context.

The first affordance of video production for Ahmed was the ability to overcome the language barrier, attaining professional filming and video editing skills in language-intensive digital environments with very limited instruction despite his beginning-level proficiency in
English. This could be explained by the centrality of extra-linguistic modes in video production that enabled Ahmed to execute various plans for filming and editing—doing them instead of grappling with how to explain them in language—along with just-in-time scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) that was available to him through my and his teacher’s support, a vital social context for his learning of DMC as a literacy practice (Street, 1984). Emboldened by this success, which received praise from his teachers, peers, and me, Ahmed could repeatedly, even if temporarily, exit the potentially-vicious cycle of the language barrier coupled by interrupted education and limited reading and writing skills, enabling a virtuous cycle that solidified a sense of competence, expertise, and symbolic power with every video production.

This pattern highlights the importance of educators supporting additional ways of being literate beyond reading and writing in language (Cope & Kalantzis, 2005), especially for language learners with a similar background to Ahmed’s, who may often be underestimated and underchallenged academically and intellectually (Emert, 2014b; Harris, 2011) by well-intentioned educators who fear driving them into collision with the language barrier. Scaffolded DMC, as this pattern showed, could be employed not only to avoid this risk, but also to help learners like Ahmed cast themselves as experts and envision being successful in academic work and school learning more broadly (Emert, 2014b; Kendrick et al., 2022; Michalovich et al., 2022).

Ahmed’s investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2023) in video production as a literacy practice was thus affirmed, valuing the social and cultural capital that he desired to obtain (e.g., various digital literacy practices) and opening possibilities for him to imagine new identities (e.g., video editor) (Norton & Pavlenko, 2019). As the second pattern showed, video production, specifically practicing and editing his speech into fluency in his videos, also afforded Ahmed an
opportunity to claim his right to speak (Norton, 2013) in his classroom while also bringing his imagined identity of a proficient English speaker into closer contact with his identity at school at the time and situate him as a valued contributor and member of the classroom community. The importance of enabling learners like Ahmed to claim their right to speak in classrooms cannot be overstated, considering the difficulties posed by the language barrier (Karam, 2018; Rodriguez-Jimenez & Gifford, 2010), including being continuously misunderstood and underestimated at school (Emert, 2013).

The study supports previous findings relating to the affordances of DMC (Boisvert & Rao, 2015; Emert, 2013, 2014b, 2014a; Hepple et al., 2014; Jang & Kang, 2019; Jiang, 2017; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Kendrick et al., 2022; Michalovich, 2021a, 2021b; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010), situating them in this unique context of in-school video production with an emergent multilingual adolescent learner who had not had the opportunity to meaningfully participate in schooling, learn to read and write in his first language, or learn English prior to age 14. The study shows how in-school video production, through practice and revision of recorded speech across multiple different projects, afforded Ahmed possibilities for communicating more clearly in language, building positive self-images, engaging creatively in the hard work of academic language and literacy learning, and making manifest in the present, in unmistakeable concrete form and penetrating certainty (Pinney, 2008, cited in Robertson, Wilding, et al., 2016), his imagined identity as a proficient English speaker. The study shows possibilities for thus challenging the limits of the conceptual binary (Miller & McVee, 2013) between traditional literacies and multimodal literacies.

This affordance of video production to showcase Ahmed’s English proficiency, if only temporarily, enabled him to counter the deficit perceptions of his peers, teachers, and me. Video
production thus afforded Ahmed an opportunity to reveal his learning capabilities, resilience, steadfastness, and intelligence to everyone around him, dispel misperceptions of him, and carve out a space for himself to belong in the classroom and be known for his many strengths. This affordance is crucial for educators and teacher-educators to understand because for students like Ahmed, settlement, including a new experience of schooling, can feel profoundly precarious, entailing a sense of ontological insecurity (Gifford & Wilding, 2013; Robertson, Gifford, et al., 2016), experiencing others’ projection of stereotypes and prejudices (McBrien, 2005), and challenges fitting in socially, including finding friends and a space of belonging at school (Harris, 2011; Karam, 2018). The study extends claims made in other circumstances about the affordances of DMC for emergent multilinguals, including from refugee backgrounds, to counter their stereotypical representations and various othering practices, make themselves visible to others, develop identities of competent designers, and challenge ideologies that marginalize them (Michalovich, 2021b; Smith et al., 2020).

5.7 Implications

The study bears important implications for educators and teacher-educators working with adolescent emergent multilingual learners who have come late to literacy, have had their schooling significantly interrupted, and are at a beginning level of proficiency in the language of schooling. Video production, as a type of DMC, can help these learners, with sufficient scaffolding, to overcome the language barrier, build expertise and positive identities for themselves around desirable media skills, communicate with others in powerful ways, alter how they are perceived at school to be known for their strengths, and engage with rich, challenging, and gratifying curricula through the multimodality of DMC. Recognizing how indispensable DMC is for refugee-background youth, Gifford et al. (2013) called for including DMC as an
essential component of settlement policies and services, to which this study adds school and
district programs supporting these learners in settlement contexts. Harnessing DMC may not
secure these learners’ path to graduation. However, it might afford them, as this study has shown
in the case of Ahmed’s video productions, to devise audiovisually-mediated representations of
themselves that—harkening back to David Grossman’s quote from the beginning of Chapter 1—
cast anchors that take hold of their future and help them pull themselves toward it, while making
their experience at school meaningful and identity-affirming. It is in this sense that this study is
hopeful.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this chapter, I return to the research goals to consider how they were met, summarize and integrate the findings of the study, discuss its significance and contributions, briefly revisit potential limitations, provide recommendations for future research, and offer potential implications for educators and teacher educators.

6.1 Meeting the Research Goals and Questions

This study was designed to explore how emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students, particularly from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds, could be better supported through DMC, in this case video production, to invest in school learning and achieve their potential. As such, it addressed the youth’s intellectual, cultural, and communicative resources along with their language and literacy needs, challenges, and barriers. Youth’s range of knowledge, interests, and aspirations, cultivated through their personal and cultural experiences, were recognized and appreciated as assets.

The study addressed these goals in three ways. First, a role-play-based, dramaturgical pedagogy was examined, as a case, for the possibilities it afforded, across video productions and participants, for emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students’ investment in classroom learning (Chapter 3). Second, a specific video production—reaction videos—as a case, was examined for the ways in which youth from refugee backgrounds positioned their identities through their design choices in producing those videos (Chapter 4). Third, video production was examined for its affordances specifically for an emergent multilingual SIFE with refugee experiences who had come late to literacy, as a case (Chapter 5).
6.2 Summary of Findings

Chapter 3 addressed the following research question: What are the possibilities afforded by dramaturgically-structured DMC processes for adolescent newcomer students' investment in classroom learning? The chapter indicated three patterns exemplifying these affordances: (1) changing the definition of the situation; (2) reinforcing impression management to gain social and economic capital; and (3) creating bonds of reciprocal dependence and familiarity.

