

IRAQI REFUGEE ENGLISH LEARNERS IN THE UNITED STATES:  
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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by  
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## ABSTRACT

Dr. Amanda Kibler, Advisor

Framed within sociocultural perspectives of language learning, identity, and literacy, this dissertation aims at better understanding the school experiences of four adolescent Iraqi refugee English learners in the United States. As more waves of school-aged refugee children with little or interrupted schooling arrive into Western English speaking countries, there is a need for new ways to respond to these students' needs and help them develop the educational and social skills that they need to adapt to their new environments. Within the United States context, we know little about refugee students' school experiences. This study addresses this gap by asking the following two research questions: 1) How do four adolescent Iraqi refugee English learners negotiate social school contexts?, and 2) How do four adolescent Iraqi refugee English learners negotiate academic school contexts?

Data collection occurred between the months of October and December of 2015 and included video recorded classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, and student artifacts of their work both at school and outside school. This study adopted a qualitative design with an ethnographic perspective to answer the research questions. A hybrid inductive-deductive thematic analysis-based strategy was adopted to analyze the data using qualitative data analysis software. Member checking, triangulation, engagement in the field, and reflexivity were measures that were adopted to increase trustworthiness.

Findings suggest that participants in this study negotiate academic and social contexts of school through using language in creative and agentive ways. For example,

participants use writing, verbal resistance, silence, and multimodal and multilingual out-of-school literacy practices to negotiate discriminatory practices and limited peer social networks in social school contexts. They also resist or negotiate engagement in school-based literacy practices, using language to make connections to out-of-school literacy practices that they are invested in. In negotiating academic and social contexts of school, and through using language in an agentic manner, participants construct their identities as multilingual and multi-literate adolescents that can navigate life in real and online contexts. The four participants in this study negate the stereotypical image of the helpless refugee and highlight the importance of language and student agency as tools to adapt and succeed at educational and social resettlement.

Those findings have theoretical and pedagogical implications. On a theoretical level, negotiated engagement has emerged as an agentic and respectful approach to encourage student engagement in school-based literacies. This approach can be practically applied on a pedagogic level through a contextual approach that includes extending invitations for the students to learn, respecting the possibilities that are available for them to enact various identities and forms of knowledge, investing in learning with, about, and from them, ensuring their right to speak, and planning flexible and inclusive learning opportunities. Refugee specific implications include problematizing the issue of silence in the classroom and framing it as response to trauma and resistance, challenging commonly held beliefs about culturally relevant approaches (e.g., who decides what is relevant?), and addressing discriminatory practices against refugee students.

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, “Iraqi Refugee English Learners in the United States: A Multiple Case Study,” has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to Romeka, Elijah, my family in Lebanon, and to all displaced individuals in search of home.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the four student participants in this study who have shared part of their lives with me and their respective teachers who have generously allowed me into their classrooms. I would also like to thank members of my committee for their valuable advice – not only throughout this dissertation process, but also throughout my journey at Curry School of Education. I extend my gratitude to the Curry School Research and Development Fund that partially funded this research through the Curry IDEAs (Innovative, Developmental, Exploratory Awards) grant. Finally, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Kibler, who has been a wonderful mentor that has constantly inspired me to become a better scholar.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*The ordeals refugees survive and the aspirations they hold resonate with us as Americans. This country was built by people who fled oppression and war, leapt at opportunity, and worked day and night to remake themselves in this new land. The refugees who arrive in the United States today continue this tradition, bringing fresh dreams and energy and renewing the qualities that help forge our national identity and make our country strong.*

*President Barack Obama*

*June 20, 2014*

*World Refugee Day (US Department of State, 2014, p. iii)*

In a speech given by President Obama on the World Refugee Day in 2014, he highlighted the deep connections between the challenges and hopes of refugees and American ideals such as hard work and overcoming obstacles. He also reported a “grim milestone” of 51 million people who are now refugees, asylum seekers, or internally displaced persons according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). For the purposes of this proposed study, I adopt the United Nations’ definition of a refugee as a person

who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion,

nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Convention and Protocol, 1951/1996) (as cited in McBrien, 2005)

The UNHCR (2012a) underscored the rising numbers of displaced individuals and the increasing diversity in refugee populations and their needs across the globe. From an educational policy perspective, the UNHCR (2012b) emphasized refugees' right to quality education and asserted the importance of education for the well-being and even future security of individuals and societies.

As more waves of school-aged refugees with little or interrupted schooling arrive into Western English speaking countries, there is a need for new pedagogic responses to help these students develop the educational and social skills that they need to adapt to their new environments (Dooley, 2009). Among these key skills is proficiency in the language(s) of the host country. Language emerges as a significant inclusion/exclusion factor for refugee students in emergency (Zakharia & Bartlett, 2014) and non-emergency (MacNevin, 2012) contexts. "If refugees [...] move to a place with a different language, literacy, and script, they must learn it or face further exclusion," Zakharia and Bartlett argued (2014, p.18). However, little is known on how educators can address refugee students' academic and linguistic needs. McBrien (2005, p. 356) contended in her seminal literature review on refugee education in the United States (US):

Aside from stressing language acquisition and the need for teachers to be patient

and sympathetic, the literature on refugee children and adolescents does not specify ways to boost refugee students' achievement in required school subjects.

Whereas one can find numerous articles discussing academic achievement in math, science, and language arts for the general population of students and for larger minority groups (such as African Americans and Hispanics), this kind of research is not available for refugee populations.

Since McBrien's review of the literature in 2005, the need to learn more about refugee education still persists in the US (Lerner, 2012). This need transcends the US to include other Western countries of resettlement like Australia (Hatoss, 2013) and conflict or crisis contexts like Lebanon (Karam, Monaghan, Yoder, & Kibler; under review). Challenges that face refugee students and often prevent them from succeeding in adapting to their country of resettlement are many, including parental perspectives (resistance to or approval of) on acculturation, rejection or acceptance of host societies, the prevalence of stereotypes and prejudiced ideas (McBrien, 2005), and dissonance between their school-based and out-of-school literacy practices (Omerbašić, 2015; Sarroub, 2007). On an educational level, chief among refugees' challenges is learning a foreign or second language (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; MacNevin, 2012; McBrien, 2005). While research has focused on the role of education and culture among large minority groups of English language learners (ELLs), we know little about newcomer populations such as Iraqi refugees (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). This dissertation addresses this gap in the literature by examining the school experiences of four Iraqi adolescent refugee English learners (ELs). More particularly, this dissertation aims at answering the following research questions:

- 1) How do four adolescent Iraqi refugee ELs negotiate social school contexts?



## 2) How do four adolescent Iraqi refugee ELs negotiate academic school contexts?

But apart from the gap in the literature, why does research on school experiences of adolescent Iraqi refugee ELs matter and what is the significance of the above research questions? What theoretical lens and methodological tools will be used and what justifies these choices? In the following sections, I provide a rationale for conducting this research that aims at answering the above questions. I include background information on Iraqi refugees in the US to establish the importance of learning more about this population. I also briefly discuss the choice of the theoretical lens and methodological tools that this dissertation adopts (a more detailed discussion will follow in Chapter 2 and 3 of this dissertation), and finally summarize the overall purpose of this dissertation.

### **Rationale**

#### **Recent Numbers of Iraqi Refugees**

The US is the biggest resettlement country in the world for refugees referred by the UNHCR (UNHCR, 2014). In fact, the US has resettled more than 124,000 Iraqis since 2008, making the Iraqi refugee population one of the largest in the US (US Department of State, 2016). Numbers from 2014 and 2015 revealed that Iraqi refugees constituted around 28% and 19% of the total refugee population admitted into the US during those past two years. More current data from 2016 (US Department of State, 2016) indicated that Arabic is the most common language spoken by refugees admitted to the US since 2008 (see Appendix A). Therefore, Iraqi refugee students whose mother-tongue is Arabic are faced with the challenge of learning English as quickly as possible, and developing complex bi/multilingual competencies, while maintaining their first

language (L1). The next section provides more contextual information on Iraqi refugees and why they fled their homeland.

### **Background and Causes of Iraqis Seeking Refuge**

Iraq is an oil-rich country located in the Middle East with the Arabian Gulf (also known as the Persian Gulf; see Yoder, Johnson & Karam, 2016 for more details) on its south eastern border. The country shares common borders with Syria, Iran, Kuwait, Jordan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. According to Yako and Biswas (2014), Iraqis started seeking refuge since the war with Iran in 1980. This escalated with the Gulf War in the 1990s and reached a climax with the bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in February 2006. This last event was a climactic one due to its sectarian nature as it marked the beginning of the ongoing struggle for power between the Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq. Sectarian violence continued with the current and sudden rise of the Islamic State (commonly known as ISIS) who have persecuted religious minorities and even other Muslims such as Shiites or even Sunnis who do not share the common vision of starting a religious Caliphate in Iraq. The combined effect of wars, religious persecution, and sectarian violence forced millions of Iraqis from various sects to flee from Iraq and resettle in various countries such as Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) was established in 2007 to help resettle displaced Iraqis in the US and as a response to humanitarian requests from international and humanitarian organizations for the US to help resettle Iraqis who were impacted by this conflict and forced to flee (Yako & Biswas, 2014). According to the Department of State (2016), several governmental and non-governmental organizations are involved in processing refugee applications received from the UNHCR, US embassies (mostly in Iraq

and intermediary countries such as Turkey and Jordan), or non-governmental organizations. The processing period can last around 18-24 months and include a complex list of eligibility and non-eligibility criteria. For example, there is a need to establish a “reasonable possibility that he/she would face some form of harm or predicament if returned to the country of origin or habitual residence” (UNHCR, 2014, p. 83).

Despite the fact that the Iraqi refugee population is one of the largest in the US, we know little about their experiences in their country of resettlement (Yako & Biswas, 2014). On an educational level, Sarroub, Pernicek, and Sweeney (2007) argued that “How these and other refugee children adapt to their new social, cultural, and economic setting directly affects the future of the United States” (p. 669). Thus, it is important for us to learn more about their school experiences, especially at the adolescent stage.

### **Why Adolescents?**

According to the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) in Australia, adolescent and late adolescent (15-24 years) refugees

are faced with an array of additional pressures, demands and stresses that are particularly acute. These include more significant pressure to achieve educationally, less previous experience of education and higher level of family responsibilities than those who arrive at a younger age. These and other barriers impact significantly on the settlement experience of refugee young people.

(O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 4)

These challenges can make it more difficult for adolescent refugees to adapt in their country of resettlement.

Age can also be one of the factors that can potentially influence second language acquisition (SLA). SLA is the “scholarly field of inquiry that investigates the human capacity to learn languages other than the first, during late childhood, adolescence or adulthood, and once the first language or languages have been acquired” (Ortega, 2009, p.1-2). Achieving academic proficiency in a new language is a complex process that can take several years (Hakuta, Goto Butler, & Witt, 2000); this is valuable time that adolescent refugees who come to the US with minimal proficiency in the language do not have. In addition, second language learners who start learning a target language before puberty can often attain native-like phonological skills while this possibility is far less likely, although not entirely impossible, for older learners who start learning a new language later in life and are more likely retain phonological elements from their first language when speaking their second (Scovel, 1988; 2000). This is commonly labeled as “having a foreign accent” and can make it more challenging to acculturate, and students with heavy accents are subject to ridicule and bullying (Olsen, 1988; 2000).

Bullying can also have religious underpinnings. Adolescent Muslim refugee female students often choose to wear a veil (hijab) after puberty as an expression of their faith, thus Muslim adolescent females can be the target of religious based bullying. For example, interview data with Somali adolescents in one middle-school in the US revealed bullying of female Muslim students due to their wearing the hijab and refusal to date boys (Birman, Trickett, & Bacchus, 2001). Female students reported being forced to unveil themselves for a school id photo. Their sense of shame was so great that they were contemplating dropping out of school (Birman, Trickett, & Bacchus, 2001). Bullying of

Muslim refugee students is often aimed at not only religious, but also linguistic and racial aspects of their identity (e.g., Oikonomidou, 2007).

Adolescence is also an important developmental stage for identity construction. Drawing on Erikson's identity theory and other psychologists, Deutsch (2008) contended that identity integration is "the primary developmental task for adolescents" (p. 179). Deutsch highlighted the importance of resolving contradictions in constructing a stable self-concept at that critical stage of one's life in order to avoid "identity diffusion" (p.199). Therefore, in addition to facing acute challenges in acculturating and learning a new language, refugee adolescents are also going through a critical stage in their lives where their identities are being shaped. All of these factors make it important for us to gain a better understanding of their experiences at school.

### **Theory and Methodology: A Brief Introduction and Rationale**

This dissertation examines refugee ELs' school experiences at the intersection of language, learning, identity (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Ivanič, 1998, 2006; Norton, 2013) and literacy (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 2000) from a sociocultural perspective. A sociocultural lens allows me to better understand the contextual influences on adolescent refugee students' language learning and literacy and identity development within the school as a sociocultural context. To better understand how students negotiate academic contexts of school in particular, this dissertation also draws upon the concepts of appropriation and resistance of hegemonic literacy practices (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005) and their engagement (Philp & Duchesne, 2016) in academic tasks and literacy practices.

On a methodological level, this study adopts a qualitative research design to answer the research questions. A qualitative design is particularly effective in uncovering social and cultural frames underlying the learning experiences of refugee students – a design that is in line with a sociocultural perspective. In addition, a qualitative approach is particularly helpful when researching marginalized populations (Marshall & Rossman, 2010) such as refugees and examining issues of identity and power within SLA (Norton, 2013). I provide a more detailed explanation of the conceptual framework in chapter 2 and elaborate on methods in chapter 3.

### **Statement of Purpose and Overview of the Study**

According to Lerner (2012, p. 9), “Research has shown that educational resettlement in the U.S. is, for the most part, far from successful.” However, we know little about the educational resettlement of refugees both on an academic and social level, and there have been numerous calls for more research on this topic (e.g., McBrien, 2005), especially for studies adopting case study (Stewart, 2013) and ethnographic approaches (Lerner, 2012). This dissertation aims at answering such calls by exploring the multiple layers that frame the academic and social experiences of adolescent Iraqi refugee ELs within the school as a sociocultural context. Such layers include students’ negotiation of discriminatory practices, limited peer social networks, language learning, and resisting and engaging in school-based literacy practices that sometimes intersected (or not) with their out-of-school multilingual and multimodal literacy practices. Throughout this negotiation process, students constructed their multiple and evolving identities through using language in an agentive and creative manner.

Answers to this dissertation's questions have implications for theory and practice. As the numbers of Iraqi refugees increase in the US, it becomes more important to learn about their learning experiences, their out-of-school and school-based literacy practices, and power structures that influence their learning. Learning in general, and especially learning a second language, is not a decontextualized process and this study aims at better understanding the sociocultural elements that accompany adolescent Iraqi refugee ELs' learning and navigation of academic and social contexts of school. After this brief introduction, I proceed to chapter two where I present a more detailed discussion of the conceptual framework for this study in addition to an overview of the literature on refugee education. In chapter three I describe the methods that I used to collect and analyze the data. In chapters four and five, I present the findings from this study, explaining how students negotiated the social and academic school contexts consecutively. I conclude with chapter six where I summarize and discuss the findings and implications of this study before I present suggestions for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAME AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This study is informed by a review of the theoretical and empirical literature on language learning, literacy, and identity in general and more specifically as relevant to refugee students. From this body of work, important conceptual differences emerge about how to frame research on refugee education within studies on ELs, immigrant students, and the wider field of literacy and second language acquisition. In general, this chapter discusses these conceptual differences, highlighting principles that frame this dissertation within the relevant literature and providing definitions of key terms.

More specifically, I start the first section by discussing my conceptual framework, which encompasses notions of language, learning, and identity (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Ivanič, 1998, 2006; Norton, 2013) in addition to sociocultural approaches to literacy (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 2000). From the theoretical literature on sociocultural approaches to literacy emerge the notions of appropriation and resistance as agentive responses to hegemonic literacy practices (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005) which I also discuss as part of my conceptual framework. In addition to appropriation and resistance, another important concept that influences how students negotiate academic contexts of school is engagement (Philp & Duchesne, 2016) which I discuss in the same section.

The above mentioned theories come together to help frame this dissertation's research questions as shown in Figure 1 which presents a helpful heuristic that outlines



the underlying conceptual principles that this dissertation draws upon. In short, students' negotiation of academic and social school contexts lie at the intersection of language, learning, identity (Ivanič, 1998, 2006; Norton, 2013), and literacy (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 2000). In negotiating social school contexts (e.g., participants' experiences of discriminatory practices and limited peer social networks), it is important to consider students' identities and the role of power structures (e.g., their right to speak; Norton, 2013) in constructing their identities. In negotiating academic school contexts, school-based literacy practices in particular, it is important to examine how students use their agency to respond to such practices in the forms of appropriation, resistance (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005) or engagement (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). In negotiating academic and social contexts of school, it would be unwise to ignore out-of-school literacy practices as the school is not the only site where participants' identities are constructed. In addition, school-based practices often intersect with out-of-school ones from a sociocultural perspective (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 2000) as literacy is acquired within social contexts and through interactions with others – both at school and outside of school, and using various modalities (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2000a, 2000b).

The second section, I dedicate to the literature review. I first explain the similarities and differences among refugees, immigrants, and ELLs, discussing the implications that such similarities and differences may have on research and pedagogy pertaining to refugee students. I also differentiate between research on refugee education in emergency contexts and research that is conducted in countries of resettlement before I present a synthesis of the research on refugee education and literacy practices of refugee students, highlighting the dominant themes and findings.