The first pattern highlighted how changing the situation with the dramaturgical pedagogical approach through the introduction of authentic roles, scripts, props, and actions associated with DMC processes contributed to emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students’ meaningful participation and investment in classroom learning. Students were arguably energized by the possibility of safely and playfully experimenting with scripts, props, actions, and identities associated with unfamiliar and potentially face-threatening roles. They participated and were apprenticed in meaningful situations indexical of professional (e.g., filmmaking) practices.

The second pattern highlighted how impression management was a key component in this dramaturgical pedagogical approach, enabling students to harness DMC processes for presenting idealized versions of themselves, which held the promise of gaining them social and economic capital. This arguably facilitated students’ investment in school learning.

The third pattern highlighted how the dramaturgical pedagogical approach to DMC created bonds of reciprocal dependence and familiarity by heightening students’ interdependence in collaborating on individual and collective group impressions as performance teams. Arguably, the mutual dependence and accountability induced by the dramaturgical approach propelled students to participate in the composing processes actively and meaningfully.
Chapter 4 addressed the following research question: How do youth from refugee backgrounds position their identities through design choices in their reaction videos produced at school in their settlement context? The chapter indicated three patterns of design choices exemplifying these positionings: (1) knowledge brokering; (2) navigating gaze; and (3) playfully disrupting cohesion.

The first pattern showed how, through their design choices around development and delivery of content, youth from refugee backgrounds harnessed the reaction video project to position themselves as knowledge brokers. In their reaction videos, youth demonstrated expertise on topics, issues, and ideas they were passionate about or had experiences with, and garnered interest and identity affirmation from their peers and teachers. Throughout the project, they sought to position themselves as agentive learners with rich assets, rather than learners with deficits in a process of remediation.

The second pattern showed how youth from refugee backgrounds designed their reaction videos to position themselves as transnational navigators, maneuvering and steering toward or away from certain imagined identities and communities at that moment in time. Youth invested much effort, with much sophistication, in navigating their own gaze and the gaze of the viewers, leaving out or including in the videos, to varying degrees, their migration and cultural backgrounds. To me and my co-authors, Dr. Maureen Kendrick and Dr. Margaret Early, this highlighted the youth’s positioning of themselves as transnational navigators seeking to negotiate their place—along with a place for their cultural backgrounds and refugee experiences—within the settlement context, and particularly within school spaces and classrooms.
The third pattern showed how youth made strategic design decisions in their reaction videos to position themselves as playful, resolute, resisters who contested essentialization through playfully disrupting the cohesion of their videos. Youth sought to include bloopers and playful takes within their final cuts, some of which included idle moments, carnivalesque performances, “action” or “cut” remarks, fiddling with equipment, and out-of-frame assistance from me or their peers. Youth strategically positioned themselves through these design choices as lighthearted, humorous, and worthy of connection, friendship, and intimacy with others, just like any other student.

Chapter 5 addressed the following research question: What are the affordances of in-school video production for emergent multilingual SIFE from refugee backgrounds? The chapter indicated three patterns exemplifying these affordances: (1) overcoming the language barrier; (2) showcasing fluency; and (3) countering deficit perceptions.

The first pattern demonstrated how Ahmed was able to overcome the language barrier while attaining professional filming and video editing skills in digital environments that rely heavily on language. This was possible despite Ahmed’s beginning-level proficiency in English, and was explained by the centrality of extra-linguistic modes in video production processes, along with just-in-time scaffolding. Engaging in DMC processes thus enabled Ahmed to exit, if only temporarily, the potentially-vicious cycle of the language barrier coupled by interrupted education and limited reading and writing skills. As explained in the chapter, this arguably enabled Ahmed to enter a virtuous cycle in which each video production served to strengthen his sense of competence, expertise, and symbolic power.

The second pattern demonstrated how through video production, and in particular, practicing and editing his speech for fluency in his videos, Ahmed was able to exercise his right
to speak in the classroom. This experience brought him closer to his imagined identity as a proficient English speaker and helped him feel like a valued member of the classroom community at the time. By creating videos in school and repeatedly practicing and revising his recorded speech, Ahmed was arguably able to improve his communication and develop a positive self-image. This process also enabled him to engage creatively with academic language and literacy learning and make his identity as a proficient English speaker more tangible for himself and others.

The third pattern demonstrated how Ahmed's video production enabled him to showcase his academic abilities, persistence, and intellect to others, disabusing them of any incorrect deficit-oriented assumptions and cementing his position as a respected and capable member of the classroom community, recognized for his talents. Peers' and teachers’ perceptions of Ahmed shifted as they got to know him beyond his English language abilities and observed his video production skills in DMC projects. These projects highlighted Ahmed's strengths, which had previously been overlooked due to his communication challenges.

Taken together, these findings showed how DMC can be harnessed in school settings to support emergent multilingual adolescent newcomer students, particularly from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds, to invest in school learning and work towards realizing their full potential. This has been shown through three angles. First, the dramaturgical pedagogical approach, which (a) afforded redefined situations indexical of professional practices, communities, and identities, (b) reinforced impression management that held the promise of increased social and economic capital, and (c) helped create bonds of reciprocal dependence and familiarity. Second, the way a certain type of video production, reaction videos, enabled youth from refugee backgrounds to powerfully position themselves as knowledge brokers,
transnational navigators, and playful, resolute, resisters. Third, the case of an individual emergent multilingual SIFE with refugee experiences who had come late to literacy, for whom DMC enabled to demonstrate his ability to overcome the language barrier and showcase his fluency for purposes that were valuable for him, all the while countering deficit perceptions.

6.3 Significance and Contributions

This study demonstrates that it is not only possible, but uniquely meaningful, and imperative, to integrate DMC into the school learning of emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers, particularly those who come from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds. The study highlights in different ways how video production, as a digital literacy practice, afforded these students opportunities for digital literacy learning (Jones & Hafner, 2021): gaining expertise in the practical use of digital tools, understanding the meaning conveyed through forms of digital communication, leveraging digital tools for social connections, recognizing the impact digital media can have on their and their teachers’ perspectives, and harnessing digital tools to position their identities. The study shows that it is very much possible and essential to ensure that these learners too get the opportunity to engage in DMC at school to meaningfully and equitably advance their social power and mobility, which has been envisioned for all students by the multiliteracies movement in language and literacy education (Serafini & Gee, 2017). It does so while valuing these learners’ agency, resilience, as well as the varied social, cultural, semiotic, and intellectual resources that they bring with them, their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 2005), as assets (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). DMC practices can be powerful for supporting emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers to invest in school learning and achieve their potential.
In making this contribution, the study more specifically addresses multiple research gaps. First, it adds research findings to a less-developed area in the literature on DMC with emergent multilingual learners, namely DMC’s specific affordances and educational possibilities for newcomer youth from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds in school settings (Li & Akoto, 2021; Michalovich, 2021b). The study also contributes an empirical analysis of DMC’s affordances specifically for SIFE from refugee backgrounds who have come late to literacy, a population that received very limited attention in the literature on in-school DMC. The study does so uniquely through a rich conceptual framework that includes the notion of investment and its relationship with identity-affirmation, capital, imagined identities and imagined communities (Darvin & Norton, 2023). The identity-as-positioning perspective (Golden & Pandya, 2019; McVee et al., 2021) further helps map the ways youth from refugee backgrounds harnessed DMC processes to position themselves anew in storylines that go beyond common deficit narratives and trauma stories.