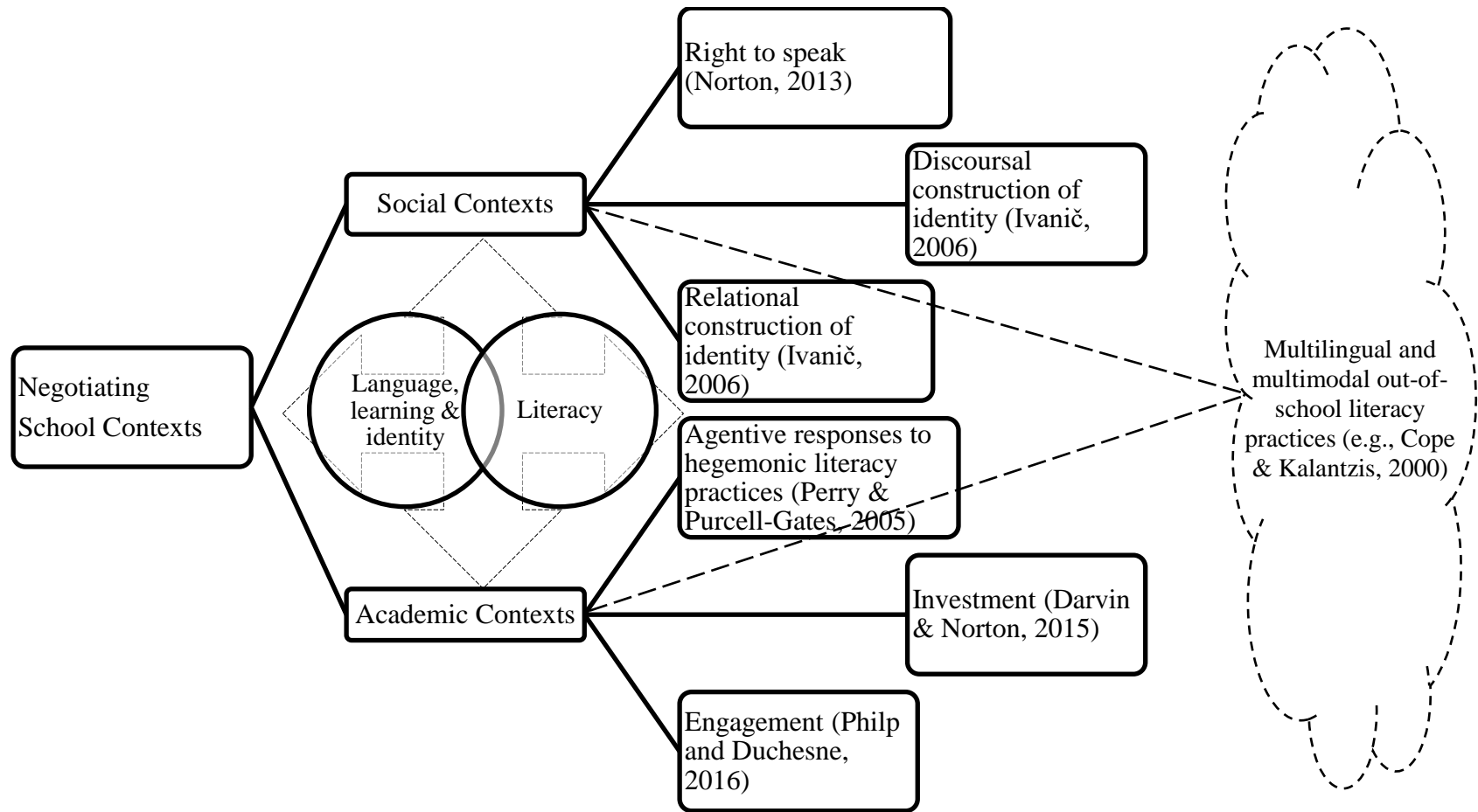


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

## Conceptual Framework

### Language, Learning, and Identity

Norton (2013) defines identity as “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” (p. 45). Norton’s identity model places emphasis on language and social contexts, thus deviating from cognitivist approaches to second language acquisition that have previously dominated the field. Since learning a new language takes place within social contexts where power structures shape learners’ positioning and identity construction, Norton argues that language learning, identity, and power are interrelated and frame language learners’ experiences. Darwin and Norton (2015) also explain that investment is at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology. Investment is best understood metaphorically if compared to Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of cultural capital according to Norton (2013). Language learners *invest* in learning a second language with the hope of increasing their cultural capital and gaining access to material resources (e.g., money) and symbolic resources (e.g., social networks). Such resources as money or social networks are privileges available only to speakers of the target language as the ability to speak that language precludes membership to certain “communities of practice” (COPs) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For example, some “non-native” English speaking teachers may be denied employment or discriminated upon due to their “non-native” status (e.g., Rudolph, Selvi, & Yazan, 2015; Selvi, 2014). Ideologies are essential in determining who has access to such privileges and communities.

“[I]deologies are dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion, and the privileging and marginalization of ideas, people, and relations,” according to Darwin and Norton (2015, p. 44). If we are to consider school or classrooms as COPs, examining ideologies enables critical analysis of systemic patterns of control within such contexts and enables questioning how individuals are positioned at the center/periphery of such COPs. Access to COPs enables language learners to interact with speakers of the target language and thereby facilitates learning by benefitting from the experience of more knowledgeable individuals within that community such as peers and teachers. Norton also drew attention to the possibility that communities can be imagined, in that they include “groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination” (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241).

The right to speak is another key construct in Norton’s model. Power relationships within a COP are essential in determining who is included/excluded, who has the right to speak, and who is denied the right to speak (Norton, 2013). As such, a language learner’s right to speak within a community of practice is often a site of struggle since in some cases language learners are sometimes denied the right to speak based on their “non-native” command of an L2, or certain ideological functions that value or devalue the linguistic capital that they possess. For example, Lippi-Green (2012) argues that language is a medium for discrimination by those in power against marginalized speakers of English that deviate from Standard American English (SAE). Lippi-Green provides numerous examples throughout her book, but one interesting example draws on popular culture – Disney productions in particular. Lippi-Green highlights how the

protagonists in Disney movies usually speak SAE while villains use stigmatized accents. Thus, language and power are inseparable and can influence an individual's right to speak and identity construction.

Ivanič (1998, 2006) shares Norton's (2013) view on the interconnectedness of language and identity, and links these ideas to literacy, and writing in particular. According to Ivanič (1998, p. 32), "Writing is an act of identity in which people align themselves with socio-culturally shaped possibilities for self-hood, playing their part in reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses, and the values, beliefs and interests which they embody." In other words, when one writes a text, one is constructing an image of the self from the possibilities of selfhood that are available in a sociocultural context. For example, by writing this dissertation, I am consolidating my identity as an emerging scholar. Following Ivanič's (1998) argument, sociocultural contexts can facilitate or limit those possibilities of self-hood. My membership in the sociocultural context of an academic institution (University of Virginia) makes the possibility of self-hood as a prospective scholar possible. Within classroom contexts, teachers can determine what possibilities of self-hood are available for students to construct their identities. For example, by allowing or denying the use of the students' first language, teachers can provide or deny the opportunity to explore possibilities of self-hood as emerging bi/multilinguals.

In a later piece, Ivanič (2006, p. 7) does not limit her argument to *writing* as an act of identity, but expands it to language in general which "signal[s] all forms of communication, encompassing the full range of semiotic resources and practices. Most of what I say about 'language' can, I suggest, be applied to multimodal, intersemiotic

communication in its broadest possible sense (as proposed by, for example, Cope and Kalantzis 2000, Kress and van Leeuwen 2001).” Through language, identity is constructed in a discoursal manner by address (how others talk to us), attribution (how others talk about us), and affiliation (how we talk like others), and all three means can be operating simultaneously during any communicative event (Ivanič, 2006). For example, in a group chat on Skype, one’s identity is discursively constructed by how one participant in the chat room speaks to her/him, how other participants speak about that person (whether that person is momentarily present or absent), and how that person speaks the same language that is used by other participants. As an example of the final issue – that of language, if the group chat is among educational researchers discussing a research project, they will probably be using content specific vocabulary that is relevant to their theoretical frameworks and methodologies.

Identity is also relational in the sense that it is dependent on the social contexts that frame it such as time, space, relationships, learning contexts, and power (Ivanič, 2006). “A person might construct a quite different impression of him/ herself in the company of one set of people from the impression s/he would construct in the company of another group of people” (Ivanič, 2006, p.12). For example, a student can construct an identity in one classroom that is different than her/his identity in another classroom or outside of class altogether. The identity that this student constructs is largely dependent on the personal relationships she/he has in that class (e.g., with the teacher or other peers), her/his ability to achieve in that class, or the possibilities of self-hood available in that classroom. By asserting the relational aspect of identity, Ivanič agrees with Norton

(2013) on the notion that identity is not a fixed construct but is rather fluid and is in constant flux.

Both Norton (2013) and Ivanič (2006) adopt a sociocultural perspective and perceive an interconnected relationship between language, learning, and identity. As this dissertation aims at learning more about adolescent refugee ELs' academic and social negotiations of school contexts, a sociocultural lens makes a good fit to investigate the interrelations among language, learning, and identity. In addition, negotiating academic school contexts requires examination of students' school-based literacies. However, school-based literacy practices are not isolated from out-of-school literacies when viewed through a sociocultural lens. As such, it is important to discuss what literacy is and highlight sociocultural approaches to literacy in particular – the focus of the next section.

### **Literacy: A sociocultural approach**

It is problematic, to say the least, to arrive at a uniform definition of *literacy* – a term that seems to be continuously evolving (Kliwer et al. 2004; Mackey, 2004). This dissertation acknowledges the different views on literacy ranging from cognivist perceptions of literacy that equate literacy with skills such as “decoding, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, writing, and spelling” (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008, p. vii), to more inclusive sociocultural approaches that encompass literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984), critical sociocultural approaches to literacy (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007), and multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2000a; 2000b).

Cognivist approaches to literacy assume that literacy is a set of neutral cognitive skills that students can learn regardless of context – this is what Street (1984, 2003) refers

to as the *autonomous* view of literacy. One either has these skills or not; one is either literate or illiterate as Perry explains (2012). In contrast, sociocultural approaches to literacy do not view literacy as a set of fixed skills restricted to reading, writing or even listening and speaking. Sociocultural approaches view literacy within the frame of culture, language, identity, agency, ideology, and power (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Lewis, Enciso, and Moje, 2007; Street, 1984). Street (1984) contrasts the *autonomous* model of literacy with an *ideological* model that views literacy as a set of practices “inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society” (p. 433).

Barton and Hamilton (2000) differentiated between literacy events that are observable (e.g. a guided reading activity in class) and literacy practices that are not observable. Heath (1982, p. 93) perceived a literacy event as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretative processes". This is distinguishable from literacy practices where larger social and cultural elements frame these literacy events. A simple way of differentiating between literacy events and literacy practices is to think of literacy events as “observable uses of text” (can be bi/multilingual) and literacy practices as “the connections of those events to the larger context” (Perry, 2014, p. 315). Gutiérrez (2007) notes that a sociocultural view of literacy “helps us conceive of literacy practices as part of a toolkit that is socially and culturally shaped as individuals participate in a range of practices across familiar, new, and hybrid contexts and tasks” (p. 116). Thus, literacy from a sociocultural perspective is framed within societal and cultural frames. Barton and Hamilton (2000) concur with this assumption and list the following six points as key principles to a sociocultural approach to literacy:



1. Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts
2. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life
3. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others
4. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices
5. Literacy is historically situated
6. Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making. (p. 8)

Although the various sociocultural approaches have slightly different foci, they mostly share the common underlying principles that Barton and Hamilton (2000) have listed. As this dissertation aims at better understanding Iraqi refugee adolescents' negotiation of the school as a social context, a sociocultural lens is a better fit than a cognitivist one, and thereby this dissertation adopts a sociocultural outlook on literacy. In the sections below, I highlight two sociocultural approaches to literacy in particular for their relevance to this dissertation: critical sociocultural approaches and multiliteracies.

**Critical sociocultural approaches.** Sociocultural approaches that investigate power, identity, and agency are usually under the umbrella of “critical sociocultural literacy” (Moje & Lewis, 2007). Moje and Lewis (2007) draw on Foucault (1977) to explain *power* from a critical sociocultural perspective as “produced and enacted in and through discourses, discourses, relationships, activities, spaces, and times by people as they compete for access to and control of resources, tools, identities” (p. 17). Another

important construct is *agency*. Moje and Lewis (2007, p. 18) draw on Lave (1996) and Gee (2001) to define *agency* as “the strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools and resources, and histories as embedded within relations of power.” Learning, according to Moje and Lewis (2007) involves assuming different identities within *discourse communities* or groupings of people that “share ways of knowing, thinking, believing, acting, and communicating” (p. 16) across time and space – meaning that these discourse communities can either be face-to-face in the here and now or ideational and distal. Identity, power and agency carry special significance when investigating marginalized groups and their literacies which are often looked upon through a deficiency lens.

**Multiliteracies.** As contextual elements change, literacy also follows suit and changes as well (Barton and Hamilton’s sixth and final point). For example, one of the changes to literacy that came with the most recent advances in technology pushed the boundaries on what we consider *text*. The New London Group (1996) introduced what is now known as *multiliteracies*, a sociocultural approach to literacy that acknowledges the multiplicity of texts and media of expression, deemphasizing print as the dominant medium of expression. Kress (2000a, 2000b) introduced the term *multimodality* and argued that meaning making can be achieved not only through *print* literacy but also through a variety of media including “visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). Therefore text is not only based on written or printed letters, but transcends that to include other modes of representation – a perspective that this study endorses.

**Responses to School-based Literacies: Appropriation, Resistance, and Engagement**

Sociocultural approaches to literacy recognize the importance of power. Based on an analysis of multiple ethnographic case studies focusing on literacy practices in the US and international contexts, Perry and Purcell-Gates (2005) found that participants demonstrated a sense of agency in responding to hegemonic literacy practices through resistance and appropriation. According to Perry and Purcell-Gates (2005), resistance “implies some form of rejection of the hegemonic discourse or ideology” (p. 8). They drew upon Clayton (1998) to differentiate between overt and covert modes of resistance. While overt resistance includes explicit refusal to partake in certain hegemonic literacy practices, covert resistance involves languages and literacy practices that are not observable by those in power. For example, a student may overtly refuse to answer questions in class when asked by the teacher. The same student can covertly resist participation by pretending not to know the answers to the teacher’s questions. As far as appropriation is concerned, it “describes those acts by dominated groups where actors adopt a hegemonic practice for the agent’s own purposes, rather than those purposes designated by those in power” (p. 9) according to Perry and Purcell-Gates (2005). Thus appropriation involves thwarting the intent of those in power and transforming the literacy practice in its original form as conceived by those in power. For example, a student may decide to write about a different topic or in a different genre in her/his journal contrary to the topic/genre assigned by the teacher.

For students to learn, it is not enough for them not to resist certain literacy practices, but it is also important for them to be engaged in learning. Researchers have emphasized the importance of engagement for learning (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012; Gettinger & Ball, 2007). However, engagement has been used educators (and

sometimes researchers) as an umbrella term to describe learner's participation and interests in class. Philp and Duchesne (2016) review the literature on engagement with a focus on tasks that involve interactions among language learners within educational contexts such as schools and classrooms. As a result, they arrive at a multidimensional understanding of engagement: "Engagement refers to a state of heightened attention and involvement, in which participation is reflected not only in the cognitive dimension, but in social, behavioral, and affective dimensions as well" (p.51). For example, the cognitive dimension of engagement involves attention and effort, the behavioral dimension involves the time participants remain "on-task", the affective dimension involves indicators such as enthusiasm, interest, and enjoyment, and the social dimension involves participants listening to, learning from, and providing feedback to each other. Philp and Duchesne (2016) contend that these dimensions are interdependent and all play a role in engagement and facilitating learning; however, engagement will vary depending on context, and researchers should consider such variables as the setting, the task, and the participants.

Engagement, appropriation, and resistance are all means through which language learners can negotiate academic school contexts. As such, adopting these conceptual frameworks is a good fit for this study that aims at better understanding refugees' negotiation of school's academic contexts.

### **Literature Review**

Before reviewing empirical studies on refugee education, it is important for this dissertation to differentiate among refugees, immigrants, and ELs, in addition to discussing the difference between emergency contexts and countries of resettlement – the

topic of the next three sub-sections. I then review studies of refugee education, grouping studies according to three themes relevant to this dissertation: pedagogy, identity, and literacy practices.

### **Refugees or Immigrants: What's the Difference?**

A considerable body of research has grouped refugees and immigrants together (Bal & Perzigian, 2013; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Both groups have to adapt to new countries, cultures, languages, and school systems. However, differences do exist between the two groups. Unlike immigrants who often willingly choose to settle in a new country, refugees are forced to leave their country of origin, often under violent circumstances (MacNevin, 2012). McBrien's (2005) seminal review of the literature highlighted some of these key differences, arguing that unlike immigrants, refugees often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and inadequate living conditions in addition to having interrupted or no education and insufficient financial means. In addition, refugees have legal status in countries of resettlement which enables them to access services such as welfare and work permits (Feuerherm & Ramanathan, 2015). While definitions of refugees and how these definitions are applied may vary from one country to another, this study will adopt the UNHCR definition, cited earlier. It is also important to note that some immigrants share some of the key characteristics that are definitional to refugees – trauma, forced immigration, and challenging economic conditions are not restrictively refugee related. Thus, sometimes it is difficult to draw clear distinctions between immigrants and refugees.

### **Refugees or ELs: What's the Difference?**

Many of the curricular and pedagogic approaches to teaching English as a second language to refugee students can also be applied to ELs. For example, linking learning to ELs' prior knowledge is widely recognized to facilitate learning according to the literature on language acquisition (Cummins, 1989; Freeman & Freeman, 2002). The same applies to guided reading, a well-established approach that can be helpful to refugees (Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger, 2014), ELs, and indeed all students as well (Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez, & Rascón, 2007). Nonetheless, Oikonomidou (2010) contended that including refugees "in the general category of language learners, [is] a reality that contributes to their invisibility" (p. 75). While refugee students may often be labelled as ELs (Bal, 2014), they differ from ELs in that they often do not "have mother tongue concepts [basic L1 literacy skills] to provide field knowledge to support reading in English" (Cranitch, 2010). SLA research has shown that students who are literate in their first language can learn a new language with more ease than students who are not (Cummins, 1989). Thus, pedagogies that work for ELs with prior schooling may not work with refugee students with little or no schooling (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007) who are not literate in their first language. According to SLA research, the incorporation of the first language into instructional approaches can facilitate English learning (August & Shanahan, 2006). This will be less likely if students have limited literacy ability in their native language. In addition, refugee students often suffer from disrupted schooling that can result in "gaps in cognitive skills, concepts of literacy, and undeveloped or culturally distant understandings about the world" (Cranitch, 2010, p. 265). Finally, although language learning is essential to refugee students' settlement efforts and their future (Olliff & Couch, 2005), research has shown that it is not enough (Cranitch, 2010).

Creating a supportive environment that addresses students' social needs and helps them counter the traumatic experiences they may have been through is also essential. Cranitch (2010), for example, described how classroom routines can counter some of the feelings of anxiety in the classroom and how counsellors provided craft activities for refugee students as a "time-out" from playground time that may sometimes get overwhelming for refugee students who are still getting used to a new schooling system.

### **Emergency Contexts vs. Countries of Resettlement**

This study distinguishes between conflict or crisis ridden contexts (such as Syria or Iraq) in which refugees are amidst ongoing war activities or events that threaten their safety, and nonemergency contexts in which refugee populations exist or transfer to, known as countries of resettlement (e.g., Australia). A recent report by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) prepared by Zakharia and Bartlett (2014) defined conflict as "a continuum ranging from a relatively stable environment to increasingly escalating tensions that may lead to change, such as institutionalized forms of social injustice, or direct physical or structural violence. Conflict is experienced differently across identity groups, geographic areas, and time. Crisis can be the result of conflict, violence, and natural disasters" (p. 1). In resettlement contexts, acculturation and learning a new language are often some of the main hallmarks of adapting to a new home country. While the needs may differ between countries of resettlement and conflict/crisis contexts, there is a dearth in the literature on how to address school-aged refugee students' needs in both contexts. The next section aims at providing a synthesis of the literature produced to date on teaching English to refugee students in non-emergency contexts or countries of resettlement.

### **Scholarship on Refugee Education**

This section will first synthesize the literature produced to date on refugee education as relevant to this dissertation. As such, I group the studies reviewed in this section in three themes: pedagogy, identity, and literacy practices. Studies under the theme of pedagogy involved instructional approaches (e.g., culturally relevant instruction) that are beneficial to refugee students, studies under the identity theme described how refugee students constructed their identities within schooling contexts in their respective countries of resettlement, and finally studies that involved literacy practices of refugee students described what literacies refugee students engaged in both in-school and out-of-school. Although those themes often intersected, I grouped the studies as per the most prominent theme. This was by no means an objective practice, but it helped organize the literature into manageable themes that were relevant to this dissertation.

The selection process of the literature included in this review was initiated through a search of the Academic Search Complete, Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson), Education Index Retrospective: 1929-1983 (H.W. Wilson), Education Research Complete, ERIC, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and Linguistics and Language Behavior, using the descriptors *refugee* in combination with *English language learners*, *SLA*, *TESOL*, and *literacy*. A snowball technique was also used when examining articles, textbooks, and chapters, thereby identifying further resources to check. Studies included in this review addressed issues related to refugees and language learning, literacy development, or identity. Studies on non-refugee immigrants were excluded as the focus of this proposed study is on refugees. Other studies that were not



discussed in this review were ones with adult non-school-aged participants (e.g., Hatoss, 2012) and studies related to teacher preparation (e.g., Ferfolja, 2009; Naidoo, 2009). Such exclusions were mainly due to the studies' indirect relevance to this dissertation and to provide adequate space to discuss studies related to pedagogy, identity, and literacy practices.

**Pedagogy.** There is a growing body of literature on instructional approaches that educators working with refugee populations can use in order to better serve the needs of refugee students who are trying to adapt to new educational contexts in their countries of resettlement. Such approaches included adopting culturally relevant teaching, drawing upon students' prior knowledge and interests to facilitate learning, adopting caring approaches, using guided reading, and constructing classroom tasks that involve multiliteracies.

The use of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) was one recommended instructional approach. For example, Nykiel-Herbert (2010) reported on the experiences of 12 Iraqi refugee children (ages 8-11) in a New York urban elementary school. Teachers at that school created a special program where Iraqi refugee students were grouped together and culturally relevant instruction was delivered in such a way to reflect Iraqi students' experiential knowledge. Use of their mother tongue was encouraged and teachers tried to incorporate their cultural norms and beliefs into instruction, such as drawing on their oral tradition of storytelling. Based on students' language assessment score growth, Nykiel-Herbert claimed that the "culturally homogenous learning environment of the self-contained classroom created unique opportunities for the Iraqi children to advance academically, strengthen their sense of

ethnic and cultural identity, and gain appreciation and respect for the host culture” (p. 13). Although this intervention sounds promising, a limitation is that grouping students together in a homogenous class may not always be an option to schools and a discussion of alternative solutions could have been helpful. In addition, the author provides few details about the ethnic backgrounds and prior schooling experiences of the Kurdish Iraqi students participating in the study.

Another study whose findings suggest the importance of culturally relevant instruction is that of Croce (2014). Using discourse analysis to analyze 160 Burmese refugee elementary students’ retellings of informational texts, and discourse analysis and social semiotic analysis of the informational texts, Croce’s (2014) findings reveal that refugee students’ understandings of the informational texts under study were informed by their sociopolitical perspectives and lived experiences. For example, drawing upon his experience of air travel and his own perception of that experience, one participant described the prepackaged meals offered on an airplane as a “cup of food” – a description that the researcher acknowledges as vastly different from her own perceived interpretation of airplane meals. As such, Croce’s (2014) findings demonstrate the importance of better understanding students’ experiences and how they may mediate their understanding of informational texts.

Drawing upon refugee students’ prior knowledge and interests were also important for addressing their academic needs. For example, in a study that examined an intensive language program in Australia, Dooley’s (2009) findings based on interview data with the teachers suggest that linking learning to refugee students’ prior knowledge may improve their comprehension. Teachers distinguished between content and concept

in such a way that even when students might have no prior knowledge of certain content, teachers can still make connections to students' relevant conceptual knowledge. For example, one teacher drew on students' knowledge of the desert to explain about Antarctica as one of the driest places on earth. Similarly, Dwyer and McCloskey (2013) suggested that student interest should be considered when preparing materials and planning activities for refugee students, based on their findings that refugee students from several countries participating in a summer program that integrated their interests in soccer into reading and writing workshops did not experience "literacy regression" (as measured by the Bader reading inventory) between academic years.

Apart from prior knowledge and interests, other studies suggested adopting caring approaches to establish connections with students. For example, in a summer enrichment program that she volunteered to partake in, Stewart (2016) taught literacy skills to eight Burmese adolescent refugee students in a Southwestern state. Stewart adopted five "simple rules" principles to implement a caring approach: 1) I learn, you learn; 2) I teach, you teach; 3) I read, you read; 4) I write, you write; and 5) I care about you, you care about others. By the end of this four-week summer camp, Stewart reported reciprocated caring behaviors from the students such as sending her text messages, writing her handwritten notes, or even one student's act of wearing the only Burmese traditional dress that she possesses on the last day of class to commemorate that special occasion.

While Stewart's study was highly qualitative, a quantitative approach was adopted by Montero, Newmaster, and Ledger (2014) who used a pretest- posttest model (using tests such as the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test- 4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007) to examine the influence of guided reading on the reading achievement of 11 refugee

students at a high school in Canada. The study included rich background information displaying a wide range of diversity in terms of age (14-20), origins (Somalia, Iraq, and Colombia), language (Somali, Arabic, and Spanish), literacy experiences (none-literate to semi-literate), and their prior formal schooling experiences (e.g. no schooling experience, informal schooling, and some interrupted schooling). Montero and colleagues trained the students' teacher on guided reading and keeping running records. A control group was used to compare results to the experimental group. Using several well-known psychometric measures to track the students' English language and reading progression, pre-post intervention scores showed statistically significant gains in the experimental group's reading achievement. Montero and colleagues (2014) concluded that guided reading can help refugee students learn how to read. Montero and colleagues' study included two sections on the students' and teachers' perspectives including a direct quote from one of the students and another from the teacher – mainly expressing their positive experiences. This qualitative aspect of the study was a welcome addition; however, one quotation from a student and a teacher does not necessarily represent all of the students' and teachers' perspectives. We do not know if there were other perspectives of this intervention or if opposing points of view were sought out or avoided. As such, the qualitative part of the study reporting positive points of view of the intervention seems to be in support of the quantitative results; however, it would have been beneficial to acknowledge the existence or lack thereof of resisting teachers or students who did not necessarily have such favorable opinions of guided reading.

Creating engaging tasks that involve the use of multiple literacies was another recommended instructional approach. For example, in an eight-week workshop delivered

to nine female refugee adolescents from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, Emert (2014) and a group of his graduate interns facilitated the participants' creating of digital narratives. The participants first listened to stories told by the interns, and then they videotaped themselves telling their own stories. Interns transcribed their stories and helped them to edit these narratives and present multimodal final products through incorporating illustrations and using Movie Maker. Emert (2014) drew upon observational data to describe how participants engaged in complex tasks and how drawing upon their interest in storytelling reduced their anxiety and enabled them to share their stories (see Emert, 2013 for a similar study with refugee boys during a five-week summer literacy program). In another study, Hepple, Sockhill, Tan, and Alford (2014) described how they worked with three adolescent ELs (two of which were refugees from Burundi and Eritrea) on clay-animated projects (e.g., adapting the storyline of a class reader titled "The Big Wave") at a high school in Australia. Sockhill and Tan (second and third authors and teachers of the students) worked with the students to facilitate a series of tasks leading to the completion of the project – starting with reading the text that students were to adapt, creating the storyboard and clay models, writing the dialogue, filming, narrating the story, and editing and presenting the final product. Hepple et al. (2014) drew upon observational and interview data to argue that such a multimodal approach to teaching (students working on a variety of design modes to create meaning) reinforced students' sense of agency, engagement, and collaboration.

**Identity.** Another body of literature discusses refugee students' identities in relation to their adaptation to their new lives in their countries of resettlement and their experiences as pertaining to religion, language, gender, and race. For example, using

school observations and focus groups, Oikonomidoy (2007) reported on how a group of seven Somali Muslim female adolescent refugees experienced discrimination in their urban high school in the US based on their Muslim identity. Students reported discriminatory practices based on their religion (e.g., wearing the hijab). One student reminisced on how “in middle school right after 9/11 [2001] people used to be called a Ninja ... I didn’t even get it. Cause wearing this thing [points to the hijab] is Ninja. They just look at you and they have certain stuff in their mind” (p. 20). Despite discrimination, Oikonomidoy (2007) described how the students showed a range of coping strategies such as verbally confronting their aggressors or internally negating feelings of anger. Mthethwa-Sommers (2015) arrived at similar findings in a study that aimed to better understand how 12 refugee students attending three high schools in an urban area in the US coped with bullying. The study reported bullying based on race (e.g., students telling Somali refugees to go back to Africa), language (e.g., laughter in class at foreign accents), and religion (e.g., equating hijab wearing Muslims with terrorists). Just like the participants in Oikonomidoy’s (2007) study, students in Mthethwa-Sommers’ study (2015) devised coping strategies that included direct resistance, suppressing emotions, reaching out and making American friends, and inflicting self-harm such as cutting oneself. Both studies show the realities of refugee experiences of discrimination based on their religious, linguistic, and racial identities. While participants in both studies demonstrated resilience and agency, they also show how their modes of coping and resistance (and indeed identity constructions) are shaped by such discriminatory practices.

In her book, *Mogadishu on the Mississippi*, Bigelow (2010) highlighted Somali refugee students' fight against stereotyping (e.g. refusing to be called African Americans), and how they negotiated new identities in their country of resettlement. Based on interview and observation data collected throughout the span of five years, Bigelow emphasized the importance of oral traditions in Somali society and observed how Somali refugee students used various oral genres – a type of literacy that is not as valued at school. Bigelow argued that “Finding bridges between the native language oral strengths and English is likely a key underpinning to sound pedagogy for Somali teens with limited formal schooling” (p. 89). Such bridges can be formed through the use of culturally relevant texts (e.g. film and songs) and the incorporation of a wide variety of genres related to orality such as poetry and folktales.

Another study that addresses discriminatory practices against refugee students comes from Canada where Schroeter and James (2015) used classroom observations and interviews to better understand the identities of nine high school students (six of which were African-Canadian with refugee experiences) and how they were linked to their academic experiences at school. To better serve their needs, the participants were placed in a separate academic program. African-Canadian refugee participants felt that the program was not allowing them to achieve their full potential and pursuing their “imagined social futures” of pursuing careers in nursing, law enforcement, firefighting, mechanical engineering, business, and real estate. Students reported feeling trapped in the program and repeating work that they had already covered in other classes. One student even attributed their placement in that program to race arguing that “We’re here because we’re Black” (p. 31). In short, despite best intentions to meet the needs of refugee

students by placing them in a separate program, the findings revealed students' frustrations and how these feelings were tied to racialization, social isolation, and students' feelings of helplessness in pursuing their future dreams.

**Literacy practices of refugee students.** Another emergent theme from their review of the literature was refugee students' literacy practices. Studies highlighted connections (or the lack thereof) between students' school-based and out-of-school literacy practices, their engagement in language brokering, the influence of TV on their literacy practices, and more recently a small yet emerging body of literature on refugees' engagement in multimodal literacies.

Sarroub (2007) examined the school-based and out-of-school (home and work) literacy practices of an adolescent Kurdish (Yezidi) Iraqi student. Observational data was collected over the course of a year and a half, and findings indicated that Hayder's (the focal student) home life was incompatible with the learning expectations at school. Hayder came from an agricultural context in Iraq where literacy did not carry as much importance as it did in the US, his country of resettlement. At school, his teacher described him as "being in a fog" and not doing his homework; she also suspected that he was on drugs due to his red eyes and tired manner. Outside of school, Hayder's interest in reading was driven by practicality. Hayder was not interested in reading things that he did not see a direct benefit from. For example, he asked his boss at work at a fast food chain to provide him with a manual to help him understand how to manage the register efficiently. Although such a manual did not exist, he could see the benefit from reading written instructions. Outside of school, he would read everything he encountered from subtitles at the bottom of TV screens to billboards and food ingredients (Hayder wanted



to learn how to pronounce and read “mayonnaise” to be able to order it at restaurants). Hayder attributed his forgetfulness and his foggy behavior in class to a scorpion bite when he was a kid. Before the scorpion bite, Hayder claimed to have had good memory and the ability to speak in more than one language. The scorpion bite seemed like a metaphor of Hayder’s home life’s incompatibility with his school demands. To Hayder, the priority was finding a job and taking care of his family. He did not see how reading at school could help him attend to his many responsibilities outside of school such as supporting his family and having to earn income. Sarroub (2007) concluded by highlighting the importance of teachers helping students understand the value of their work across-content and helping students see the value of reading through making connections to the realities of their lives both in and out of school.

Perry (2014) investigated the brokering abilities of young (Kindergarten and Grade 1) Sudanese refugee students. Language brokering is often associated with translating and interpreting (Tse, 1996). However, Perry provides a wider perspective and considers Sudanese refugee students’ brokering abilities across three categories: lexico-syntactic and graphophonic brokering (e.g., child supporting parents in spelling words, rephrasing sentences, and pronunciation), cultural brokering (e.g. the child explaining to parents when attending a school event is expected or not), and genre related brokering (e.g. explaining the function of a permission slip). Brokering, therefore, is one means that refugee families rely on (whether the brokers are part of the family or not) to be able to understand a new language, unfamiliar genres that were not common in their country of origin, and the broader literacy practices where nuanced cultural knowledge is needed to be able to comprehend texts such as the concept of sweepstakes documents. For example,

in another study on brokering, Perry (2009) reported how she tried to explain the concept of spam mail to an Iraqi refugee family who believed that they had won \$1,000,000,000 as per the mail they received. Perry highlighted some of the tricky language in the text (the use of conditional “if” statements), and the fact that such mail is often aimed at marketing a certain product or convincing the family to purchase certain items. In focusing on one family, Perry (2014) noticed that one child’s brokering efforts were more successful at home than at school due to the fact that her parents perceived her as a teacher at home and benefitted from her language brokering efforts; however, there were different expectations at school where teachers wanted children to work individually and did not necessarily provide a context where Remaz, the focal student, could act as a broker. Perry (2014) concluded that teachers can make use of students’ language brokering abilities in order to encourage parental involvement in students’ learning. According to Perry (2014), teachers can help in achieving this goal by making explicit to students the different genres of texts at school and the various real-world goals and functions that genres and texts have.

Perry and Moses (2011) investigated the influence of television on the literacy practices of Somali adult and children refugee participants’ English development. Selected parents had diverse educational backgrounds while the children (four focal students) were one boy and girl in kindergarten and another boy and girl in grade 1. Drawing on observational and interview data in addition to artifacts that Perry collected over the period of a year and half, Perry and Moses concluded that watching television helped the three families make connections to their African heritage (e.g. watching African music videos), better understand the US context (e.g. watching Opera and Dr.

Phil), and make religious connections (e.g. watching the Trinity Broadcasting Network to learn about other Christians across the globe). All of these experiences helped the participants learn about the English language. For example, one student explained, "I learned how to spell English on Channel 18, the learning channel. [...] They spell everything out . . . and they tell the meaning" (p. 294). Perry and Moses also reported connections that the students made between books that they read at school or in the local library and the television shows that they saw, suggesting that television viewing influenced the students' reading choices. One important finding from Perry and Moses is that contrary to commonly held beliefs about television being a detractor from school work and learning in general, television functioned as a valuable resource in supporting Sudanese refugee students' learning of English. This has implications on a pedagogical level, and Perry and Moses concluded that "Not only can educators tap into learners' knowledge of multimedia texts to support basic early literacy and language skills, but they can also support refugee learners' development of 'new literacies' (Marsh, 2009)" (p. 302).

Along the same lines of new literacies, Gilhooly and Lee (2014) documented two Burmese refugee adolescent males' digital out-of-school literacy practices. Findings revealed that the two participants' engagement in online literacy practices such as music/video production and online chatting served their family in four ways: "(1) maintaining and building coethnic friendships, (2) connecting to the broader Karen diaspora community, (3) sustaining and promoting ethnic solidarity, and (4) creating and disseminating digital productions" (p. 391). Gilhooly and Lee (2014) assert the importance of technology as a means for refugee students to cope with trauma and

explore their cultural heritage. “Internet provides a forum for expression that is not exclusively bound by language. Such freedom will lead to much-needed confidence and a sense of belonging,” Gilhooly and Lee contended (p. 394). Another study that addresses refugee students’ multimodal literacies is that of Omerbašić (2015) who documented nine Thai female refugee adolescents’ out-of-school multimodal literacy practices using observations and multimodal interviews. Omerbašić reported the participants’ use of a hybrid language using Romanized script to represent Burmese, and engagement in various multimodal productions such as sharing images with juxtaposed text on Facebook (e.g., picture of national flag with “Karen Students of the XXX” – US State) to signify belonging to multiple localities. According to Omerbašić, “digital spaces were the only places in which the young girls in this study, like many other youth resettled as refugees, could access personally, socially, and culturally meaningful content” (p. 479) and interact with peers who had the similar experiences and histories. Nonetheless, access to such digital spaces was denied at school, limiting the potential for meaningful learning experiences and bringing issues of power to the forefront: Whose literacies and forms of knowledge matter?

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented the conceptual principles that frame this dissertation, discussing the intersection of language learning, identity, and literacy in explaining students; negotiation of social and academic school contexts – including negotiation, appropriation, and resistance of school-based literacies. I also provided an overview of the literature on refugee education pertaining to pedagogy, identity, and literacy practices. In summary, despite the increasing number of refugees in the US, there is a dearth of

literature that can help us better understand their school experiences, and “case studies of immigrant and refugee students are needed to provide information on their lives in and out of school” (Stewart, 2013, p. 49), especially when it comes to adolescent Arab refugee students. This dissertation aims to add to this body of literature by examining four adolescent Iraqi ELs’ school experiences at the intersection of language learning, identity construction, and literacy practices (multimodal and multilingual school-based and out-of-school practices).

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODS**

This chapter explains the methods that I used to answer this study's research questions and achieve the overall aim of better understanding how adolescent Iraqi refugee students negotiate academic and social school contexts. Eight sections comprise this third chapter. First, I start by briefly reacquainting the reader with the research questions and the purpose of this study. Based on this, I then make a case of why adopting a qualitative approach is a good fit to answer those research questions. In the third part, I describe the locale of the study, the participants, and the recruitment process. I discuss the data collection process and the data management plan in the fourth and fifth parts consecutively. In the sixth section I describe my data analysis procedures followed by the seventh section where I discuss issues related to access, ethics, and trustworthiness. Finally, I reflect upon my role(s) as a researcher and the different identities that have influenced my positionality with respect to this study.

#### **Purpose and Research Questions**

This study aims at describing how four adolescent Iraqi refugee students negotiate not only academic school contexts, but also social contexts of school. The focus on social contexts is in line with sociocultural theories that frame this study. Documenting these experiences will enable us to better understand how refugee students adapt to their school life on academic and social levels within their host country. Another aim is to describe

how students negotiate engagement in school-based literacy practices and make connections to their multilingual and multimodal out-of-school literacy practices. These connections between school-based and out-of-school literacies matter if educators are invested in creating more democratic classrooms that allow students to exercise their sense of agency. Language was not only a key aspect in how students negotiated academic and social school contexts, but also in how they constructed their identities in a discursal and relational manner (Ivanič, 1998, 2006). More specifically, this study aims at adding to the literature on refugee education and adolescent literacy in the US by answering the following research questions:

- 1) How do four adolescent Iraqi refugee ELs negotiate social school contexts?
- 2) How do four adolescent Iraqi refugee ELs negotiate academic school contexts?