The study distinctively adds to this less-developed area in the literature, on in-school DMC with emergent multilingual learners from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds in school settings, by exploring multiple types of video productions in new-media genres, such as reaction videos, video podcasts, visioning videos, and (COVID) safety videos, over many months. One of those types, reaction videos, was explored in-depth for the ways in which youth from refugee backgrounds harnessed it to powerfully position themselves in the classroom. This helps address another specific gap related to DMC in school settings, namely how DMC can be integrated in school settings with specific new media genres (Smith, 2014).

Extending the findings of previous studies that explored other populations or other settings, this study elucidates and exemplifies how in-school DMC holds promise for enabling
emergent multilingual newcomers from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds to take ownership of their representations across time and space and change how they are perceived by others (Berman et al., 2001; Goulah, 2017; Jang & Kang, 2019; Leurs, 2017; Robertson, Gifford, et al., 2016; Rogers et al., 2010), effectively collaborate with others and strengthen connections to various communities (Bruce, 2019; Chávez & Soep, 2005; Goodman, 2003; Hepple et al., 2014; Karam, 2018; Omerbašic, 2015; Robertson, Wilding, et al., 2016; Smith, 2019b; Smythe et al., 2016; Vanek et al., 2018; Vasudevan & Riina-Ferrie, 2019), harness the symbolic power of DMC to share their knowledge, cultivate positive self-images and identities (Gilhooly & Lee, 2014; Hull & Katz, 2006; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Jang & Kang, 2019; Johnson & Kendrick, 2017; Vasudevan, Schultz, et al., 2010), and make themselves visible to various audiences (Due et al., 2016; Goodman, 2010, 2018; Luchs & Miller, 2016; McBrien & Day, 2012; Mills, 2008; Pandya & Low, 2020; Rodriguez-Jimenez & Gifford, 2010; Wilding, 2012). The study also contributed nuanced understandings of how DMC could be harnessed by students and teachers to support and showcase language and literacy learning processes, such as those evidenced by Ahmed’s use of video editing to work on and showcase his English fluency. This extends, adds to, and supports the findings of previous studies encouraging in-school DMC for language learning processes among SIFE and youth from refugee backgrounds (Emert, 2013, 2014b, 2014a; Kendrick et al., 2022; Michalovich, 2021a; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010).

The study further sheds light on processes of DMC in school settings, especially collaborative processes, an area of research with a limited body of literature (Hellmich et al., 2021; Li & Akoto, 2021; Smith, 2014, 2019a; Smith et al., 2017). It does so uniquely by exploring a dramaturgical pedagogical approach to DMC, with implications for DMC collaborative processes. Importantly, this investigation of a dramaturgical approach to DMC
contributes insights to two additional strands of research with limited literature. One is literature on play-based pedagogies with adolescent learners in school, which explores its capacity for enabling adolescent learners to participate in playful explorations and performances that are characterized by imaginative, socially liberating, choice-driven, and multimodal experiences (e.g., Fisher et al., 2017; Kendrick et al., 2018; Lammers et al., 2022; Pandya & Mills, 2019; Vasudevan, 2015; Vasudevan, DeJaynes, et al., 2010). Another is a limited body of literature exploring dramaturgical approaches to the design and study of teaching and learning (Bakke & Lindstøl, 2021; Lam, 2000; Østern, 2021), to which this study contributes an analysis of the planning, implementation, and reception of DMC activities as a social drama. Finally, the study also contributes to studies of drama-based educational approaches in additional language education (e.g., Belliveau & Kim, 2013; Cahnmann-Taylor & McGovern, 2021; Ntelioglou, 2011), extending those to small-scale drama-based activities for in-school DMC.

6.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As discussed more extensively in Chapter 2, the study has limitations. On the one hand, these limitations set boundaries around what can be inferred from it. On the other hand, they can help guide recommendations for future research. These two aspects will be integrated in this section.

First, the study’s limitations can be marked by the multi-layered and specific context, timing, duration, and people involved in it. Undoubtedly, these aspects helped shape what was possible to examine, as well as the inferences that could be developed. As a key example, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the scope of the study in important ways, limiting what was initially a series of in-person DMC projects to remote interactions. The level of interaction made available in the reaction videos projects, which was fully in-person (prior to COVID), meant that
at the time it was a better candidate for a case study of its own, compared to some of the other video productions, which were spread across longer periods of time as they were conducted remotely.

Additional aspects of the context can help situate the study’s inferences and the reach of the implications. The study was conducted in a public school, with many of its participants coming from a sheltered English language district-funded program. Although the video productions were all held during school hours and designed with curricular and teacher goals in mind, they were facilitated in small groups by a researcher with high-end equipment and expertise in filmmaking and English teaching (who was not an active teacher at the school), and involved students who showed interest in video production at that moment in their lives. The study, in how it was ultimately shaped by COVID-19 restrictions, was also limited to data collection within the school settings, and did not include, for example, participants taking filming equipment home to document their lives (which was part of the original plan), or home visits by the researcher. Choices such as those made by the teachers regarding the specific new media genres they wished to prioritize with the students also determined the kinds of insights that could be gained regarding DMC processes in this study.

As discussed more extensively in Chapter 2, all of this does not take away from the significance of the findings; as an ethnographic, qualitative case study adhering to the notion of “actuality implies possibility” (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 19), this research showed actual DMC projects with a variety of real affordances that implied possibilities for application or adaptation in other contexts. The recognition of limitations helps readers, whether those are researchers, teachers, or teacher educators, understand where the actuality ends and the possibility begins.
Future studies could thus consider a variety of directions to drive this body of research forward. DMC processes are still a relatively under-explored area of research, especially among emergent multilingual adolescent students from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds. Studies could examine DMC processes among newcomer students in mainstream classes and across the curriculum (potentially involving collaborations among teachers from multiple subject areas). They could examine teacher-led DMC processes in larger classrooms (e.g., 20-30 students). Studies could also explore DMC processes beyond video production (e.g., sound postcards) in school settings among these students.

In particular, the new possibilities increasingly afforded by generative artificial intelligence arguably introduce tools that could help significantly streamline, refine, and bring DMC processes to new levels of multimodal eloquence and prowess, along with ethical dilemmas and challenges around copyright and academic integrity. Emergent multilingual students may harness these tools for self-expression and language and literacy learning in unique ways that warrant scholarly attention.

Studies of in-school DMC among newcomers could further benefit from more explorations of integrations of DMC with anti-racist and first peoples’ principles of learning. This is especially important considering the potential of DMC to decenter authority as well as dominant ways (and modes) of knowing, along with the possibilities it affords learners to inquire critically about social, cultural, economic, and political issues for the purpose of promoting social justice. Future studies could explore with newcomers from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds DMC projects that (1) encourage students to select topics that center around issues such as systemic inequities, colonialism, decolonization, cultural appropriation, and residential schools, among others; (2) focus on genres that can support
advocacy (e.g., social justice documentaries, “How-to” videos exploring how to be anti-racist, how to decolonize various spaces, etc.); (3) systematically guide students to explicitly structure and organize DMC processes (e.g., collaborative processes) according to first peoples’ principles of learning; and (4) encourage students to seek diverse perspectives from various racialized individuals and communities to include in their DMC artifacts.

Similar to the way in which the reaction video was explored as a case study of a specific new media genre, future studies could also explore other new media genres and their particular affordances for newcomer students in different contexts (e.g., different countries and school types). Similar to the way a dramaturgical pedagogical approach was employed in this study, future studies could examine alternative approaches, such as game-based pedagogical approaches to DMC.

This area of research may benefit from studies of in-school DMC among newcomers that explore additional sites of meaning making (Rose, 2016) beyond production (i.e., DMC processes). This could include the site of audience (e.g., audience experiences of DMC artifacts), especially the relationship between DMC products and audience perceptions of newcomer students. This could also include the site of circulation (i.e., the different venues and contexts in which artifacts are experienced and disseminated), which may help map the possibilities of DMC for supporting newcomer students’ civic engagement through the dissemination, circulation, and amplification of their voices using digital media.

Lastly, this area of research would also benefit from studies that explore teachers’ perceptions, challenges, and practices with newcomer youth from refugee backgrounds and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds, and teachers’ professional development in these digital media-based pedagogies.
6.5 Potential Implications for Educators and Teacher Educators

Educators and teacher educators could consider several implications for their practice, based on the findings of this study. First, the video productions in this study, as types of DMC, have been shown to support students’ investment in language and literacy learning at school in meaningful ways. I would encourage educators and teacher educators to explore possibilities for employing DMC in classrooms with emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers, particularly those from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds, including SIFE. Depending on the school context, this might be more feasible through collaboration among multiple teachers. On a broader level, it would require schools and districts to value DMC in addition to print-language academic competencies and provide teachers with professional development opportunities in various forms of DMC along with appropriate human and material resources. The latter could include equipment (e.g., laptops for editing media footage, video and sound recording devices), educational assistants that can provide small groups with just-in-time support (including language support) in their individual media productions during class time.

By employing a dramaturgical pedagogical approach to DMC, teachers could enable students to playfully and safely participate in redefined situations indexical of professional DMC practices, enhance their impression management, and be part of performance teams. To do this, teachers could consult students about types of DMC, including new media genres, that are prevalent in their lives. Teachers could then examine the scripts, actions, roles, and props of DMC projects to determine their potential for classroom activities. They could identify and explicitly assign students meaningful and powerful roles that are essential for the interaction to succeed and differ from ordinary school-based roles. Teachers could facilitate the composing processes by engaging students in practicing authentic scripts and actions and using various
symbolic objects and props. Such facilitation could include inviting students to share and use their full linguistic repertoires in their roles and the redefined situations, employing language scaffolds (e.g., key vocabulary, sentence frames, visual aids), as well as explicitly teaching contextually-responsive language use (e.g., formal vs. informal language, tone and register, technical vs. lay language). By dramaturgically designing the processes involved in any given DMC project, teachers could redefine their classroom learning situations as authentic interactions indexical of real-world professional situations.

In choosing DMC projects in new media genres to focus on, teachers could reflect on the possibilities these genres may afford emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers to position themselves in their classrooms in powerful ways that counter negative and discriminatory narratives, showcasing their creativity and knowledge, and highlighting their multitude of assets and strengths. Alongside scaffolding, as indicated above, educators could consider providing students as much choice and freedom as possible in making design choices, and be attentive and curious about those design choices. Teachers may ask themselves questions such as: What expertise and funds of knowledge are students bringing (or could be bringing) to the DMC project? To what extend are they using the DMC project to pull themselves toward or away from certain aspects of cultures and migration-related experiences? To what extent do students’ design choices evidence their anticipation of how others might perceive them and their attempt to fit or resist such perceptions? What might this anticipation mean about students’ sense of belonging in school?

Engaging emergent multilingual newcomer students in DMC processes in safe and playful learning spaces can afford teachers the opportunity to know their learners, including their often-ignored assets and imagined identities and communities. Teachers can encourage students,
especially emergent multilingual students with a similar background to Ahmed's, to explore new ways of being literate beyond reading and writing in language, providing a space for learners to envision themselves as experts and as academically successful.

Teachers could design units of study that draw on DMC projects to reflect emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers’ interests and full range of communicative repertoires. Through DMC, students may find new ways to overcome their language barrier and attain expertise in sought-after digital literacy skills. Teachers could reflect on how incorporating specific DMC projects into their curriculum might enhance students' self-esteem, foster and showcase their language and literacy learning, and bring to life their imagined identities in tangible ways. Depending on the scale of how DMC is employed with these students, the classroom and the school community could potentially move well beyond common deficit narratives and trauma stories and better foster a sense of belonging for newcomers. By enabling students to express themselves through a variety of DMC projects, educators may find that they are able to better support students for whom settlement and a new experience of schooling can feel profoundly precarious, reducing these students’ sense of ontological insecurity. By incorporating DMC, teachers could enable emergent multilingual adolescent newcomers from refugee and socio-economically marginalized backgrounds to counteract the challenges of fitting in socially and experiencing others' projections of stereotypes and prejudices. Ultimately, DMC could provide a transformative space for students to engage in new and creative learning opportunities that build their sense of identity and investment in language and literacy learning in school.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Forms

A.1 Consent of Teachers

CONSENT FORM – Teachers
Language and Literacy Learning Among Refugee and Migrant Background
Children and Youth in Canadian Classrooms

Principal Investigator: Dr. Maureen Kendrick
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University of British Columbia
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PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to investigate, together with children and youth from refugee backgrounds, and you, their teacher, the multiple forms of literacy (digital, visual, multilingual, gaming) that these students perform in and out of school. We want to understand the communicative practices of children and youth from refugee backgrounds, including what they can do, what they enjoy doing, as well as their language and literacy needs in Canadian schools. Identifying the needs and communicative potential of these learners is very important to maximize their social and economic well-being. We want to work with you to help school systems and community groups understand how to support child and youth refugees to catch up to their same-age peers in school as quickly as possible; to understand how to support child and youth refugees’ learning, social adjustment and academic success; and to develop policies and practices that reflect the digital and multimodal practices of today’s children and youth.