To answer these questions, this study adopted a qualitative design with an ethnographic perspective for an in-depth understanding of how sociocultural influences shape adolescent Iraqi refugee students' learning and social experiences at school in their country of resettlement. In the next section, I discuss in more detail the qualitative design of this study.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative methodology is particularly valuable when conducting in-depth research that seeks to explore subjective understandings, cultural descriptions, and marginalized<sup>1</sup>, populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall, 1987) such as refugees. In addition, a qualitative approach is better aligned to the theoretical and conceptual lenses

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<sup>1</sup> I purposely do not use the term “vulnerable” to avoid negative connotations of helplessness and adopt the term “marginalized” (see Perry, 2011; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008).

that frame this study. On a theoretical level, this study builds on sociocultural perspectives of language, learning, and identity (Ivanič, 1998, 2006; Norton, 2013). It also draws on sociocultural perspectives of literacy (e.g. Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007; Purcell-Gates, Perry, and Briseño, 2011; Street, 1995) grounded in the work of Vygotsky (1978), and notions of *appropriation* and *resistance* of hegemonic literacy practices (Perry & Purcell-Gates (2005) and *engagement* within classroom contexts (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). A sociocultural perspective of literacy views literacy as social practice, often “patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others”, historically situated and framed by social goals and practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). Such contextual complexities will remain masked with a quantitative approach; as such a qualitative design would a better alternative to enable an in-depth understanding of the literacy practices of a marginalized population of students. But what kind of qualitative design was adopted to answer the research questions?

The *Interactive Model of the Research Design* (see Figure 2) provides an overview of the qualitative design of the study and is adopted from Maxwell’s (2012) *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Interactive models help facilitate designing research studies and are particularly helpful in identifying key design features, explaining the way these features interact, and justifying these interactions and design decisions (Maxwell, 2012).



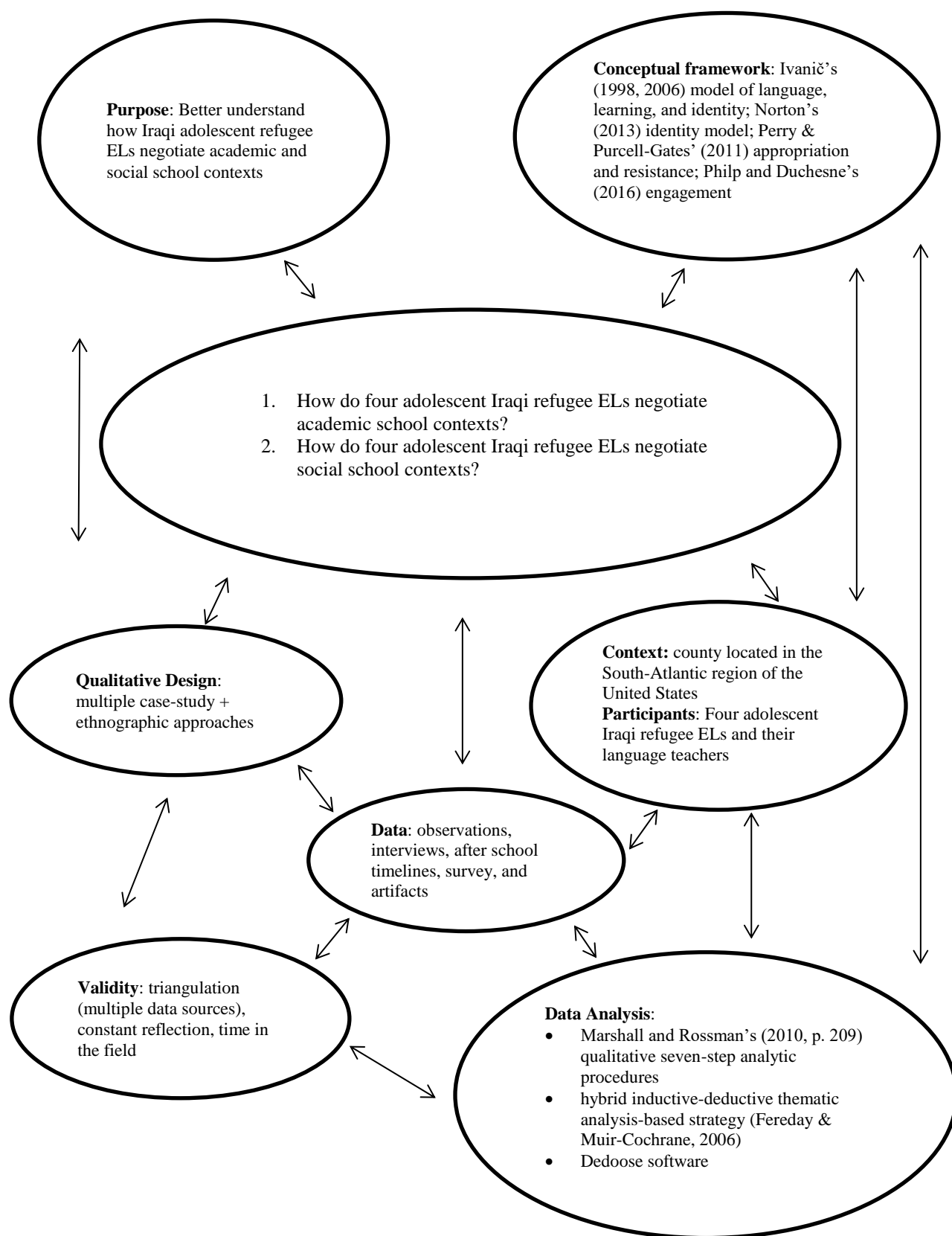


Figure 2. Interactive model of the research design

From a design perspective, this study adopted a multiple case-study (four focal students, their families, and teachers) design paired with ethnographic approaches to conducting research. According to Stake (2000), a multiple-case study approach enables the researcher to sample multiple cases in order to study a phenomenon, group, condition, or event. This purposive selection of more than one case strengthens the researcher's understanding of the object of study and adds to the credibility of the study (Stake, 2000). Barone (2011) explains that some researchers are critical of this approach for detracting from the focus of a single case study approach (Wolcott, 1994); however, other prominent methodologists such as Miles and Huberman (1994, 2013) are more in favor of multiple-case studies and find them more compelling and “replicable” in qualitative terms.

While this study is not an ethnography by definitional parameters, it does employ ethnographic approaches to research. According to Purcell-Gates (2011), ethnography from a literacy research perspective “is grounded in theories of culture and allows researchers to view literacy development, instruction, learning, and practice as they occur naturally in sociocultural contexts” (p. 135). This is in line with this study's aim of learning about how participants negotiate academic contexts of school and school-based literacy practices in particular as they occur naturally in the sociocultural context of school as opposed to a scientific lab. This study draws from ethnographic approaches to research and shares ethnographies' focus on context, culture, and multiplicity of data sources (more details will follow under data collection and analysis). Green and Bloome (1997) make a helpful distinction between doing ethnography, adopting an ethnographic perspective, and using ethnographic tools:

doing ethnography involves the framing, conceptualizing, conducting, interpreting, writing, and reporting associated with a broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group, meeting the criteria for doing ethnography as framed within a discipline or field. By adopting an ethnographic perspective, we mean that it is possible to take a more focused approach (i.e., do less than a comprehensive ethnography) to study particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practices of a social group. Central to an ethnographic perspective is the use of theories of culture and inquiry practices derived from anthropology or sociology to guide the research. The final distinction, using ethnographic tools, refers to the use of methods and techniques usually associated with fieldwork. These methods may or may not be guided by cultural theories or questions about social life of group members. (p.183)

Thus, as per Green and Bloome's view, in this study I adopted an ethnographic perspective in its focus on refugee adolescents as a social group and its aim of studying their practices within the context of school and out-of-school guided by sociocultural theory. In addition, this study employs ethnographic tools (methods and techniques) with respect to fieldwork. Such tools include detailed observations, interviews, and collecting various artifacts from the students' classrooms and the virtual world that they occupy on the internet.

### **Locale and Participants**

**Locale.** This project took place in a county located in the South-Atlantic region of the United States (US). The choice of this county is motivated by the presence of a regional office that provides assistance to refugees, and thereby a relatively high

concentration of refugees. This high concentration brings forth a need to learn more about the learning experiences of refugee students (46 of which are Iraqi) dispersed among the county's public schools according to an interview with the county's English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and World Languages Programs Coordinator (03/12/2015). The county is a unique setting because it has only relatively recently started receiving refugees (since 1999) and therefore the community is not a place where refugees have been historically placed. In addition, the county is predominantly white (around 70% according to the US Census bureau). Therefore, the county is not a diverse setting where refugees from Iraq can simply blend in. The relatively low number of potential participants also brought challenges to recruitment procedures, which are discussed below.

**Recruitment and participants.** Participants included four adolescent Iraqi refugee ELs, and their ESOL or language arts teachers. To recruit these participants, I first identified (through the help of the county's ESOL office) all adolescent Arab refugee students enrolled in middle and high public schools in the target county. The largest Arab population of refugee students was Iraqi (N = 46), hence the choice of Iraqi refugee ELs. In my recruitment process, I adopted a stratified-purposeful approach where I aimed to select participants that represented subgroups within a population to facilitate comparison (Miles & Huberman, 2013). I aimed at recruiting two male and two female participants with diverse WIDA ACCESS<sup>TM</sup> English language proficiency assessment scores. The WIDA ACCESS<sup>TM</sup> English language proficiency assessment scores ranks students on an increasing scale of proficiency: Level 1 (entering), Level 2 (beginning), Level 3 (developing), Level 4 (expanding), Level 5 (bridging), and Level 6 (reaching). As such, I

aimed at having two participants within the WIDA Levels 1-3 frame and two other participants within the WIDA Levels 4-6 frame. Moreover, I wanted to recruit both middle school and high school participants. In Tables 1 and 2, I present an overview of the student and teacher participants, followed by profiles of the student participants.

To recruit participants, I sought the help of two ESOL coordinators at one middle school and one high school to deliver invitations (consent forms) to potential participants in each school and explain about the study. As a result, two female participants and two male participants agreed to participate and signed the required consent/assent forms along with their parents. After acquiring student consent, I invited the language teachers of these four students to participate in this study, and they also signed the required consent forms. Two additional high school students agreed to participate in this study, but they were not included because their teachers refused to participate and therefore I could not gain access to their classrooms. One final note about the participants is that Zein and Suha's ranking as WIDATM Level 4 enabled them to be in mixed (ELs and English monolingual students) mainstream language arts classes as opposed to being in ESOL classrooms with students classified as ELs.

Table 1

*Overview of Student Participants*

<b>*Students</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>WIDA Level</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Future Aspirations</b>	<b>Countries of resettlement prior to **US</b>
Haytham	Male	13	7	Arrival: W1 Current: W3	Muslim	Policeman	Iraq → Jordan → Syria → Turkey
Salwa	Female	14	8	Arrival: W1 Current: W3	NA	NA	Iraq → Syria → Iraq → Turkey
Zein	Male	14	8	Arrival: W1 Current: W4	Muslim	Game Developer	Iraq → Jordan → Syria → Turkey
Suha	Female	18	12	Arrival: W1 Current: W4	Muslim	Dentist	Iraq → Jordan → Syria → Turkey

\*All students are literate in Arabic, their first language.

\*\*Haytham, Salwa, and Zein arrived into the US in 2014. Suha arrived in 2012.

Table 2

*Overview of Teacher Participants*

<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Experience teaching ELs</b>
Ms. Hilton	ESOL	Haytham	8 years
Mr. Ronaldo	ESOL	Salwa	15 years
Mr. LeBlanc	Language Arts	Zein	9 years
Ms. Hills	Language Arts	Suha	2 years
Ms. Stone	Counselor	Suha	NA

## Profiles of Student Participants<sup>2</sup>

**Haytham.** Haytham is a thirteen year-old Iraqi adolescent who “hates school” and likes to play soccer and videogames. He often reads about his favorite soccer players online in English and has his own YouTube channel where he posts recorded videos of him playing some of his favorite videogames. After finishing high school, he wants to become a policeman to fight injustice. He has dark hair and thick black eyebrows that he raises up whenever he is being sarcastic with Ms. Hilton, his ESOL teacher, in class. For example, Ms. Hilton drew a rather less than impressive illustration on the board, and Haytham sarcastically commented that she should be the art teacher and not the English teacher. Haytham reports learning some English in Syria, but he highly values Arabic and wishes that the school day were shorter so he can speak more Arabic to his family at home and play more videogames. Haytham blames the US for destroying Iraq “because of oil” and feels sad when he hears about bombs in Iraq. He dreams of going back to Iraq someday to see his grandfather.

**Salwa.** Salwa is a confident fourteen year-old adolescent Iraqi girl with long dark hair and dark eyes. She reports learning some English in Iraq and Syria before coming to the US. She often helps her parents in writing text messages in Arabic to their family in Iraq. She celebrates Christmas but does not care about religion and thinks that Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq are “crazy people” who “are fighting for nothing. I don’t like it!” Salwa’s parents do not allow her to have social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter so that she is not exposed to hateful discourse relating to the war in Iraq, according to Salwa. She does not know what she wants to do after high school, but she is very motivated to

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<sup>2</sup> I have intentionally not included citations for every piece of data in this section to avoid “cluttering” the paragraphs and to facilitate the reading of these profiles.

exit her ESOL status because “*that’s why I came here. If I end up staying here forever and not being good at English, then why did I stay here then?*” She loves playing “Roblox” (online gaming platform) where she can play various games chat with her friends. Salwa loves to write (although she stopped writing in her journal because her mother reads it), and wishes she could write more in Mr. Ronaldo’s class. She loves reading *La Linea* (a novel about adolescent immigrants trying to cross the border from Mexico to the US) in class and often reads children’s books for her brother outside of school. Her favorite singer is Fetty Wap (an American hip-hop artist), but she likes to listen to Kazem El Saher (Iraqi singer) at home.

**Zein.** Zein is Haytham’s older brother. Just like Haytham, he reports learning some English in Syria before coming to the US. He is a tall fourteen year-old adolescent with curly and short dark hair who reports being bored at school. He loves playing soccer, basketball, and online videogames. He even creates his own videogames by writing computer codes. He loves technology so much that he built his own computer because the one he had was too slow for him to be able to code, create videogames, and post videos on his YouTube channel. To build his own computer, Zein watched YouTube videos for hours and ordered the parts that he needed online. Zein often plays videogames that are rated 18+ and says that he does not mind it because he has seen worse violence<sup>3</sup> and dead bodies in Syria. He does not like to read about topics relating to refugees and considers such things to be part of his past rather than his future – a future where he dreams of becoming a professional game developer. Zein describes how his hands started

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<sup>3</sup> Zein claims not to be phased by violent videogames due to his prior experiences of “real” violence in Syria. In this sense, Zein’s experiences seem to bring a sense of normalcy to violence that can potentially be problematic.



shaking and his face turned red when the girl he really likes at school once greeted him, and he wonders if it is right or wrong for Muslims to date women. At school, “Finding friends is very difficult” for Zein. He is mostly silent in class, but has a completely different identity online as we will discover.

**Suha.** Suha is eighteen years old who describes herself as “very fashionable” and dreams of becoming a dentist. Before coming to the US, she reportedly learned some English in Jordan and Syria. Suha drives her own car and works at a retail store in town as a sales assistant. She is also completing a course on dentistry at a local technical institute. She has a very strong personality which often leads to conflict with her English teacher, Ms. Hills. For example, Suha verbally confronted her English teacher when Ms. Hills did not explain why “self-control” is spelled with a hyphen. As Suha completed all school requirements for graduation last year except passing her reading State Standardized Test (SST), and as a result she is only enrolled in two language classes in school this year – one of which is Ms. Hills’ – in order to help her pass the SST. Besides having a fiery personality that made such conflicts a recurring theme in Ms. Hills’ class, Suha describes herself as a helpful person. She assists her family outside of school in translation at hospitals or at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Despite a strong desire to continue school in America and become a dentist, she says she hates life in the US and wants to go back to Jordan where she can be with “my family, my people, my friends, and the same traditions and culture.”

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected between the months of October and December of 2015 and included a variety of sources in order to reinforce validity and reliability through

triangulation (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Purcell-Gates, 2011). Data included videotaped classroom observations, artifacts of student work (e.g. student writing samples, classroom bulletin boards, and curricula), and semi-structured interviews with students and teachers (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Data Collection*

<b>Data</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Number / Dates / Interview duration</b>
*Observations (videotaped with fieldnotes)	Haytham	14 observations October – December 2015
	Salwa	15 observations October – December 2015
	Zein	18 observations October – December 2015
	Suha	11 observations October – December 2015
**Student interviews	Haytham	3 interviews: 12/09/15; 12/11/15; and 12/15/15
	Salwa	2 interviews: 12/10/15 and 12/15/15
	Zein	3 interviews: 12/01/15; 12/09/15; and 12/15/15
	Suha	1 interview 12/15/15
***Teacher interviews	Ms. Hilton	12/10/2015
	Mr. Ronaldo	12/07/2015
	Mr. LeBlanc	12/07/2015
	Ms. Hills	12/09/2015
	Ms. Stone	12/11/2015
Artifacts	All	Multiple; throughout
	participants	

\*Each observation was around 90 minutes in length.

\*\*Duration of student interviews ranged between 30 and 45 minutes.

\*\*\*Duration of teacher interviews ranged between 26 and 75 minutes.

**Observations and artifacts.** Within a qualitative research frame, “observation entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 139). When observations are recorded (mainly in written form but sometimes in other forms such as audio as well), they are often referred to as fieldnotes (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Observations are essential to ethnographic studies because they allow the researcher to observe participants in their natural environments (Purcell-Gates, 2011). Although this study is not an ethnography, it does aim at observing participants in their natural environment; therefore observation is an essential tool to document the literacy events in classrooms. All class observations were video recorded and fieldnotes were typed and deidentified as per the attached protocols (see Appendix B). Video recordings were used to capture events that were not recorded by the observer in class and to provide more accurate context and details of participants’ interactions and experiences. Information acquired by reviewing the videotapes was added to fieldnotes. For example, it was helpful to go back to the videotapes to acquire direct quotes from participants or contextualize certain literacy events. Deidentified data were uploaded to UVA Box and whenever relevant artifacts were identified during observations (e.g. student writing), they were collected electronically via a digital smart phone camera and also uploaded to the server.

**Interviews.** I conducted informal and topical or guided interviews (Patton, 2002) (also known as semi-structured interviews). “The informal, conversational interview takes place on-the-spot, as casual conversations are entered into with individuals and/ or small groups; it is spontaneous and serendipitous” (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 144).

Guided interviews on the other hand are more structured (see Appendix C for protocols). They are usually scheduled and the researcher prepares a list of initial questions that he/she may or may not share with the participant ahead of time (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Guided or semi-structured interviews are less rigid than structured interviews in that the interviewer can deviate from the scripted questions and ask follow-up questions that arise from the participants' responses.

Informal interviews with the students took place mainly during breaks or when they finished a certain task early in class. For example, many informal conversations occurred with Suha during the breaks that Ms. Hills used to give the students half-way through the class. Guided interviews with students were scheduled during their lunch breaks in order for students not to miss any instruction, while teacher interviews were scheduled during their planning periods or after school. Student interviews were conducted in either English or Arabic, depending on the students' preferences, but most interviews involved use of both Arabic and English. With some students, more than one session was scheduled (as shown in Table 3) to address all questions on the protocol. The main purpose of student interviews was to gain insight on how they negotiated academic and social school contexts and what kind of literacy practices they were involved in both in and out of school, in addition to asking follow-up questions relating to my observations in class. Teacher interviews aimed at gaining teachers' perspectives of the participants, provide context to the participants' experiences, and offer an additional data source for triangulation of data from classroom observations and student interviews.

I transcribed and translated all interview and fieldwork data. As most of the interviews and informal interactions during observations were mainly in Arabic, I

italicize any direct quotes that the students originally uttered in English. As such, throughout the dissertation any italicized direct quotes indicate an original (and not translated) English text and any non-italicized direct quotes were originally spoken in Arabic. I applied the same translation principles concerning fieldnotes.