PROCEDURE

You will be involved in designing, with the co-investigators, a structure for data collection that focuses on 2-4 units of study (which may also be conducted in online learning platforms, such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom), to take place during the 2020-21 school year. The thematic units will focus on engaging children and youth in documenting their own lives and literacy practices, as
well as in inquiry projects, as articulated in the BC subject area curricula, which are relevant to students' lives, interests, and issues. You will work together with a member of the project team to identify current or proposed units of study that you think will help us understand and illuminate the full range of children and youth refugees’ multilingual and multimodal communicative repertoires in and out of school. In collaboration with you, we will use techniques such as digital storytelling, photo journals, arts-based activities, film-making, and performance, as well as writing and drawing. Conducted during the school year, these data promise to provide some insight into the ways that students use different modes to voluntarily communicate and represent their knowledge and experiences, particularly, as these relate to subject-area language and literacy demands of school and beyond. You will be involved in determining how and when the data will be collected.

We will take field notes during class observations of these units (in the school’s online platforms, if school learning is online), and will audio and/or videotape classroom observations selectively and only with your permission (this includes computer screen recordings of audio, video, and text from the school’s online learning platforms, if school learning is online). Every effort will be made to avoid disrupting the regular routine of the class. We will also be collecting participating students’ class work. This may include writing, storyboards, artwork, performances and the digital projects that they create. With student consent, we may make short video clips of their performances.

As part of the research, you will be interviewed regarding your ideas pertaining to the students’ language and literacy practices. We will seek your permission to record these interviews (including using computer screen recordings of audio, video, and text in the school’s online communication platforms) to ensure that your understandings are accurately represented. We will also seek permission from your students and their parents to interview students (in the school’s online learning platforms, if schooling is online) about their literacy practices and their own understandings about the role of literacies in their lives.

You have a range of options regarding how actively you participate in the research. We can discuss how you might participate in the data gathering and analysis including analysis of students’ textual, visual or digital works and/or keeping a log of your personal reflections during and after unit(s) of study.

DURATION
We will observe only while the mutually agreed upon units of work are being taught. Observations will occur about once a week, unless otherwise agreed upon by you. Data collection will take place primarily during the months of October to June. Interviews with you and with students will last approximately 15-30 minutes each, depending on how much you have to say. The interviews will be conducted by one of the two co-investigators, once each term, at a time convenient to you and your students.

POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY
There are no known risks to participating in this study.
CONFIDENTIALITY

We will not identify you by name (or by image) in any reports of the completed study unless you choose to have your name included. In our notes, we will not use your real name or any information that can identify you. In audio recordings, any mention of your name will be erased from the recording. In video recordings, your face will be blurred or otherwise masked. In computer screen recordings, any image of your face will be blurred or otherwise masked, and any mention of your name will be erased from the recording.

Study documents will be kept in a secure locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's UBC office for a minimum of 5 years. Computer files will be password protected and encrypted, and will also be kept for a minimum of 5 years.

DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada has funded this study. Findings will be presented at national and international conferences and published in professional and research journals. Reports based on these presentations and articles will be available to you and a report of research findings will also be submitted to Heather Hart, Assistant Superintendent, Burnaby School District Office.

REFUSAL

Participation in this project is optional. You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Refusal to participate or withdrawal/dropout after agreeing to participate will not have an adverse effect or consequences on the participants, their education or employment.

INQUIRIES

We will be happy to answer your questions about the research. Please do not hesitate to contact us either in person, by e-mail, or by telephone.

WHO CAN YOU CONTACT IF YOU HAVE COMPLAINTS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THE STUDY?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at __-____-____ or if long distance e-mail _____________ or call toll free _-____-____-_____. If you have any questions about the study, contact the Principal Investigator: Dr. Maureen Kendrick, (__)_--__. E-mail: _____________________.
CONSENT

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information above, understand that your participation in this research is voluntary, and that you have freely and willingly consented to participate in this research project. Your signature also indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. You may withdraw your consent at any time without any consequences to your employment or professional standing.

SIGNATURE

1.) ☐ I consent to participate in this study.

Signature (full name): ____________________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________________________________

2.) ☐ I wish to have my name included in any reports or publications resulting from this research. I do not wish to remain anonymous. By signing this consent form, I am communicating my desire to have my perspectives and teaching and learning experiences and activities attributed to me in media used to communicate the results of the research project.

Name (please print): ____________________________________________________________

Signature (full name): _________________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________________________________
A.2 Assent of Students

**ASSENT FORM – Students**

**Language and Literacy Learning Among Refugee and Migrant Background Children and Youth in Canadian Classrooms**

**WHO IS DOING THIS STUDY?**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Maureen Kendrick  
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Mr. Amir Michalovich  
Graduate Student (PhD), Dept. of Language and Literacy Education  
University of British Columbia  
Phone: (___) ____-____, E-mail: _________________

**WHY ARE WE DOING THIS STUDY?**

- We are doing this study to learn, together with youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their teacher, about the different kinds of literacies (digital, visual, multilingual, gaming) that students perform in and out of school.
- We want to understand how youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds communicate, including what they can do, what they enjoy doing, as well as their language and literacy needs in Canadian schools.
- We want to get a better understanding of how to help teachers, and other educators, to support the learning, well-being, and academic success of youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds, in school and beyond.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THIS STUDY?**

Because we are doing our study together with your teacher, the first thing that will happen is that we will do classroom projects. You will benefit from these projects whether you take part in the study or not. Whether you choose to take part in the study or not will not affect your standing in class or the regular activities of the class.
In the classroom projects, you and other students will have opportunities to:

- **Work on creative projects** to learn more about the things you are interested in. For example, you could create a short film about an activity you like to do or about something you want to change in the city.
- **Tell, if you choose, about your knowledge and experiences**, and tell about the different kinds of literacies that you use in and out of school.
- **Develop your skills** in activities such as writing, drawing, research, interviewing, digital storytelling, photography, filmmaking, and performance. These activities may be part of the creative projects.

If you agree to take part in this study, here is what will happen:

- We will observe your work during your regular class with your teacher (in online platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom, if school learning is online). The observations will happen during 2-4 classroom projects each term. This will help us understand how you learn and communicate in different languages and literacies.
- If you ask for our help with advanced camera or sound equipment outside of school for your classroom project and if we can join you (once or twice), we will observe your work during these activities (this will not take place when relevant COVID-19-related restrictions are in place).
- We will ask you questions during classroom projects about your use of language and literacies in and out of school, including any difficulties you have had. These informal interviews are an important part of the study because they give you an opportunity to tell us your point of view. We may interview you alone or in groups with your classmates, depending on what you and your classmates prefer (if school learning is online, these interviews will be held using the school’s online learning platform).
- We will collect digital copies of your class work. This may include creative and/or academic writing, artwork, photographs, podcasts, storytelling projects or materials that you created digitally, in school or out of school. You are encouraged to show examples from outside the classroom, as it will help us understand what you enjoy doing.

**WILL THE SESSIONS BE AUDIO-TAPED OR VIDEO-TAPED?**

- For us to understand and record your ideas accurately, we will ask your permission to audio-tape or video-tape the interviews and observations.
- For the work you do on your project using a computer in the classroom, we will ask your permission to record the computer screen and the computer audio when you are working on your project in the classroom (or in the school’s online learning platform).
- If you do not wish the interviews, observations, or classroom computer work to be audio-taped or video-taped, we will write notes.

**HOW LONG WILL THIS STUDY TAKE?**

- Classroom observations will take place during 2-4 classroom projects, planned within the 2020-21 school year. Each project will last between 2-4 weeks. Observations will take
place once or twice a week (1.5-3 hours in total per week) during English Language Learning classes, in agreement with your teachers.

- If you ask for our help with advanced camera or sound equipment outside of school for your classroom project and if we can join you, we will observe your work during these activities too. We anticipate that if this takes place, it will be **once or twice for 2-4 hours each time** (this will not take place when relevant COVID-19-related restrictions are in place).

- We will visit and observe in your classroom (including the school’s online learning platform) mostly during the months of January to June. If you are interviewed, it will last about **15-30 minutes depending on how much you have to say**. We’ll make sure that the interview time doesn’t interfere with your studies.

**WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AS A STUDY MEMBER?**

- **Everything you do in the study is up to you.** You don’t have to take part in activities you don’t want to. You can leave the study at any time you want. You don’t have to answer any questions you don’t want to. If you decide to leave the study, this will not harm your relationship with us, and materials with your information will be destroyed immediately.

- At any time, you have the right to ask that any materials that you created or information that we collected will not be used in the study, and we will destroy these materials immediately. However, if the results of the study with some of these materials are already published, we will not be able to withdraw them.

- You have the right to refuse to participate at any time; it is not a problem if you don’t want to be interviewed, observed, video-taped or audio-taped.

**HOW WILL WE PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY?**

- **We will not identify you by name** in any presentations of the completed study unless you choose to have your name included.
  - In our notes, we will not use your real name or any information that can identify you.
  - In audio recordings, any mention of your name will be erased from the recording.
  - In video recordings, your face will be blurred or otherwise masked.
  - In computer screen recordings, any image of your face will be blurred or otherwise masked, and any mention of your name will be erased from the recording.

- If you have examples of your work that you are very proud of and you want to have your name or images included with it in any public presentations and publications, you and your parent can provide permission to include your name or images. We will ask for your permission to contact you about this in the future.

- Computer files with materials or data will be protected with passwords and will only be accessed on the researcher’s personal computer.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?**

- The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada has funded this study. With your permission, data and findings will be presented as research articles, posters, videos, or podcasts at local, national and international conferences, film screenings, as well as
community events, and published in professional and research journals. A report of research findings will also be submitted to Burnaby School District and the Vancouver School Board.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

• There are no known risks to participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS THAT COULD COME OUT OF IT FOR YOU?

• **You will get a chance to talk about things** that concern you, as well as about ideas you have that may solve the challenges you face.

• As you work on creative projects with the help of a university scholar, you will have a chance to **think about your future goals and practice skills** for your future career. This could help your self-esteem and resilience.

• Your participation in this study will help schools, educators, and communities to **support the learning, well-being, and academic success of refugee and migrant background learners**, in school and beyond.

WHO CAN YOU CONTACT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY?

We will be happy to answer your questions about the study. Please do not hesitate to contact us in person, by e-mail, or by telephone: Amir Michalovich, Phone: (___) ___-____, E-mail: __________________

WHO CAN YOU CONTACT IF YOU HAVE COMPLAINTS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THE STUDY?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at ___-____-____ or if long distance e-mail _______________ or call toll free _-____-____-____.
CONSENT

- Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your class standing.
- Your signature below indicates that you have read the information above and received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Please check the appropriate box for each line:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You consent:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. To participate in this study.</td>
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<td>2. To be audio recorded for this study.</td>
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<td>3. To be video recorded for this study.</td>
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<td>4. To the recording of the computer screen and the computer audio when you</td>
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<td>are working on your project in the classroom.</td>
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</table>

Signature (full name): ______________________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________________________________________
A.3 Consent of Parents / Guardians of Students

CONSENT FORM – Parents/Guardians
Language and Literacy Learning Among Refugee and Migrant Background Children and Youth in Canadian Classrooms

WHO IS DOING THIS STUDY?

Principal Investigator: Dr. Maureen Kendrick
Dept. of Language & Literacy Education
University of British Columbia
Phone: (___) ___-____, E-mail: __________________

Co-investigators: Dr. Margaret Early
Dept. of Language & Literacy Education
University of British Columbia
Phone: (___) ___-____, E-mail: __________________

Mr. Amir Michalovich
Graduate Student (PhD), Dept. of Language and Literacy Education
University of British Columbia
Phone: (___) ___-____, E-mail: __________________

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS STUDY?

- We are doing this study to learn, together with youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their teacher, about the different kinds of literacies (digital, visual, multilingual, gaming) that students perform in and out of school.
- We want to understand how youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds communicate, including what they can do, what they enjoy doing, as well as their language and literacy needs in Canadian schools.
- We want to get a better understanding of how to help teachers, and other educators, to support the learning, well-being, and academic success of youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds, in school and beyond.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THIS STUDY?

- Because we are doing our study together with your child’s teacher, the first thing that will happen is that we will do classroom projects.
• These projects will be part of the regular classroom activities, but we will only collect information from students who provide consent. Whether you allow your child to take part in the study or not will not affect their standing in class or the regular activities of the class.

In the classroom projects, your child and other students will have opportunities to:

• Work on creative projects to learn more about the things they are interested in. For example, they could create a short film about an activity they like to do or about something they want to change in the city.
• Tell, if they choose, about their knowledge and experiences, and tell about the different kinds of literacies that they use in and out of school.
• Develop their skills in activities such as writing, drawing, research, interviewing, digital storytelling, photography, filmmaking, and performance. These activities may be part of the creative projects.