### **Data Management Procedures**

In organizing the data, I adopted a data management protocol similar to a current project that I am currently working on as a research assistant (*Influences of Classroom Level Social Settings on Language and Content Learning in Linguistically Diverse Classrooms*, Kibler, Principal Investigator). The data management plan involved creating protocols to store each type of data collected. In short all data were organized in folders by data source on UVA Box and all documents followed a specific document naming procedure that could be summarized by writing the document's title first followed by the year, month, date, participant pseudonym and researcher's initials. The following sections will describe how data was managed according to data source/type.

**Management of interview data.** For interviews, the protocols (see Appendix C for protocols) provided detailed accounts of how to conduct the interview. For example, some pre-interview steps included making sure that the equipment was ready and reminders were sent to the participants of the interview time and date. During the interview, a list of questions guided me throughout the interview with potential follow-up questions to elicit further information. After the interview, I wrote a quick reflection within 24 hours to help capture the main observations and any methodological challenges to address for the next interview. The protocol included directions on naming and

uploading the audio, and transcription conventions. These interview protocols helped keep the data organized and facilitated the data analysis process.

**Management of observations/artifacts data.** A protocol for writing field notes (see Appendix B) helped facilitate the process of data collection and analysis. Similar to the interview protocols, this protocol had a pre, during, and post structure. Pre-observation tasks included checking the equipment and sending reminders to participants. During the observation, I took notes using a template that included information such as the date, the participants, and time among others. I kept a running record of detailed events with time stamps to help facilitate reviewing the data when needed. Post-observation tasks included transcribing the notes within 48 hours. Directly after each observation, I also wrote a reflection that summarized the observations and highlighted key issues, both thematic as pertaining to the literature and the research questions and methodological – the researcher’s state of mind and efficacy. Naming and uploading the deidentified transcripts to UVA Box, and then to Dedoose for analysis, were the last steps in the post-observation protocol.

**Dedoose.** Dedoose is a cloud-based data analysis software that allowed me to analyze the data from virtually anywhere with a laptop and an internet connection. It also allowed me to add my advisor as a collaborator to the project which facilitated the process of providing feedback and supervising the coding process.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed Marshall and Rossman’s (2010, p. 209) qualitative seven-step analytic procedures: “(1) organizing the data, (2) immersion in the data, (3) generating categories and themes, (4) coding the data, (5) offering interpretations through

analytic memos, (6) searching for alternative understandings, and (7) writing the report”.

While these steps are listed in a linear fashion, the data analysis process was highly iterative as even Marshall and Rossman (2010) warn against a prescriptive approach of these steps.

I have already discussed data management in the previous section, so I move on to discuss step two: immersion in the data. Immersion in the data was a very important step in providing a more thorough understanding of the participants’ experiences and paved the way for the emerging themes and coding categories. I read the fieldnotes and interview transcripts at least three times after completion of the study in an attempt to identify emerging themes. As I read the data, I wrote analytic memos that included my emergent insights from the data and any connections I made to the literature and the research questions.

The third step was generating codes and themes (see Appendix D and Table 4 for complete and abridged versions of the codebook, respectively). For this step, I drew upon Fereday & Muir-Cochrane’s (2006) iterative and hybrid inductive-deductive thematic analysis-based strategy where a priori codes were derived from the literature, in addition to codes evolving from the data itself in the form of emergent themes. This was a recursive process where themes from the literature provided a lens to look at the various data, and the data from the field produced emerging themes that had connections to the literature and theoretical frames undergirding this study as shown in Table 4. For example, the theme of discriminatory practices (e.g., Oikonomidou, 2007) provided a lens to observe the students’ experiences, but the sub-codes of linguistic, religious, and racial

discrimination were informed by my observations of the students and conversations with them.

Dedoose facilitated the coding process as it allowed the creation of codes and the flexibility of coding chunks of data according to these codes. Dedoose also allowed for the addition of emerging codes as I immersed myself more into the data.

Table 4

*\*Codebook (abridged – see Appendix D for complete codebook)*

<b>Parent Codes</b>	<b>Sub-Codes</b>	<b>Sub-sub-codes</b>	<b>Ties to literature/ conceptual framework</b>
Social School Contexts	Discriminatory Practices	Linguistic discrimination Religious discrimination Racial discrimination	(e.g., Birman, Trickett, & Bacchus, 2001 Oikonomidou, 2007; Schroeter & James, 2015)
	Peer Social Networks	Virtual and/or imagined communities  Real communities (as opposed to virtual or imagined)	(Norton, 2013)
	School-based Literacy Practices	Negotiated engagement Overt resistance Covert resistance	(Perry & Purcell- Gates, 2005)
Academic School Contexts	Out-of-school Literacy Practices	Multilingual (e.g., coding and “Arabizi”) Multimodal	(e.g., Omerbašić, 2015)  Cope & Kalantzis, 2000



One particularly salient emerging code was *negotiated engagement*, which arose inductively as a nuanced and different form of negotiating literacy practices than what Perry and Purcell-Gates (2005) describe as appropriation and resistance (see also Clayton, 1998) but also different from simple “engagement” as described by Philp and Duchesne (see Chapter 2). As negotiated engagement is an important practice in which students in this study engaged but one that has not been given attention in the literature, a brief detour to define negotiated engagement and explain how it is different than appropriation and resistance seems appropriate.

Negotiated engagement is any instance when participants engage in a school-based literacy practice after negotiating a certain aspect of that practice such as the topic, genre, purpose, medium of production, or social purpose in such a way to better align this literacy practice to their beliefs, histories, languages, values, identities, or investments in out-of-school literacy practices. Negotiated engagement is different from appropriation which describes those acts by dominated groups where actors adopt a hegemonic practice for the agent’s own purposes, rather than those purposes designated by those in power” (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005, p. 9). The main difference is that students do not thwart the hegemonic practice imposed upon them, but rather engage in it after some agentic modification or negotiation of their engagement with those in power. As such, negotiated engagement can be seen as an addition to Perry and Purcell-Gates (2005) appropriation/resistance of literacy practices. With appropriation, students thwart hegemonic literacy practices to fit their own purposes. With resistance, students resist engagement in hegemonic practices either overtly or covertly. With negotiated engagement, students engage in hegemonic practices but do so after negotiating an

alteration of this practice with those who are in power or modifying it in such a way that does not thwart the academic learning goals of a certain task. This in no way limits students' sense of agency, but can be seen as a "diplomatic" means to enforce change on hegemonic literacy practices without clashing with those in power by appropriating tasks or resisting them. For example, a teacher may assign students the following writing task: "Describe how you spend Thanksgiving with your family." Some students may not celebrate Thanksgiving. As such, a student can resist this hegemonic practice by refusing to write. She/he may appropriate this task by thwarting the teacher's purpose of writing a descriptive piece about Thanksgiving and writing a narrative (for example) about Ramadan.

Another option that involves negotiated engagement is where the student asks the teacher if she/he can produce a video of how her/his family typically celebrates Ramadan. The student may not even "ask" the teacher's permission, but may use her/his own sense of agency to change the literacy practice within the parameters of the learning goals set by the teacher. This last option requires flexibility and collaboration (as opposed to conflict) between the teacher and the student. The teacher can scaffold (to varying degrees) the student in such a way that ensures fulfillment of the learning goals and still addresses the students' cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic needs and aspirations. For example, the teacher can work with the student to incorporate descriptive text (potentially bilingual or multilingual) into the video. In this manner, the student will still be writing a descriptive piece, but he has negotiated the topic (Ramadan instead of Thanksgiving), the modality (video instead of traditional text), and the language (bilingual instead of a monolingual). Thus, another difference between negotiated engagement on the one hand

and appropriation and resistance on the other is this sense of collaboration and flexibility between the teacher and students. It is not only a student's behavior that defines negotiated engagement, but also the cooperative relationship with that student's teacher(s). The absence of such a collaborative and flexible instructional approach can lead to resistance, and in the case of covert resistance, the teacher will not even know that the student is not engaged. As such, negotiated engagement is a diplomatic and respectful means to enforce change to hegemonic literacy practices that students may desire to change in such a way to address their interests, beliefs, and identities. Through negotiated engagement, students can incorporate part of who they are (their identities) into the teaching and learning process.

Another important emergent theme was Arabizi – “a system of writing Arabic using English characters” (Yaghan, 2008, p. 39; see Appendix E for a complete chart detailing Arabic characters and their Arabizi equivalents). According to Yaghan (2013), the term is a combination of the words “Arabic” and “engliszi” (English, as pronounced in majority of the Arab world); hence the term “Arabizi”. Although this writing system already exists in the literature, it arose inductively from the data in this dissertation as I expected students to only use English and Arabic, but participants reported using Arabizi and shared some of their Arabizi writing samples. Based on interview data, Yaghan (2008) mentions many reasons why young Arabic speaking individuals are engaged in this type of writing, including the fact that early technology did not support Arabic script and Arabizi was an innovative and needed way to communicate over the internet and via text messages. In addition Arabizi provides more flexibility in expressing every day issues and communicating in slang Arabic (as opposed to standardized modern Arabic).

Participants in this study also used Arabizi to text and chat over the internet. In the following chapters I provide examples from the students' writing samples that they have shared, but for now, I will suffice with presenting one representative example to highlight how Arabizi is used:

Arabizi: Shukran 3ala qira2et hal utroo7a.

Arabic (starts from right to left): شكراً على قراءة هل أطروحة.

English translation: Thank you for reading this dissertation.

In addition to Arabizi, another “language” emerged as part of the participants' out-of-school literacy practices – computer coding. As one participant (Zein) describes it, coding is a language that tells the computer what to do. Through writing this “language”, Zein is able to create videogames – a task which he spends hours on each day. Below I include a brief example of some of the codes that Zein used to create one of his videogames:

```
playerDistance = Vector3.Distance(player.transform.position, transform.position);  
if(playerDistance <= disRange && health > 0 && playerDistance >= 3)
```

It is important to note that creating a simple videogame requires around 1,000 lines of code according to Zein. Such emerging themes as using codes, Arabizi, and negotiated engagement were integral to this dissertation and it was important to discuss them as part of the data analysis process. Now, I resume my description of how the data was analyzed.

So far, I have described the first four steps in Marshall and Rossman's (2010) qualitative seven-step analytic procedures: (1) organizing the data, (2) immersion in the data, (3) generating categories and themes, and (4) coding the data. I now move on to the fifth step which involves offering interpretations through analytic memos. During the

coding process of the data using Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) hybrid approach, I constantly reviewed the data and often wrote analytic memos that connected the findings to the research questions and the literature reviewed in the second chapter of this proposal. These memos took different formats such as concept maps or thematic tables that helped me organize the data and explore different interpretations. I have previously discussed the benefits of such memos briefly, but I add Marshall and Rossman's (2010) advice for researchers to write memos during the analytic process, listing some of the many benefits by arguing that "Writing prompts the analyst to identify categories that subsume a number of initial codes. It helps identify linkages among coded data. It helps identify gaps and questions in the data. It forces the analyst to stay thoughtfully immersed in her study, even when pulled away by tempting distractions" (p.213-214).

The step before the last was searching for alternative understandings. Although Marshall and Rossman (2010) listed this step as the sixth in a linear process of seven steps – the seventh being writing the findings – searching for alternative understandings was an ongoing and cyclical process. While writing memos and producing concept maps, I included such reflections on potential alternative understandings that sometimes led to the rewriting of several sections of this study. For example, how students negotiated school-based literacies did not "fit" under appropriation/resistance solely; hence "negotiated engagement" emerged as an alternative understanding and reflecting upon possible nuanced understandings of appropriation. Such constant reflection reinforced the credibility of the findings and trustworthiness.

### **Access, Ethics, and Trustworthiness**

Access, ethics, and trustworthiness are particularly important when dealing with marginalized populations such as refugees. Concerning access, the first step was to conduct an informal interview with the county's ESOL and World Language Programs Coordinator in order to gain an overview of the refugee population in the county and inquire about access. As a result of this interview, I learned that one of the ethical safeguards, in addition to the traditional university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, is the county's Research Review Committee (RRC) whose job is to examine research proposals and decide whether approval should be granted or denied. Part of the ethical consideration of conducting research that both the IRB and the RRC consider include making sure that the participants are under no risk, that they are aware of the purpose of the research, that their participation is voluntary, and that they understand the time commitments involved in participation in a specific study. Such criteria are often met by having participants sign consent forms. However, acquiring IRB and RRC approval is not equivalent to guaranteeing an ethical approach to research – this is just the tip of the iceberg. Cultural sensitivity and a respectful understanding of the community under study are essential. For example, in Muslim communities (Iraqis are predominantly Muslims) it may be deemed inappropriate for an adolescent girl to be in a room alone with a man. As such, I was sure to agree with Suha and Salwa on a convenient place to conduct the interview.

As religion is often a delicate subject, I did not ask directly about the participants' religion, but this data emerged organically, and I was able to infer or confirm the participants' religion. For example, Zein mentioned fasting during Ramadan and reading the Quran. Haytham, his brother, wrote in his journal that he is a Muslim. Suha reported

that she is a Muslim in an informal conversation about a book she was reading in which the main character is a Muslim girl. Salwa reported celebrating Christmas, but did not explicitly identify as a Christian. In addition, some Muslim communities eat only halal meat and/or do not eat pork. Part of the students' compensation included buying them lunch during the interview that took place during their school lunch break. While Zein did not observe halal practice, his brother Haytham explicitly asked for a halal meal. As such, it was wrong to make any assumptions relating to the students' practices and it was important to be aware of and sensitive to diverse beliefs even within the same family. The preceding two examples demonstrate that ethical approaches to conducting research go beyond acquiring IRB approval and place onus on the researcher to be respectful of the people and communities she/he is studying (see Perry, 2011 on how university IRBs do not "speak" to populations such as refugees).

Other ethical considerations include making sure that all data was treated confidentially and deidentified by replacing real names with pseudonyms. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time (though none did so); all data were kept on a password protected server (UVA Box) and access was restricted to me in addition to my advisor. Consent forms were translated into Arabic and participants were given forms in both Arabic and English and thereby had a choice to sign the form in either Arabic or English. Interviews were conducted either in English or in Arabic, or a mixture of both depending on the participants' preferences.

When it comes to trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) seminal work offers valuable advice on procedures that can validate the standards of trustworthiness in qualitative research – what makes qualitative research credible. According to Lincoln and

Guba (1985), prolonged engagement in the field, member checking (confirming findings with participants), and triangulation (corroborating findings through a multiplicity of sources) are all procedures that can add to the credibility of a qualitative research study. Despite Lincoln and Guba's (1985) defining work in this field, it's important to acknowledge more current thinking on issues of trustworthiness. For example, Cho and Trent (2006) label Lincoln and Guba's approaches to trustworthiness as "transactional" – meaning that they are focused on methods to ensure accuracy, albeit at the expense of neglecting the presence of multiple perspectives of reality, including that of the researcher. Cho and Trent (2006) adopt a transformational approach to validity where researcher reflexivity is essential. This study draws on both transactional and transformational approaches to trustworthiness. I believe that such traditional transactional procedures are valuable in ensuring the accuracy of what is reported as findings. Therefore, I spent as much time as possible in the field between the months of October and December of 2015. Triangulation (see Ellingson, 2009 for "crystallization" – another take on triangulation) through multiplicity of data sources was another measure of credibility that was adopted in this study: videotaped classroom observations, artifacts, timelines of after school literacy practices, and interviews. Finally, member checking was an additional measure to increase trustworthiness. I created member checking handouts (see Appendix F) summarizing the main data that I collected regarding each student. Salwa, whom I met at school, approved all the points on the handout, but clarified that she only played Roblox at school during free time. Member checking with Zein and Haytham took place via email. Haytham approved the findings, but Zein asked me to add that he likes basketball now. I made both of these changes where appropriate in this



dissertation. Unfortunately, I could not contact Suha for member checking as she has left school early in the spring semester after passing her SSTs.

Transformational validity also matters and emphasizes the researcher's reflexivity. "Self-reflexivity requires acknowledging the multiple positions that we occupy in relation to our participants, as well as in the world as a whole" (Deutsch, 2008, p. 34). This is particularly important for this study as my role varies along the continuum of participant and observer (Patton, 2002). I assumed the role of observer most of the time during class observations; however, sometimes my role shifted to participant-observer when the students asked me for help and I provided it (e.g., translating words to Arabic) or when I often interacted with them and asked them questions as they completed tasks in class (e.g., asking Zein if he would like to create a videogame for a class project). As such, it was beneficial to constantly reflect on my own role and positionality as a researcher.

### **Role of the Researcher/Positionality**

Acknowledging the various roles and lenses that influenced the data analysis in this study is essential. One important aspect of my identity as a researcher is being a native speaker of Arabic and a citizen of Lebanon, an Arab country. I have also worked with diverse populations (including Iraqi students) in the United Arab Emirates for seven years. Culture and language can traditionally be limitations in research on Arab refugee populations (e.g. Perry & Moses, 2011). In this study, I believe that having an emic understanding of the diverse Arab cultures and sharing the same native tongue with the student participants encouraged them to share more about their experiences, especially those that involved multilingual literacy practices such as writing in a hybrid form of

Arab/English. Nonetheless, Lebanese Arabic is slightly different than Iraqi dialect and sometimes I politely asked students to explain some of the words which I did not quite understand in Iraqi.

There were also cultural differences between Lebanon and Iraq. For example, Zein was struggling with the concept of dating and whether it was right or wrong for a Muslim young man to date young women (Interview, 12/09/2015). Within Christian communities in Lebanon, it is socially acceptable (at least in my experiences) for adolescents to date. I initially thought of telling him that it was fine to ask the girl that he liked out on a date, but I politely recommended that Zein have a conversation with his parents regarding this issue.

Working with refugee populations is part of my commitment to better understand this marginalized population of students and builds on previous research and community service that I have done in Lebanon with Syrian refugee students (summer 2014). That research experience enabled me to have a better understanding of methodological and ethical considerations of working with marginalized populations.

Another aspect of my identity is that of a professional English teacher who has taught diverse ESOL students throughout my career. This might have influenced the way that I perceived and interpreted instruction in the classrooms that I observed. For example, I often found myself struggling with detaching myself from adopting an evaluative lens in my observations as opposed to an observational one. On certain occasions, my belief in writing as a very important strand of English language arts that acts as a gatekeeper for placements both in secondary and post-secondary levels (Kibler, 2014) sometimes influenced what I perceived and interpreted as good literacy teaching

for ELs. For example, I was judgmental of the limited writing opportunities in Mr. Ronaldo's class, but with time, discussions with my advisor, and constant reflection, I realized that it was more important to better understand the reasons underlying such pedagogic decisions instead of simply passing judgment. As such, I was able to understand Mr. Ronaldo's rationale: writing was going to be the focus of the next semester to prepare students for the WIDA<sup>TM</sup> assessment.

To conclude this chapter, it is my hope that adopting several measures to increase trustworthiness lent more credibility to this study. A final reflexive yet important comment is that collecting and analyzing the data for this study was far from a linear process. I often read and reread the data and wrote various drafts of the chapters, concept maps, coding manuals, and other artifacts used in this study. Indeed, this study was a learning opportunity on a methodological level and a chance to connect qualitative theory with practice.