If you allow your child to take part in this study, here is what will happen:

• We will observe your child’s work during their regular class with their teacher (in online platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom, if school learning is online). The observations will happen during 2-4 classroom projects each term. This will help us understand how your child learns and communicates in different languages and literacies.
• If your child asks for our help with advanced camera or sound equipment outside of school for their classroom project and if we can join them (once or twice), we will observe their work during these activities too (this will not take place when relevant COVID-19-related restrictions are in place).
• We will ask your child questions during classroom projects about their use of language and literacies in and out of school, including the challenges they have in Canadian schools. These informal interviews are an important part of the study because this gives your child an opportunity to tell us their point of view. Interviews may be conducted with your child alone or in groups with their classmates, depending on what your child and their classmates prefer (if school learning is online, these interviews will be held using the school’s online learning platform).
• We will collect digital copies of your child’s class work. This may include creative and/or academic writing, artwork, photographs, storytelling projects or materials that your child created digitally, in school or out of school. Your child is encouraged to show examples from outside the classroom, as it will help us understand what they enjoy doing.

WILL THE SESSIONS BE AUDIO-TAPED OR VIDEO-TAPED?

• For us to understand and record your child’s ideas accurately, we will ask your permission to audio-tape or video-tape the interviews and observations.
• For the work your child does on their project using a computer in the classroom (or in the school’s online learning platform), we will ask your permission to record the computer screen and the computer audio.
• If you do not wish the interviews, observations, or classroom computer work to be audio-taped or video-taped, we will write notes.

HOW LONG WILL THIS STUDY TAKE?

• Classroom observations will take place during 2-4 classroom projects, planned within the 2020-21 school year. Each project will last between 2-4 weeks. Observations will take place once or twice a week (1.5-3 hours in total per week) during English Language Learning classes, in agreement with the teachers.
• If your child asks for our help with advanced camera or sound equipment outside of school for their classroom project and if we can join them, we will observe their work during these activities too. We anticipate that if this takes place, it will be once or twice for 2-4 hours each time (this will not take place when relevant COVID-19-related restrictions are in place).
• We will visit and observe in your child’s classroom (including the school’s online learning platform) mostly during the months of January to June. If your child is interviewed, it will last about 15-30 minutes depending on how much your child has to say. We’ll make sure that the interview time doesn’t interfere with their studies.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AND YOUR CHILD’S RIGHTS AS STUDY MEMBERS?

• Everything your child does in the study is voluntary. They do not have to take part in activities they don’t want to. They can leave the study at any time they want, and you can decide that as well. Your child does not have to answer any questions they don’t want to. Your child’s decision or your decision to leave the study will not affect their relationship or your relationship with us, and all data and materials collected in relation to your child will be destroyed immediately.
• At any time, you and your child have the right to request that some or any materials that your child created, as well as notes made by us, audio, video, or computer recordings will not be used in the study. In such a case, we will destroy these materials immediately. However, once the results of the study with some of these materials are made available publicly or in professional or journal publications, we will not be able to withdraw them.
• You have the right to refuse to allow your child to participate at any time; it is not a problem if you do not wish your child to be interviewed, observed, audio-recorded, or video-taped.

HOW WILL WE PROTECT YOUR CHILD’S PRIVACY?

• We will not identify your child by name in any presentations of the completed study unless your child chooses to have their name included.
  o In our notes, we will not use your child’s real name or any information that can identify them.
  o In audio recordings, any mention of your child’s name will be erased from the recording.
  o In video recordings, your child’s face will be blurred or otherwise masked.
In computer screen recordings, any image of your child’s face will be blurred or otherwise masked, and any mention of your child’s name will be erased from the recording.

- If your child has examples of their work that they are very proud of and that they want to have their name or images included with it in any public presentations and publications, your child and you can provide permission to include your child’s name or images. We will ask for your permission to contact you about this in the future.
- Computer files with materials or data will be protected with passwords and will only be accessed on the researcher’s personal computer.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?
- The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada has funded this study. With your permission and your child’s permission, data and findings will be presented as research articles, posters, videos, or podcasts at local, national and international conferences, film screenings, as well as community events, and published in professional and research journals. A report of research findings will also be submitted to Burnaby School District and the Vancouver School Board.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?
- There are no known risks to participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS THAT COULD COME OUT OF IT FOR YOUR CHILD?
- Your child will get a chance to talk about things that concern them, as well as about ideas they have that may solve the challenges they face.
- As your child works on creative projects with the help of a university scholar, they will have a chance to think about their future goals and practice skills for their future career. This could help their self-esteem and confidence.
- Your child’s participation in this study will help schools, educators, and communities to support the learning, well-being, and academic success of refugee and migrant background learners in school and beyond.

WHO CAN YOU CONTACT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY?
We will be happy to answer your questions about the study. Please do not hesitate to contact us in person, by e-mail, or by telephone: Amir Michalovich, Phone: (___) ___-____, E-mail: __________________________

WHO CAN YOU CONTACT IF YOU HAVE COMPLAINTS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THE STUDY?
If you have any concerns or complaints about your child’s rights as a research participant and/or their experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint
Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at ___-___-____ or if long distance e-mail ____________ or call toll free _-___-____-____.
CONSENT

- Allowing your child to take part in this study is entirely up to you and them. You have the right to refuse to allow your child to participate in this study. If you decide to allow your child to take part, you may choose to pull them out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on their class standing.
- Your signature below indicates that you have read the information above and received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to allow your child to participate in this study.

Please check the appropriate box for each line:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You consent:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. To allow your child to participate in this study.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. To allow your child to be audio recorded for this study.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. To allow your child to be video recorded for this study.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. To allow the recording of the computer screen and the computer audio when your child is working on their project in the classroom.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you agree to be contacted again if your child wants to have their name or images included with the presentation of their work?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. If yes, please provide your phone and email below (please print):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: _____________________________</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail: _____________________________</td>
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Child’s Name: ____________________________________________________________

Signature (parent/guardian) full name: ______________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________________________________
A.4 Pilot Study as Part of Coursework (LLED 558) – Assent Form

Alternative Assent Form for Young Children
Case Studies in Literacy and Multimodality

To: (Child’s Name)

Principal Investigator: Dr. Maureen Kendrick (course instructor)
Department of Language and Literacy Education
___-____-

Co-Investigator: Amir Michalovich
Department of Language and Literacy Education
___-____-

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to learn about the ways in which children and youth represent and communicate their knowledge and experience.

Procedures: In this study, I will meet with you three times during the next six weeks to observe some of the activities you like to do (e.g., playing, drawing, writing, working on the computer). I may also interview you or ask you questions about your activities. Each observation and/or interview will take about ½ an hour to one hour and will be videotaped or audio taped. I will also write notes. I will be working with you for a maximum of two hours over the three sessions during the next six weeks. I will use what I learn from talking and working with you to write a paper as my class assignment and it is possible that I will also write an article that will be published in a journal or presented at a conference. If I share the audiotape or videotape with my class, I will edit these so you and any others cannot be identified. I will ensure that no one other than myself and my professor see your work and I will not use your real name in my assignment or elsewhere and no one other than me will know who you are.

Do you agree (assent) to participate? Yes____ No_____

NB: The assent form will be read aloud and summarized and reworded appropriately according to the age of the child.
A.5  Pilot Study as Part of Coursework (LLED 558) – Consent Form (Home)

Date:
Dear Parent/Guardian:

Project Title: Case Studies in Literacy and Multimodality

I, Amir Michalovich, am a graduate student currently enrolled in LLED 558: Literacy and Multimodality with Dr. Maureen Kendrick. One of our assignments in the course is to carry out a series of naturalistic observations and interviews.

The purpose of this project is to learn about how children and youth represent and communicate their knowledge and experience through different modalities such as drawing, photography, writing, drama, etc. In addition, we will learn and practice aspects of qualitative research methodology. In this study, I will meet with your child three times during the next six weeks to observe some of the activities he/she likes to do (e.g., playing, drawing, writing, working on the computer). I may also interview your child or ask questions about his/her activities. Each observation and/or interview will take about ½ an hour to one hour and will be videotaped or audio taped. I will also write notes. I will observe/interact with your child at school for a maximum of two hours over the three sessions during the next six weeks.

The observations and interviews will be summarised into my class assignment and edited segments of audio/video may be presented to my class. It is also possible, that my class assignment will be re-drafted for publication in an appropriate journal or presented as a paper at a conference. Your identity and that of your child will be kept strictly confidential through the use of pseudonyms throughout the process. In cases where videotaping is used, the identity of the child cannot be kept strictly confidential. Any recorded data used to illustrate evidence will be edited so that no identifiable information is available, and only the course instructor, Dr. Maureen Kendrick, and I (Amir Michalovich) will have access to the raw data. I would be happy to share my findings with you should you wish.

The information gathered in this study will in no way be used to harm or misrepresent you or your child. Should you consent to your child’s participation in this project, you have the right to refuse to be involved or to withdraw at any time. Such withdrawal or refusal to be involved will not jeopardize you and/or your child in any way. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing the consent form.

If you have any questions concerning any aspect of this project, the procedures to be used or the nature of your child’s involvement, please contact me, Amir Michalovich, ____-____-_____. My course instructor, Dr. Maureen Kendrick, can be contacted at ____-____-_____. If you have any concerns about your or your child’s treatment or rights as a research participant, please telephone the Office of Research Services at University of British Columbia, at ____-____-_____.

Sincerely,

[Student’s signature]  [Instructor’s signature]

Amir Michalovich  Maureen Kendrick
I consent / I do not consent to [child’s name] participation in the study titled: “Case Studies in Literacy and Multimodality” as described above.

Signature: _________________________________ Date: ________________________________

[I consent / I do not consent to my home as the setting for the study.

Signature: _________________________________ Date: ________________________________]

[I consent / I do not consent videotaping [audiotaping] during the study.

Signature: _________________________________ Date: ________________________________]

[I consent / I do not consent to sharing the videotape [audiotape] excerpts during a class presentation.

Signature: _________________________________ Date: ________________________________]

PLEASE KEEP THIS LETTER FOR YOUR FILES AND RETURN THE ATTACHED CONSENT FORM.
A.6 Pilot Study as Part of Coursework (LLED 558) – Consent Form (School)

Date
Dear Principal/Director:

Project Title: Case Studies in Literacy and Multimodality

I, Amir Michalovich, am a graduate student currently enrolled in LLED 558: Literacy and Multimodality with Dr. Maureen Kendrick. One of our assignments in the course is to carry out a series of naturalistic observations and interviews. The purpose of this project is to learn about how children and youth represent and communicate their knowledge and experience through different modalities such as drawing, photography, writing, drama, etc. In addition, we will learn and practice aspects of qualitative research methodology. In this study, I will meet with a focal child three times during the next six weeks to observe some of the activities he/she likes to do (e.g., playing, drawing, writing, working on the computer). I may also interview the child or ask questions about his/her activities. Each observation and/or interview will take about ½ an hour to one hour and will be videotaped or audio taped. I will also write notes. I will observe/interact with the child for a maximum of two hours over the three sessions during the next six weeks. I am requesting your permission to carry out the observations and interviews at your facility during mutually agreed upon times. No special assistance or equipment is needed. The information gathered in this case study will in no way be used to harm or misrepresent the parents, the children or your facility. Should you consent to the use of your facility for this project, you have the right to refuse to be involved or to withdraw at any time. Such withdrawal or refusal to be involved will not jeopardize the participants or your institution in any way.

If you have any questions concerning any aspect of this project, the procedures to be used or the nature of your facility’s involvement, please contact me, Amir Michalovich, ____-____-____. My course instructor, Dr. Maureen Kendrick, can be contacted at ____-____-____. If you have any concerns about your institution’s treatment or rights as a research participant, please telephone the Office of Research Services at University of British Columbia, at ____-____-____.

Sincerely

[Student’s signature] [Instructor’s signature]

Amir Michalovich Dr. Maureen Kendrick
I hereby consent to the use of our facility [school’s name] in the study titled “Case Studies in Literacy and Multimodality” as described in the attached letter.

Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________________________

PLEASE KEEP THIS LETTER FOR YOUR FILES AND RETURN THE ATTACHED CONSENT FORM.
Appendix B: Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews and Semi-Structured Focus Group

B.1 Student Post-Project Interview Questions

- What were some big things you wanted to accomplish with the project?
- Who would you like to watch the video you made?
- What are you planning to do with your video? Why?
- Was it different making the video compared to writing a story on paper? Do you like one better than the other?
- What does watching the video make you feel?
- How was it like to work on this project with your partner(s)?
- How was it like being a director/videographer/editor? Do you like one better than the other?
- Did you work on or think about the video outside of class? If so, what did you do?
- What do you like best about your video? Why?
- What was hard for you while working on this project? Why?
- What advice would you give other students about creating videos like these?
- If you had more time to work on your video, what would you add or change?
- How has it been for you living in Canada?

B.2 Teacher Focus Group and Interview Questions

- Can you share some of your experiences as a teacher working with newcomer students, including those from refugee backgrounds? What are some challenges or dilemmas you have faced? (including during COVID)
- Could you also share some moments of satisfaction you have experienced while working with these students?
- What are some factors that contribute to the resilience and success of newcomer students from refugee and immigrant backgrounds in their new school environment? What challenges or barriers might they face?
- How can we support newcomer students from refugee and immigrant backgrounds in school?
• To what extent do factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, economic background, culture, migration history, or age impact language and literacy learning in your classes, particularly for newcomer students from refugee and immigrant backgrounds?

• What are some of your observations on the video productions I facilitated with the participating students? (Including our remote interactions)

• What possibilities or affordances have you noticed for newcomer students, particularly those from refugee backgrounds, in regard to the video production projects? What challenges or limitations have you observed?

• Did you notice power dynamics in the social interactions during this project? If so, could you elaborate?