## CHAPTER IV

### NEGOTIATING SOCIAL SCHOOL CONTEXTS

This chapter describes how the four participants negotiated social contexts of school. Findings suggest that students negotiate discriminatory practices and limited peer social networks in school by devising and enacting agentive means that involve creative use of language. For example, students use writing, verbal resistance, silence, and digital means of communication to resist or evade some of the social contexts in school that involved discriminatory practices or having limited peer social networks (see Table 5). Throughout this process, participants engage in discursal and relational constructions of identity (Ivanič, 2006) and engage in out-of-school literacy practices to address some of the discriminatory discourses that they encountered in school.

Table 5

*Overview of Negotiating Social Contexts of School*

Social Contexts		Haytham	Zein	Salwa	Suha
Discriminatory Practices	Linguistic	Writing; asserting Iraqi identity	Silence	Verbal resistance; silence	Verbal resistance; claiming pride in Arabic accent
	Religious	Writing	Ignoring	NA	Verbal resistance
	Racial	NA	NA	NA	Not hanging out with white girls

Limited Peer Social Networks	Constructing virtual online communities; building cross-cultural friendships	Constructing virtual online communities	Constructing virtual online communities; building cross- cultural friendships	Constructing virtual online communities; building cross- cultural friendships
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In the following sections, I first start by providing illustrative (and not exhaustive) examples of how students negotiate various discriminatory practices at school through writing, verbal resistance, silence, and other means. I then proceed to discuss the participants' limited peer social networks at school and how they negotiated this barrier through creating virtual online communities and real communities as well within the school context.

### **Negotiating Discriminatory Practices**

Participants in this study face a host of discriminatory practices both at school and online. Some of these discriminatory practices have a linguistic, religious, or racist nature. Students adopt different strategies in negotiating these discriminatory practices as the following sections will illustrate.

**Linguistic discrimination.** One account of linguistic discrimination comes from Salwa who reports in one of her interviews that, “*One time, I bring my pizza with me to the lunch and one girl was like where did this pizza come from? And I’m like it came from your kitchen!*” Salwa believes that “*some people bully them (refugee students) because they don’t know how to speak (English)*”. While the student who asked about pizza may not be “bullying” Salwa, it is important to acknowledge Salwa’s perception of this incident as bullying. She explains that her being able to stop that student in the

cafeteria from bullying her stems from her ability to respond in English: Salwa's knowledge of English is used as a linguistic deterrent to bullying. In an interview with Salwa, she affirms her working knowledge of English upon first arriving into the US and links it to her education in Iraq (her home country) and Syria, one of the asylum countries that Salwa lived in before coming to the US.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, however, Salwa says that her accent discourages her from reading aloud in class (Interview, 12/07/15):

*Interviewer: What else do you like or dislike reading here at school?*

*Salwa: Well, I don't like to read because sometimes I pronounce the words, the hard words wrong. I don't like reading. I just like writing a lot.*

*Interviewer: So you don't like reading because of the way you sound?*

*Salwa: Yeah, only the hard words.*

*Interviewer: Does anyone make fun of you because of the way you sound?*

*Salwa: No, they all just jump in and help me, they do it so quickly they sometimes scare me, like excuse me (humorous tone).*

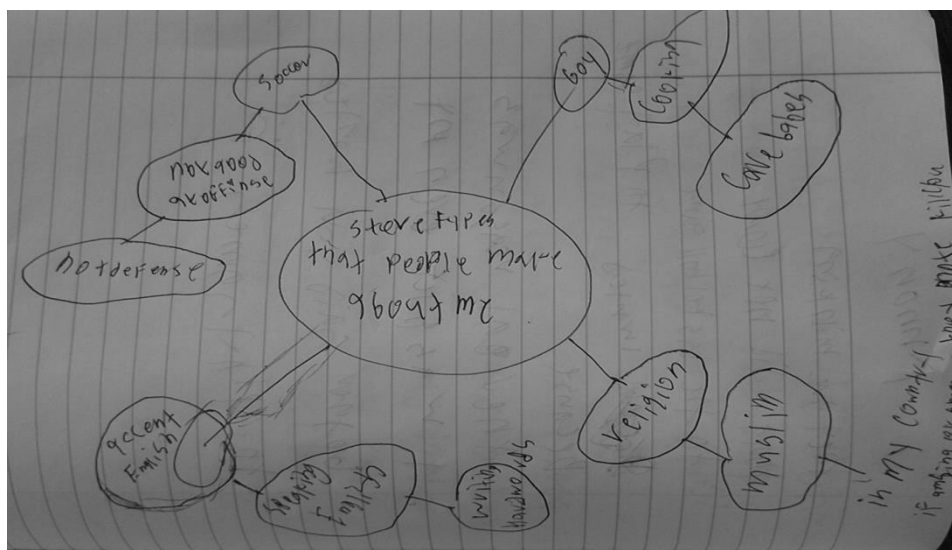
Despite a seemingly supportive environment in class where Salwa's classmates come to her aid, her accent is still a marker of difference that seems to impede her participation in class. My observations reveal that Salwa does not refuse to read aloud when called upon, but she rarely volunteers to read-aloud. While Salwa has had a more active mode of resistance during the cafeteria incident, in class she prefers not to read to

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<sup>4</sup> Although Salwa reported learning English in Syria and Iraq, there are considerable concerns about the quality of teaching English as a foreign language in Arab countries such as Syria (Karam, Kibler, Yoder, under review) and Iraq (Dawood, 2013) depending on various factors (e.g., what type of school students attended). As such, the level of English preparation that students receive prior to arrival to the US considerably varies and not all refugee ELs may have a working knowledge of English upon arrival.

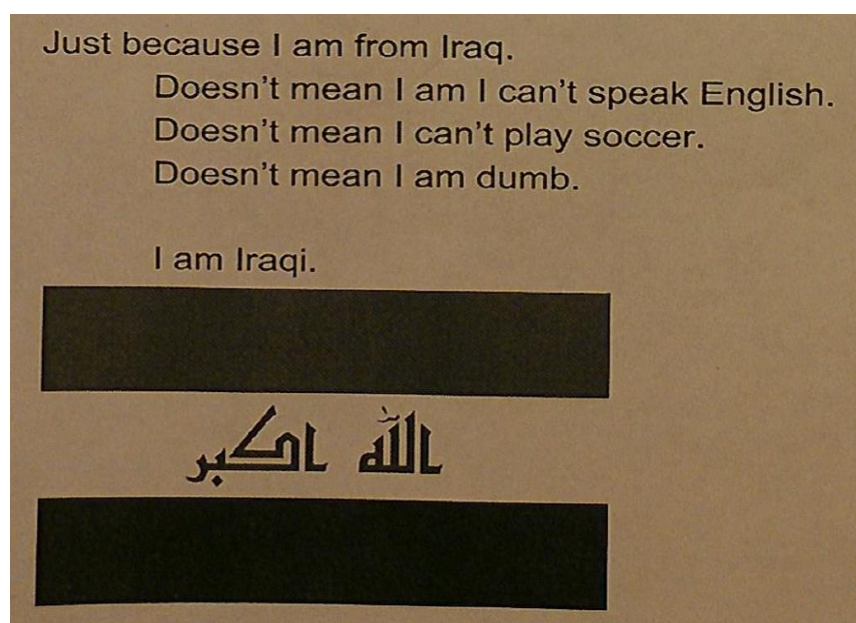
avoid pronouncing the hard words “wrong”. Perhaps in the cafeteria, Salwa finds specific students to confront, but in class it is not the students that are the source of Salwa’s concern in as much as it is the overall issue of accent as an identity marker of difference. Thus, Suha’s identity does not only have to do with the way she talks, but also the way she is addressed in the cafeteria and the extent to which she talks like the other monolingual English students.

Haytham expresses his frustration with linguistic discrimination and says in an interview, “Many people here say that ‘he’s from Iraq, and he can’t speak English,’” (Interview, 12/11/15). Haytham’s response is to a question that I have asked him about a writing task that he has completed in class. In that task, his ESOL teacher Ms. Hilton tasks students with writing a poem about the “stereotypes” that people make about them, modelled after poems that students from previous years have written. Ms. Hilton asks students to start by brainstorming ideas using an idea web and remember all the readings in class about people who fought stereotypes and injustice such as Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, and others. I observe Haytham start brainstorming ideas using an idea web as instructed by Ms. Hilton.



*Figure 3.* Haytham's idea web.

He writes "Stereotypes that people make about me" in the center bubble (see Figure 3 ) and in one of the branching bubbles he writes "accent English" and then "speaking English" and "writing hard words" as additional sub-bubbles as shown in Figure 3. Although there are other stereotypical aspects that Haytham has reported in his idea web, I will focus on the linguistic aspect in this section. Below is an excerpt of Haytham's final draft of the poem that he has written based on his brainstorming (Fieldnotes, 12/10/15):



*Figure 4.* Haytham's "Just Because" poem

Although this poem is part of a classroom task and is not born out of Haytham's own personal initiative, it is a window through which to observe Haytham's ability to resist linguistic stereotypes through writing when he is given the opportunity to do so. Through this writing task, Ms. Hilton has empowered Haytham by providing him with the instruction and the opportunity to write about the stereotypes that people make about Iraq people. Haytham uses his English writing skills to fight injustice, just like some of



the famous characters that he has been reading about in Ms. Hilton's class (e.g., MLK Jr.). Haytham also uses multimodal means of writing by inserting the Iraqi flag to further illustrate his point and assert his identity as Iraqi despite the stereotypes associated with this identification. This assertion of identity can be perceived as a form of protest and resistance to Haytham's perceived linguistic discrimination.

Intrigue by what Haytham has written has motivated me to bring the subject up in the interview, wanting to learn more about his experience. I show him the idea web and ask him to tell me more about how people stereotype him for his accent (Interview, 12/11/15):

Interviewer: Tell me more about your writing regarding stereotypes. (I show him his idea web and read from it the section on accents.) Tell me more about this. How do people stereotype you for your accent?

Haytham: People imitate you if your accent is not nice.

Interviewer: Which people?

Haytham: I don't think you know them.

Interviewer: Are they in school?

Haytham: Yes in school, and even my brother sometimes makes fun and asks what kind of an accent that is.

Interviewer: So your brother and who else?

Haytham: I have my American friends on Skype and they sometimes tease me.

Interviewer: Do you get upset?

Haytham: A little bit.

Interviewer: What do they tell you?

Haytham: I say a word and they tell me that this is not the way it's supposed to be said.

Thus, some of the stereotypes that Haytham believes people make about him are of a linguistic nature. Such discriminatory practices related to accent are not only limited to the school context, but also occupy other spaces such as Haytham's home (his brother teasing him for his accent), and his online world where he interacts with American friends via Skype. According to Haytham, those friends are mostly gamers, and while they are engaged in playing videogames such as *League of Legends* (LoL), they have active Skype group chats (audio chats) simultaneously to be able to speak to each other in real time and coordinate plans. Those friends sometimes correct him when he pronounces certain gaming expressions in a "wrong" manner. Thus, perceived linguistic discrimination is an issue that faces Haytham online, at home, and at school. He negotiates this kind of discrimination by planning and writing a poem about it using multimodal means of writing to assert his Iraqi identity and sense of resilience.

Accent is not only an issue for Haytham and Salwa, but also for Suha who tells me (Interview, 12/15/15):

*Suha: If you have an accent, people stare at you which I personally don't care about, but most of the people here [in school] and the kids look at you and go ohhhh, you have an accent. You can literally tell by their expressions.*

*Interviewer: So is it just the looks, or do they say anything?*

*Suha: I don't think they say, but some of them do. They ask you where are you from or why do you have an accent. But I honestly don't pay attention.*

Suha seems to echo Haytham's and Salwa's experiences with accent and how peers often form a deficit perspective of refugees and other bi/multilingual students based on the way they sound. Suha utters "ohhhh" with a pitiful tone that matches the long face she puts on to mirror how her interlocutors look and sound like. Despite Suha's assertion that she does not care or "pay attention", this issue of accent is significant enough for her to bring up in the interview. In negotiating these contexts, however, Suha claims pride in her accent (Interview, 12/15/15):

Interviewer: Would you rather not have an accent?

Suha: I don't care, as long as I speak clear. I don't mind if I have an accent or not. I mean some people have an accent, and you listen to them and you can't understand them. So as long as I'm clear, I don't care. I don't need an American accent. And it's good to show them that you're from the Middle East, you know!

Interviewer: Why?

Suha: Cause that's my culture and my traditions, and it's not good to erase that and forget about all of that so easily. I have a national spirit sometimes. So what if I live here? Should I forget everything?

Suha seems to link her accent to her cultural identity as a person from the Middle East. She refuses to "erase" her accent and thereby erase that aspect of her identity just

because she lives now in the US. I ask Suha if anyone has ever bullied her because of her refugee status or accent. “Who are they to bully me? I will defend myself and tell them that they are not better than I am.” Thus, Suha is ready to resist linguistic discrimination and feels confident to do this. She does not feel “inferior” because of her accent and is ready to tell other people that they are “not better” than who she is. Hence, Suha negotiates linguistic discrimination through taking pride in her Iraqi identity and being confident to verbally resist acts of bullying.

Although Zein does not report experiencing discrimination based on his accent (neither in real or virtual contexts), he believes his accent is a “problem” and reports refraining from participation in class due to how he sounds when speaking English (Interview, 12/01/15):

Zein: I can say the words, but they sound different.

Interviewer: I understand.

Zein: English is easy, but the accent is difficult, how you pronounce the words.

Interviewer: So you don’t want to speak in class because of your accent?

Zein: Yep. This is a problem.

Interviewer: How do you face this problem?

Zein: By not speaking.

Interviewer: OK. And would you like to have an accent like your friends in class?

Zein: Yes, I practice at home where I don’t see them. I practice on Skype where I don’t see the people, but I speak to them and be

comfortable in talking to them. I can use whatever accent I want, and I'm comfortable.

Indeed, my observations in class of Zein support his claim as Zein rarely speaks or participates in class. Thus, silence is Zein's solution to his accent "problem" in class. Another solution is Skyping with people that he cannot see. Zein Skypes with gamers simultaneously as they play videogames and chat about various topics such as videogames and "life" in general (Interview, 12/01/15). Through Skype, he can practice his accent or be comfortable in using any accent he wants. Thus, while Zein may feel that he does not have the "right to speak" (Norton, 2013) due to his accent in class and therefore remains silent, he is active online outside of school via Skype and within his virtual community of gamers. It is interesting to note that while Haytham is teased online for his accent, Zein does not report experiencing the same kind of interactions. While Zein has a voice online, his silence in class may influence his teacher's perception of Zein. For example, Mr. LeBlanc believes that Zein prefers to work alone in class and struggles with vocabulary: "There is a lot of guesses [in Zein's work] and not using the context clues yet to make the correct inference, so struggle with vocabulary is one [challenge]" (Interview, 12/07/2015). Although Mr. LeBlanc believes that Zein does not use context clues in class, Zein reports learning vocabulary from his online interactions with speakers of English:

You play with your friends and chat. People say stuff and everything you say, you learn it. [...] Me as a smart kid, I start to think, what is the way they are using the word for? I try to get the meaning of the word, I understand it in my mind, and I save the word so I can use it. That happens a lot. Even though I don't understand

a word, I try to understand what he is talking about so I can give him the answer.

(Interview, 12/15/15)

Thus, it seems that Zein uses context clues to interpret vocabulary words that he does not understand (some of the examples he gave me included content specific words such as “integer” and less formal expressions such as “my bad”) while chatting and playing online with his virtual friends.

**Religious discrimination.** Discriminatory practices also have a religious nature and occur both online and at school. More specifically, three of the participants who have self-identified as Muslims (Suha, Zein, and Haytham) all report experiencing such practices; however, only Suha experiences religious discrimination within the school context due to sharing in class that she did not eat pork. Suha’s English teacher always starts class with a journal writing activity. On one of the observations (10/28/16), the writing prompt is: “Describe a food that you hate without saying the name of the food. Include as many senses as possible.” I ask her what she is writing about, and she says pork and tells me that she cannot eat pork because she is a Muslim. The teacher then asks each student to share his/her descriptive writing and the other students to try to guess what their classmate had written about. When it is Suha’s turn, she describes pork as “from an animal”, “light in color”, and “nasty”. One of the students guesses it is “pork chops” and one African-American male student looks very surprised (looking back from the front seat to Suha with raised eyebrows). He exclaims, “You don’t eat bacon! You’re tripping! Why, you must be smoking or something!” Suha answered, “*Hahaha, I’m not smoking!*” and reminds him that everybody had a different taste in food. Another male student (an immigrant student from Mexico according to the teacher) who is sitting next

to Suha supported her opinion telling the student who criticized Suha that he shouldn't judge because "we're in the United States!" and people have the right to eat whatever they want. Suha joins him by commenting, "*Yeah, it's a free country!*" and starts laughing. Although Suha's classmate who is critical of her eating habits may not have linked Suha's abstaining from eating pork to her religion, this example demonstrates how difficult it is to be different – in this case religiously different. Nonetheless, Suha is not silent and verbally confronts the student who has accused her of "tripping" by invoking the idea of the US as a "free country." In confronting her accuser, Suha asserts her identity, defends her choices, and does not justify or feel the need to explain her choice of not eating pork.

Another incident that Suha recounts is not experienced directly by her, but witnessed by Suha. One of Suha's Muslim friends at school, used to wear the hijab (what Muslim women wear to cover their heads and parts of their faces). According to Suha, teachers and students at school kept on asking her friend questions about the hijab, like "*why are you wearing it? What's the purpose of wearing it? Why do you look different than the rest of the people? The same questions. Why are you wearing the same thing. And she's like, it's part of my culture and religion, and then she started getting bored with the questions and she just take it off*" (Interview, 12/15/15). It is important to note that Suha describes these incessant questions as a form of bullying which she believes have driven her friend to take the hijab off just to avoid feeling different (Fieldnotes, 12/02/15). Suha argues that it is difficult to wear a hijab in the US, because people "*will say that you are uncivilized, especially here in the South. It's better in bigger cities, but here in the South is different. But who are they to say that I'm uncivilized? They are*

*wrong. One shouldn't judge people on their religion or beliefs or race or accent or if they are refugee or not. It's like me saying that black people are bad"* (Fieldnotes, 12/02/15).

Suha adds that people can look “funny” at a hijab-wearing woman, and that her mother, who used to wear a hijab in Iraq, stopped wearing it here in the US. “*They* [people in the US] *just don't understand!*” Suha fervently exclaims. I ask Suha if she has ever been bothered by anyone at school because she is Muslim or Arab. Suha replies, “Are you kidding me? I make fun of them. No one dares to do that.” Thus, Suha says she uses her charismatic personality to fend off bullying, and she sometimes even makes fun of other people who may be trying to make fun of her.

While the incidents that Suha share occur at school, Haytham describes his experiences with religious discrimination in Iraq before arriving to the US. Although these experiences were in Iraq, Haytham draws upon those experiences while engaged in school-based literacy practices. This emerges while Haytham is brainstorming for a writing task on stereotypes assigned to the class by his ESOL teacher. In his idea web (see Figure 3), Haytham includes a series of bubbles and sub-bubbles that branch form it. These bubbles read consecutively: “religion”, “Muslim”, and “in my country if am sina [Sunni<sup>5</sup>] or shaya [Shiite] they maye kill you”. At first, I cannot read what Haytham has written, but I ask him in class to read it for me, and he does. I take a note to remember to bring this up in an interview (12/11/16) with Haytham so I can learn more:

Interviewer: You also wrote here (I show his a picture of his idea web on my laptop) that people stereotype you as a Muslim. Tell me more.

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<sup>5</sup> Sunnis and Shiites are religious factions in Islam that differ on theological and political levels. These differences have resulted in phases of sectarian violence between the two groups throughout history.



Haytham: In Syria and Iraq, you know that there are Shiites and Sunni people, right? Sometimes they tell you we will give you that much because you are Sunni, or we will give you that much because you are Shiite. They sometimes tell you that if you are Sunni or Shiite, the other party will kill you.

In the above interview, Haytham describes religious discrimination that he has experienced outside of the US. However, such injustice is an example of why refugees leave their countries in an attempt to find a better life. In addition, such discriminatory practices in countries of first asylum (Syria in this case) can make refugee students more sensitive to discrimination. Haytham's experience of religious discrimination in Syria also appears to frame his understanding of racial issues that are present in his new country of resettlement. In his journal, Haytham writes about Martin Luther King Junior (MLK Jr.) and how "black and white people and Muslim shae sna [Shiite and Sunni] [w]ill fight for freedom just like MLK jr." In this journal entry, Haytham draws from his readings on MLK Jr. and makes a solid connection between racial issues in the US and religious issues in the Middle East. In this case, journal writing is a medium that reflects Haytham's aspirations for the future of his country. It is very interesting to note that Haytham seemed to understand that the fight for freedom often does not involve the minority factions only (black people or Shiites in this case), but is a collaborative effort among all stakeholders in a certain society to fight discrimination.

Haytham's brother, Zein, also experiences religious discriminatory practices. Zein's experience is within online contexts and the data does not reveal direct links to his social school context. Nonetheless, it is important to provide a description of Zein's

online experiences as they are likely to influence his social experiences at school even though this did not emerge in the data. In one of the interviews (12/09/15), I ask Zein to describe what he usually watches on YouTube. His response is:

*Funny gaming videos. Yesterday I was watching a prank, and there was a list of other pranks. And there was a one Muslim picking a girl prank. And I was what the heck is that? I clicked on the video and then this guy was picking a lady and after he take her number he told her that he was a Muslim. And she was like, Go away from me, go away! And the guy was like why? Just because I'm a Muslim? And then she ran away from him just because he's a Muslim.*

After this recount, I ask Zein if he thinks that girls will run away from him because he is a Muslim. Zein does not think that girls will run away from him personally, but he expresses his belief that “Girls think that Muslim people hit their wife, like in Saudi Arabia they hit their wife and stuff, so girls think that Muslim people are like that” (ibid). I continue asking him questions about his experience as a young adolescent Muslim in the US and about his perceptions of that YouTube video:

Interviewer: *Do you feel different here [in the US] because you are a Muslim?*

Zein: *(Nods affirmatively) Sometimes when I read people stuff I get sad because they say that Muslim equals terrorist.*

He points to the comments people have posted beneath the video and explains:

Zein: *Yes, this one. Go down. There are so many racist comments.*

Interviewer: *Racist. That's a big word. Do you know what it means?*

Zein: *It's like someone doesn't like another type of human. And there are so many good people I found. Not so many, most of them are*

*racist, but some, go down, go down, look at what that guy said.*

*'I'm a Christian, but I respect Muslims'.*

He explains that these posts help him *“learn how people feel about Muslim people,”* which he suggests is tied to global events as portrayed in the media: *“They’re like kids. They see the news about ISIS and go, ‘Oh, all the Muslims are bad.’ They’re like that.”*

While these online “racist” comments are not directly aimed or addressed to Zein, such comments occupy the virtual world that Zein “lives” in as he reportedly spends hours online watching YouTube videos or playing online games. In addition, the way YouTube commentators talk about Muslims shape and inform (mis)perceptions of Muslims. Such comments can have a significant influence on Zein and his identity construction. They make him “sad” and drive him to believe that most people think that Arabs and Muslims are terrorists. Zein approaches these comments with a critical eye, noticing that not all the comments are “racist”, and that there are some Christian commentators who respect Muslims. However, some people according to Zein “have no minds” and easily confuse Muslims/Arabs with terrorists. Instead of commenting and joining the conversation, Zein prefers to remain silent because “they’ll never understand”. Thus, silence is a recurring theme that Zein uses online and in class.

**“Racial” discrimination.** Suha is the only student to identify “racism” as one of the social contexts that she faces in school. “White girls [at school] think that they should be the best,” Suha reports and describes how they look her up and down and are envious because despite the fact that Suha is a refugee, she wears the “best” clothes and is always fashionable. I am curious about what makes Suha form that impression, so I ask her how she knows what those “white girls” were thinking, and if they have ever explicitly

criticized Suha for being a “fashionable” refugee. “I know by the way they look at me!” was Suha’s answer. Suha role-plays how the girls look at her: she rolls her eyes and tilts her head to the side moving her gaze slowly up and down, and down and up. While the way white girls “look” at Suha may or may not be indicative of scorn, this remains Suha’s impression of their gaze and how the way they look at her make her feel. Suha also adds that she often hangs out with African American students rather than white students because “black people are more sociable”.

### **Limited Peer Social Networks**

With the exception of Salwa, participants in this study report that it is difficult for them to create peer social networks, especially upon first arrival into the US. In negotiating this social aspect of schooling, participants engage in out-of-school literacies that enable them to create virtual peer social networks that they communicate with online through videogame and social media platforms.

Haytham describes his first day at school when he “just sat there. I did not know anything or anyone when I first came here” (Interview, 12/09/15). When asked why it was difficult for him to get to know people at that time, Haytham answers that it is “mainly because of language and my accent was not good” (ibid). I ask Haytham if he were shy or embarrassed of speaking with an Arabic accent. “I’m not shy to speak Arabic, but I’m shy when I speak English with the foreigners. I’m not shy when I speak to you in Arabic in class. This is my language.” Thus, while Haytham had some limited English upon arrival into the US (he reportedly learned some English in Syria), he reports

that his shyness in speaking English with “foreigners”<sup>6</sup> because of his accent has formed a barrier that has prevented him from communicating with peers and thereby making friends.

Another example comes from Haytham’s brother, Zein, who also reports that “when someone first arrives, he can’t speak”, and therefore Zein “only used to speak to Salwa in Arabic because I couldn’t speak much English and I didn’t want to speak because it’s a new language and you can’t speak it”. Zein highlights another important point: the fact that there are very few Arabic speaking students at his school. Unlike Spanish speaking students, Arabic speaking students often find themselves with a limited number of peers to speak to in their first language. Speaking English all of the time has helped Zein improve at English, according to what he reveals in an interview (12/09/15):

Interviewer: What kind of readings do you read at school?

Zein: It’s all English. We don’t read Arabic. I’m improving more at English because there is no one to speak Arabic to. Hispanics speak to other people that are Hispanic like them. They are unlike me; I speak English all the time.

Interviewer: Do you wish there were more people to speak Arabic to here at school?

Zein: Last year, yes, because I did not know how to speak English. But this year I know English.

Interviewer: So you don’t need to have Arabic speakers around anymore?

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<sup>6</sup> In the Arab world, “foreigners” often refers to western English/French speaking people mainly due to the colonial history of the Middle East.

Zein: It would be nice, but not like last year. Last year I wished there were Arabic speaking students.

Zein highlights the absence of Arabic in school readings and contrasts his condition with that of Hispanic students at school who have peers to speak to in their first language. While having Arabic speaking peers was more important for him when he first arrived into school, this year he considers it as something that “would be nice”. Zein’s self-perception seems to have shifted. In his second year in the US, Zein sees himself more as an English speaker than he did in his first year when he reportedly knew little English. It is also worth noting that Zein had his brother Haytham and Salwa at school to speak Arabic to. However, while Zein shared the same ESOL class with Salwa in his first year and could speak to her often, this year, he has moved to a mainstream English class and therefore does not see Salwa as often.

Zein and Haytham are not the only ones who have limited peer social networks. Suha also complained how much she hates living in the US and how there is “no social life” in the US (Fieldnotes, 10/25/15). Suha adds that she does not have many Iraqi friends here in the US because she is from Baghdad (the Iraqi capital) and the Iraqi people here where she lives are not as educated as her family. Thus, Suha seems to be implying that people from the capital are potentially more educated than other Iraqis, and links her friendships with Iraqi adolescents to their level of education and geography. This limits her options as most Iraqis that she knows are not as educated as she is according to Suha. Nonetheless, Suha says that she has a Latina friend whom she hangs out with and who teaches her some Spanish words. Suha also stays in touch with her friends from Jordan using current communication technology via texting, social apps



عقبال ما نشوفك 67 مليون مشترك	day with 67 million subscribers hahahahahaha you are so funny
 <b>Zein</b> 3> تسلم حبيبي	<b>Zein:</b> Thank you dear
 <b>User 2</b> كفو بس نزل في صوتك افضل و ازين	<b>User 2:</b> Competent but try to reduce the volume it is better and more decent
 <b>Zein</b> I hav no mike bad mik ;(	<b>Zein:</b> I hav no mike [microphone] bad mik ;(

As discussed earlier, Zein believes that his accent is a “problem” which he faces by being silent in class. In contrast, when Zein communicates with his virtual community of online gamers, he explains that he is less inhibited, as the following excerpt demonstrates (Interview, 12/01/15):

Interviewer: But if you are communicating with gamers online, you only type in the chat box. How do you speak to other gamers?

Zein: Through Skype. We organize a group call. There’s a group of six of us and when I see them online I press on the Skype button and I speak to them and say, “*Yo, what’s up, bros!*” (with an elevated tone) *And they are all “Hey, what’s up, Zein!” (jovial tone). And we start talking about the games and play, and talk about life and have fun.*

The tone that Zein uses to role-play his Skype conversations is very different than how I have observed Zein communicate with peers in class where he mostly whispers and rarely speaks to anyone. In addition, not being able to see the people (probably through



using Skype's audio call feature as opposed to using the video option) seems to make Zein more comfortable in his conversations with people. Those six friends cannot see Zein in person, but they can see his "champion" in the form of a warrior slaying his opponents in Zein's favorite game, *League of Legends* (LoL). As Zein, points out in an interview (12/15/15), his online champion is "so powerful":

*Zein: Let me show you my favorite champion, Yasuo. He's so powerful. I played so many games with this champ, look. So many games, they never end. Look, victor, victor, victor! (Zein shows me his gaming history page on his LoL account.)*

*Interviewer: Oh, so the green ones are victories? And the red ones defeat.*

*Zein: Yes. Most of my games are green because I'm a pro player. Oh look, that's rank. In this game you play normal or for rank. In rank, people are lucky to play with me because I give to them. Look how many games I played in rank.*

Through building his online "profile" via the LoL website, Zein is able to construct an identity of a "pro player" as he describes it. This pro player identity is built on past victories and achievements that he has accomplished in this game. Looking at his gaming history, I could easily tell that Zein has invested hours in playing this game. Thus, Zein negotiates silence in Mr. Leblanc's class and his limited peer social network at school by assuming the identity of a "pro player" and warrior online to interact with a wide community of gamers who share the same interests and who perceive him as a competent gamer/warrior that can even have a sense of humor.

Haytham also has a YouTube channel similar to that of his brother Zein. Even though Haytham has fewer subscribers than Zein (around 25 subscribers), he also shares his brother's passion for video games and interacts with his subscribers online in English and Arabic. Haytham believes that playing video games can be helpful to improve one's English. In a persuasive writing task assigned by Ms. Hilton in class, Haytham argues that the school day is too long. To support his argument, Haytham hypothesizes that if the school days were shorter, he will be able to play more video games. Playing more videogames, according to Haytham, can help improve his English and help him make more friends. He writes, "From games we can learn English. We can have more to play video games. I have a lot of fun when i play games and we can have friends and more games" (Fieldnotes, 10/22/15). I read Haytham's writing and ask him to explain to me how he makes friends when he plays video games. "Easy, you type in chat, 'Do you want to be my friend?' then you give Skype address and chat." I ask where his online friends are from and what language they speak when they communicate. "I have friends from America!" Haytham proudly replies, and tells me that they speak English.

In my interview with Haytham, I follow-up on this topic concerning his friends (Interview, 12/11/15):

Interviewer: And do you know these people personally?

Haytham: No, just online friends. For example, I have a friend online whom I have been friends with for more than a year.

Interviewer: Tell me more.

Haytham: His name is XXX from Russia and he lives in Washington.

When I ask if this friend comments on his accent (because in a previous conversation he mentioned some online friends teasing him for his accent), he explains, “No, he actually says that he knows how I feel because he’s from Russia and knows how it feels.” Thus, in negotiating limited peer social networks at school, Haytham creates a virtual community of video gamers and finds solidarity with other ELs who share the same experiences and “know how it feels” to have an accent and have a limited number of friends to socialize with at school. Haytham also reports having a friend in Ms. Hilton’s class. “I met Samer [a refugee student from Iran] in PE [physical education class] and we became friends. When he first got here, I taught him everything and he became my friend,” (Interview, 12/09/2015). I have often observed Haytham interact with Samer in class, and Ms. Hilton often pairs them together whenever there is pair/group work involved. When asked what advice he has for refugee students to be able to make friends, Haytham recommends humor and curiosity. He explains, “For example, when you see two people talking, walk up to them and say, ‘*Hey how are you?*’, and then you can make friends with them” (Interview, 12/09/2015).

Salwa also has a virtual community of gamers and friends in her ESOL class. In one informal interview, I ask Salwa whether she plays video games. She says yes and tells me that her favorite game is Roblox. I offer her my laptop to show me the website and Salwa types Roblox in the Google search engine and locates the page (see Figure 5 below). Salwa signs in using her username and password to show me the game as we continue our conversation (Fieldnotes, 10/26/15):

Interviewer: There’s a lot of English here, so how do you find...

Salwa: I speak to people and we can chat to each other.

Interviewer: In this game?

Salwa: Yeah. There are many people that speak English.

Interviewer: Are they mostly American people? Where are they from?

Salwa: They are from America and some are Spanish and I think there's this one girl who is my friend who is Iraqi but I only speak with her in English.

Interviewer: Do any of your friends at school play this game?

Salwa: Yeah, Samira sometimes plays this game.

Interviewer: So you guys chat here online?

Salwa: Yeah, sometimes. (She laughs.)

Thus, Roblox provides a platform for Salwa to meet multilingual (Spanish, Arabic, and English) and multinational (American and Iraqi) friends. She is able to communicate with someone from Iraq through Roblox's chatrooms using English as a lingua franca. Salwa adds that her online friends "Like, they're my best friends actually! They all listen to me." Therefore, her online friends are not only there for her to play with, but they are also there to "listen" and support Salwa when needed. Her friend at school, Samira, also plays Roblox and is part of Salwa's real and virtual community of friends.

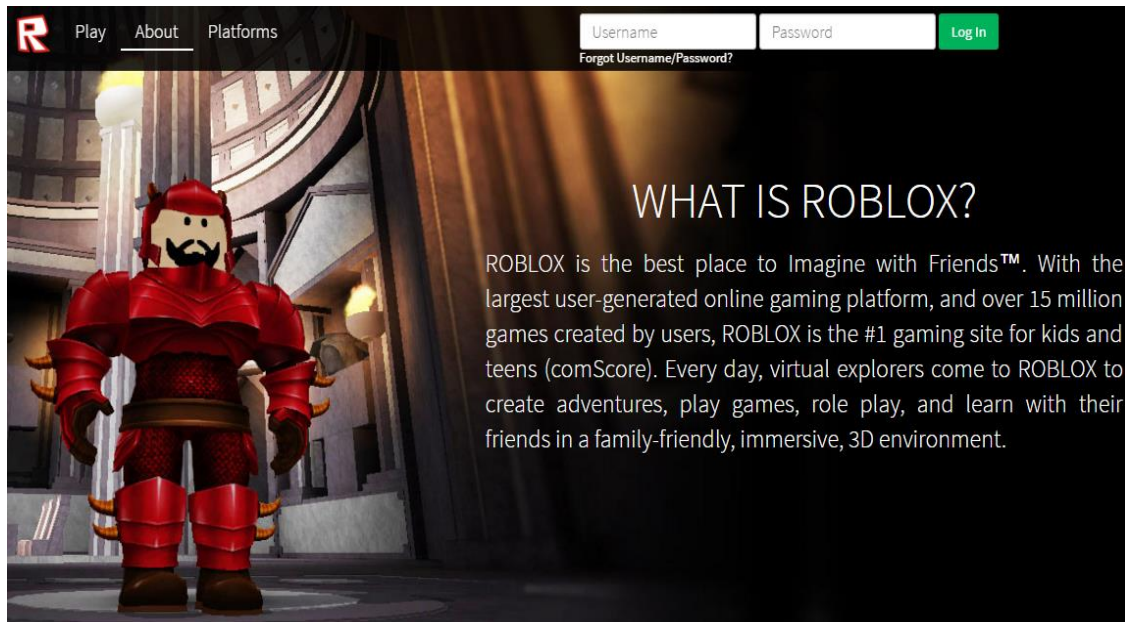


Figure 5. Roblox website.

Salwa not only creates virtual communities online, she also has a limited yet strong peer social network in Mr. Ronaldo's classroom. Salwa narrates how easy it was for her to create peer social networks at school. In an interview with Salwa, I ask her (12/07/15):

*Interviewer: Did you find it easy to make friends here in the US when you first arrived?*

*Salwa: Yeah, because I don't go and ask people if they want to be my friend. People come to me for no reason. They come to me and ask, "Do you want to be my friend?" And I'm like, yeah, whatever.*

*Interviewer: So did Samira and Miriam... [Samira is a refugee student from Iran and Miriam is an immigrant student from Honduras]*

*Salwa: Yeah, they both come to me and asked if I want to be their friend, and I was like, yeah sure.*

*Interviewer: Why do you think they come to you?*

*Salwa: I don't know, they just come to me and ask if they can be my friend. When I was first here, I was thinking who is going to be my friend and all, but the next day Samira and Miriam became my best friends.*

The initial question that I have asked may be considered a “leading” question; however, this is a follow-up question within the context of a conversation on language where Salwa is telling me how knowing English makes things easier for her. Hence, my follow-up question is whether making friends is also easy. Regardless, my observations and interviews support Salwa’s membership in a tightly knit peer social network in class with Samira and Miriam – “the three amigos” as her ESOL teacher, Mr. Ronaldo, calls them. Some examples of this solidarity in class include Salwa borrowing Miriam’s blanket on pajama day and wearing it in class, and Salwa helping both her friends, especially Samira, with academic tasks. For instance, I include the following interaction between Salwa, Samira, and Mr. Ronaldo in class where Mr. Ronaldo is talking to Samira about homework (Fieldnotes, 10/07/15):

*Mr. Ronaldo: Samira, you did not do the homework. Don't tell me you don't understand!*

*Salwa: I told her [meaning Samira]!*

*Mr. Ronaldo: Salwa, you can't hold her hand forever!*

*Salwa: You want me to hand you [Samira] the answers like we do in math? Give you answers on the bus?*

*Both girls laugh.*

*Samira: You're crazy! [They are both laughing.]*

Salwa's account of how Miriam and Samira approaches her and asks her to be their friend may seem like an unrealistic interaction, but regardless of the accuracy of Salwa's story, observational and interview data from two sources (Salwa and Mr. Ronaldo) seem to suggest that Salwa enjoys a small (Samira and Miriam) yet strong and culturally and linguistically diverse (Samira speaks Persian, while Miriam speaks Spanish) peer social network in Mr. Ronaldo's class.

Although Suha does not have a virtual community of gamers like the other three participants, she engages very actively with peers on social media outlets. She also reports having a Latina friend whom she has met at school, but I have not met that friend or witnessed any interactions between Suha and her. When I ask Suha how many hours she spends on social media every day, she answers (Interview, 12/15/15):

Suha: 24 hours on the phone. I have accounts everywhere: Snapchat, Instagram, Viber, everything, literally. I have accounts in all of them, but the only ones I really use are Snapchat, and I use Instagram for pictures, and I started recently using WhatsApp, but I don't like it. I'm always on Messenger [Facebook].

Interviewer: Who do you communicate with?

Suha: My friends. Some are in Jordan, some are here, and some are in different states.

Suha adds that she communicates with friends from the Middle East. With some of her Middle Eastern friends, Suha uses English, while with some other Middle Eastern friends from Jordan she uses Arabic or English depending on her audience. Suha's virtual community is geographically diverse and available "24 hours" a day through

various social media outlets that she uses for different purposes (e.g., pictures on Instagram and Facebook Messenger for frequent communication).

Participants in this study negotiate school contexts with limited peer social networks by creating virtual communities and building friendships at school (e.g., Salwa as part of the “three amigos” in Mr. Ronaldo’s class). Essential to this creation of online communities is medium and language. Participants utilize a variety of social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, etc.) and engage in multimodal and bilingual forms of writing in order to achieve their purposes and communicate effectively with wider audiences. Through these acts of discourse and writing, participants are not only communicating with their virtual communities, but they are also constructing their identities.

## **Conclusion**

Suha, Salwa, Haytham, and Zein negotiate social contexts of school through adopting both passive (e.g., ignoring, silence) and active approaches (verbal resistance, writing) in facing discriminatory practices. As far as limited peer social networks are concerned, participants have created diverse (multinational, multilingual, and multicultural) real and virtual communities via a variety of virtual outlets (e.g., videogames, YouTube, and Facebook) and within school contexts to negotiate limited social peer networks. Overall, the students are agentive in using language (including multimodal forms of writing) to devise strategies that help them negotiate the social barriers that they face and construct identities that are sometimes not possible within the limited social context of school and the opportunities that the school provides for them.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **NEGOTIATING ACADEMIC SCHOOL CONTEXTS**

This chapter explores how the four participants in this study negotiated academic school contexts – more specifically school-based literacy practices. Findings suggest that participants used language to devise agentive means of negotiating engagement in or resisting school-based English literacy practices as shown in Table 7. It is important to note that while negotiated engagement emerged as a theme from the data and evidence of resistance (Perry-Purcell-Gates, 2005) was also found, there was no evidence of appropriation, which was the other half of Perry and Purcell-Gates' original two-part model of agentive responses to hegemonic practices. Table 7 includes several examples of resistance and negotiated engagement, but I only discuss one example per student in this chapter due to space limitations. What these examples reveal is that students negotiated engagement in school-based literacy practices and demonstrated overt and covert modes of resistance to literacy practices that they are not invested in, seeking possibilities of selfhood (Ivanič, 1998) that transcended the array of possible identities afforded to them in class by engaging in multilingual and multimodal literacy practices (school-based and out-of-school). Through the processes of negotiated engagement and resistance, participants use language in an agentive manner to construct their identities in a discursal and relational manner (Ivanič, 2006), repositioning themselves as agentive adolescents. In the following sections, I list illustrative (but not exhaustive) examples of

Table 7

*Overview of Participants' Negotiated Engagement and Resistance of School-Based Literacy Practices*

<b>Student</b>	<b>Negotiated Engagement</b> (Students negotiate engagement in school-based literacy practices by...)	<b>Resistance (Covert/Overt)</b> (Students resist school-based literacy practices by...)
<b>Zein</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>creating a videogame instead of a board game for <i>The Outsiders</i> class project (to reflect investment in out-of-school literacy practice and preferred mode of digital presentation)</li> <li>describing hair as a video gamer instead of describing physical attributes of hair (e.g., “my hair is someone who loves video games, and my hair is a video game itself” – to reflect identity as a professional gamer)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>pretending not to know the answer (when called upon) to Mr. LeBlanc’s question relating to the Anne Frank and Syrian refugee text (covert)</li> <li>scribbling on the portrait of Anne Frank in the teacher-selected article (covert)</li> <li>being silent in class and not volunteering to participate or answer the teacher’s questions (covert)</li> </ul>
<b>Suha</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>limiting her engagement to “serious” topics of interest (writing a letter to the governor’s office about ESOL students and SSTs – to reflect beliefs about SSTs) as opposed to “silly” topics in Ms. Hills’ class (e.g., What you did last weekend)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>writing in her journal that she does not like the writing prompt and refusing to share her writing in class (overt)</li> <li>refusing to read in class (overt)</li> </ul>
<b>Salwa</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>making connections between reading texts on refugee students and her own experiences as a refugee (to reflect identity and experiences as a refugee)</li> </ul>	NA
<b>Haytham</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>writing about fighting injustice in “virtual” contexts instead of “real” contexts (e.g., reporting “bad” gamers on videogame platforms – to connect to out-of-school interest in videogames)</li> <li>writing about stereotypes that involve linguistic discrimination of Iraqi people (e.g., “can’t speak English” – to reflect Iraqi identity and linguistic beliefs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>expressing his dislike of <i>The Twits</i> openly in class (overt)</li> <li>refusing to add details to several writing tasks or writing the “bare minimum” on tasks assigned by Ms. Hilton (overt)</li> </ul>

how the participants engage in or resist school-based literacy practices and engage in multimodal and multilingual out-of-school literacy practices that better reflect their identities and investments in literacy.

### **Negotiated Engagement in School-based Literacy Practices**

Participants have often engaged in school-based literacy practices, but they have sometimes negotiated this engagement to make connections to their out-of-school interests and investments in various literacy practices. For example, Zein negotiates participation in a class project on *The Outsiders* (a novel about two rival adolescent gangs) to align with his own investment in videogames and connect to his favorite out-of-school literacy practice – writing computer codes, or coding. While the school-based literacy practice required Zein to choose from a list of teacher-selected topics and modalities to respond to *The Outsiders* (e.g., writing an additional final chapter, producing a music playlist related to the themes, or creating a board game based on the book's plot), Zein negotiates his participation in this class project to be able to choose his own medium of presentation. None of these choices address Zein's interest in videogames or his out-of-school multimodal literacy practice of coding and creating videogames. To connect the school-based literacy practice of responding to a novel that the class has read to his out-of-school literacy practice of coding, Zein manages<sup>7</sup> to negotiate with the teacher a new mode of participation and presentation of *The Outsiders* project. Zein convinces the teacher to allow him to create a videogame instead of a board game. Eventually, Zein created a videogame based on the book's plot and presented his

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<sup>7</sup> I have to acknowledge my influence as a researcher: my interference with Zein and asking him if creating a videogame for this project would be an interesting idea, eventually motivated Zein to negotiate with his teacher and consequently convince Mr. LeBlanc to allow him to produce a videogame for this project instead of a board game.

game in class. In his videogame, Zein writes more than 1,000 lines of code to create the game (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Zein's *The Outsiders* videogame project.

The player in this game walks through a grim setting (reflecting the setting in *The Outsiders*) and approaches closed doors. Then, a comprehension question pops up on the screen with multiple choice questions about the plot of the novel. The player chooses one of the answers and the game informs the player whether the answer is right or wrong. If the player unlocks all the doors and answers the questions correctly, the game starts fireworks in the background and displays the following message (Fieldnotes, 11/18/15):

Thank you for playing my game! ☺

Made by Zein

After presentation of his game in class, Zein is congratulated by Mr. LeBlanc and Ms. Wood (the student teacher in Mr. LeBlanc's class). Mr. LeBlanc starts clapping and the whole class joins in clapping for Zein who has a big smile on his face. Ms. Wood asks Zein how much time it has taken him to complete this project and Zein answers, "Seven hours." Ms. Wood asks, "And that was only yesterday?" "Correct," Zein answers in a low voice. Thus, Zein negotiates his engagement in this project by convincing Mr. LeBlanc to allow him to create a videogame instead of a board game, making a clear connection to his out-of-school interest in videogames and literacy practice of coding and his reported identity as a coder/videogame developer. Mr. LeBlanc's flexibility has provided Zein with the space to negotiate engagement in this task and has potentially lowered the likelihood of Zein resisting engagement in this task by respecting Zein's interests and allowing him to incorporate part of himself (his identity) into this class project.

Another example of negotiated engagement comes from Haytham. Haytham is often required to write journal responses that connect to the various virtues themes that are covered in the readings in Ms. Hilton's class. For one journal entry, Ms. Hilton invites the students to write how they show justice in their lives. Haytham does not resist this task, but he negotiates his engagement by including his out-of-school interest in videogames and writing about how he fights injustice *online*. In his journal, Haytham writes that while playing videogames, sometimes people say "mean" things in chat rooms and (Fieldnotes, 10/20/15):

Some times I say its not fair the game says that iF you say mean things in the chat you get banned from reporting you. So I always join the game with my Brother and my cousin so when someone say something not fair

we report Him and

He get Banned

I think this is Justice

Haytham's videogames have online means to report players that do not adhere to the gaming community's rules as can be seen on their websites (e.g., *Minecraft* and *League of Legends*). For example, *League of Legends* has a list of "reportable behavior" that includes "Using socially offensive commentary" (League of Legends, 2016). Although the topic of this journal entry is not videogames, Haytham makes solid connections between the virtue of justice and his out-of-school literacy practice of playing videogames and reporting "bad" players, thereby incorporating this topic into his journal. Haytham shares a draft of his writing with Ms. Hilton who encourages him by saying, "Yes, that's absolutely justice. Reporting people that don't play nicely" (Fieldnotes, 10/20/2015). In this case, Haytham uses his sense of agency to draw connections between the school-based literacy practice of reflective/connective writing and his out-of-school literacy practice of reporting "bad" videogame players. Ms. Hilton's encouraging words facilitated Haytham's negotiated engagement in this task and allowed him to incorporate part of his virtual world and relationships in this task.

Suha negotiates engagement in writing as a school-based literacy practice by limiting her engagement to writing "serious" topics that matter to her. Suha often refuses to participate in writing tasks in Ms. Hills' class or writes minimally, calling most of those topics "silly" (Interview, 12/15/15), but when the guidance counselor at her school suggests that Suha write a letter to the governor's educational assistant to continue a prior conversation that she had with him during a school-community panels relating to EL

issues<sup>8</sup>, Suha engages in this task and writes about her concerns regarding state standardized tests (SSTs). Below is an excerpt from Suha's letter (see Appendix G for complete excerpt):

Dear Mr. Smith,

This the student Suha that I met you when you was in my city with the governor. Today am going to write this letter to explain to you more, and with more details about how second language people are feeling about the system to the state standardized tests. Most of the student of second language are not perfect in English, but they are trying their best to pass these state standardized tests. For second language students, it's literally hard cause it needs more language. It needs more vocabulary in order to be able to pass these tests. [...] I been through alot of challenges since I came here like language is the hardest thing to do, [new] student, new culture, and hard classes, but I haven't give up because give up is not one of my options in this life. Am trying to clarifying how people from different countries are tried hard enough than everyone who has been born here.

Suha goes on to ask her addressee to consider eliminating the SSTs for "second language students" or reducing the scores that enable them to pass those tests. Thus while Suha may refuse to write about "silly" topics in Ms. Hills' class (Interview, 12/15/15), she engages in other school-based writing tasks to promote fair treatment of ELs. Suha also seems to challenge deficit perspectives of ELs by highlighting how hard they work and focusing more on the issue of language and how ELs need "more vocabulary" to be

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<sup>8</sup> Suha was selected by her school to attend a public meeting with the state governor and his staff and discuss the concerns of ESOL students in her school. As such, Suha was selected to represent the "voice" of ESOL students at her school and relay their concerns to the governor.

able to pass the tests. Thus, Suha negotiates her engagement in school-based writing practices (although this task was not part of a formal school curriculum) by engaging in writing topics that matter to her and refusing to engage in other writing topics that she considers “silly”. The guidance counselor’s knowledge of Suha’s concerns and passion for writing about standardized tests allowed the counselor to encourage Suha to engage in a writing task that mirrored Suha’s enthusiasm for advocating for ELs and highlighting linguistic barriers that hamper their success in SSTs.

As far as Salwa is concerned, she negotiates engagement in reading tasks in Mr. Ronaldo’s class to voice out her experiences as a refugee student. For example, while reading a text on the experiences of refugee students in Germany and the difficulties that they encounter, Suha makes connections between the refugee students’ experiences and her own. Salwa’s class read the following text:

Sometimes even very small children find themselves the “managers” of their family. They are expected to translate for their family and to help with tasks such as doctors’ visits or filling out paperwork. The pressure of that responsibility can sometimes cause children to struggle in school. (Fieldnotes, 10/05/2015)

Salwa identifies with the reported refugee students’ experiences saying (without solicitation from the teacher) that she also feels pressured when translating for her parents, and complains that when she does not know how to translate a word, her mother tells her, “You go to school and you don’t know the meaning of this word?” While reading another section of the same article, Mr. Ronaldo explains about “temporary shelter”, and invites Salwa to share her experiences. Salwa shares how she had temporary shelter in Syria and Turkey before coming to the US. In this example, Salwa successfully



negotiated engagement in this school-based reading practice by making connections to her personal experiences as a refugee and sharing these experiences with the class through her own volition in the first instances and by explicit invitation by the teacher in the second. Mr. Ronaldo's role is important as he invites Salwa's engagement in this task by making connections to her prior experiences. It is interesting that he does so after Salwa shows willingness to share her experiences by initiating engagement in classroom discussions as opposed to calling on her before making sure that she is comfortable with sharing her refugee experiences.

Therefore, participants successfully engage in school-based literacy practices and negotiate this engagement to make connections to their personal experiences and histories, to express their concerns about SSTs, and to make connections to their out-of-school literacy practices such as coding and social interactions via videogame platforms. These negotiations demonstrate the students' agency in using language to advocate their own interests, preferred genres, social purposes, concerns, and out-of-school literacy practices.

### **Resistance to School-based Literacy Practices**

Students have not always been engaged in school-based literacy practices and use language in an agentic manner to covertly or overtly resist some of these practices. In the following examples, the tasks that students resist have little space for them to exercise their agency and try to negotiate engagement. For example, in Suha's class, Ms. Hills starts every lesson with a journal prompt that she writes on the board, and students spend around 10-15 minutes writing before they share their journals with the whole class. These prompts are selected by Ms. Hills, and the exception is on Fridays when Ms. Hills asks

students to write about any topic they want. On one of my observations (Fieldnotes, 12/09/15), the following writing prompt is on the classroom's blackboard: "Write a fan letter to your favorite celebrity." Suha writes the following: "In my opinion I have nothing to say. Honestly, I don't like this question." Thus, Suha resists the act of writing in Ms. Hills' class by overtly expressing her opinion of the writing prompt. Even when Ms. Hills asks her to share what she has written, Suha verbally expresses her resistance in an assertive manner and replies, "I don't have anything to write about!" Ms. Hills says, "OK," indifferently and moves on to other students.

Unfortunately, this has been a common occurrence in Ms. Hills' class where Suha expresses her dismay by refusing to participate. In an interview (12/15/15), Suha tells me that Ms. Hills asks them to write "silly" things, and explains, "I love to write when I like it. You see my writing here (pointing at her journal)? This is silliness; this is not me, writing about stupid stuff." Suha also resists reading practices in Ms. Hills' class and sometimes overtly refuses to read even when invited to do so by Ms. Hills. It is important to note that Ms. Hills reports being restricted in terms of choice of reading texts due to having to implement the set curriculum by the school; however, she reports some flexibility with regards to writing (Interview, 12/09/2015). In addition, according to Ms. Hills (Fieldnotes, 10/29/15), Suha does not want to be in this class and that she is only attending this class to pass her reading SST. Ms. Hills explains that Suha "did this class last year" and adds that Suha covered level E of the same literacy program last year, and that she is completing level F in Ms. Hills' class this year (Level F was the last level in that curriculum). In other words, Suha has completed all her school coursework, but she is enrolled in Ms. Hills' class to help her pass the reading SST – Suha's main obstacle

preventing her from graduating. In short, Suha resists both reading and writing practices in Ms. Hills' class.

Another example of overt resistance to school-based literacy practices comes from Haytham who openly expresses his dislike of reading *The Twits* – a Roald Dahl story about an unpleasant couple who play practical jokes on each other – in Ms. Hilton's classroom. In my interview (12/09/15) with Haytham, he tells me that he "hates" *The Twits*. When I ask him why, he answers, "It's a disgusting book with disgusting illustrations and a silly story. I don't like anything about that book." Haytham overtly expresses his dismay in class. For example, when Ms. Hilton asks the students to read *The Twits* in class in groups (choral reading), Haytham asks the teacher, "*When are we going to finish this book? Why is this book so boring?*" (Fieldnotes, 10/27/15). In another instance (Fieldnotes, 11/10/15), Ms. Hilton announces that it's time to read *The Twits* and shouts excitedly, "Let's have fun (by reading *The Twits*)!" Haytham responds to her invitation by asking her, "*Fun in a bored book?*" but Ms. Hilton ignores him. Later throughout the semester (Fieldnotes, 12/03/15), the students are writing responses to *The Twits*. One of the questions was "Would you recommend this book?" Haytham writes, "No, you will die if you read it." Ms. Hilton passes by and notices Haytham's response. She asks him in a frustrated tone with a long face, "Why are you saying this?" Haytham shrugs his shoulders but does not reply. Haytham often participates well in class discussions and readings, but he overtly resists participating in reading tasks related to *The Twits*. It is worth noting that Haytham also displays resistance toward adding details to certain writing tasks or writing the bare minimum on other tasks even when prompted by the teacher to add details or write more.

While Haytham and Suha are involved in overt forms of resistance of school-based literacy practices, Zein's resistance is covert. For example, Zein scribbles on the face of a character (Anne Frank) they are reading about in class and pretends not to know the answer to Mr. LeBlanc's comprehension questions about the text to avoid participation. When asked about the kind of readings that he does at school, Zein answers (Interview, 12/01/15):

Zein: Things I hate.

Interviewer: Like what?

Zein: We read about people, we read about people, and topics that I don't care about. For example, that woman in World War II (Anne Frank – see Appendix H for full article), about the Jews and I don't know what. He freed I don't know whom. What do I have to do with all of this? I don't care.

Interviewer: So what do you like to read about?

Zein: I like to read about technology and game developer, but the school does not provide you with these things. The school is disgusting, it doesn't provide these things.

In a subsequent interview, I bring the topic up again, suspecting that Zein may not be interested in Anne Frank due to her being Jewish, but Zein clarifies more about this (Interview, 12/09/15):

Zein: Why should I care about *Anne Frank*?

Interviewer: You scribbled on her face.

Zein: She's Jewish and all; why should I care?

Interviewer: Is it because she's Jewish that you don't like her?

Zein: No, not because she's Jewish, but a million families in Syria have the same story. Why should I care?

Interviewer: So if the story was about a Syrian refugee family, would you then care?

Zein: No.

Interviewer: Do you want something different then?

Zein: Yes, something that has to do with *gaming* or something fun. Not about Anne Frank.

Thus, Zein says that he does not “hate” reading about Anne Frank for her religious background, but because he is simply not interested in the topic. He is also not interested in reading about refugees and later in the interview explains why: “Because it's my past. I don't want to talk about my past!”<sup>9</sup> While refugee issues are in Zein's past, “gaming” is a topic that he prefers and sees part of his future since he wants to become a coder and videogame developer. Thus, Zein resists engaging in a literacy event that reminds him of his past and looks forward to possibilities of self-hood that are in his imagined future.

While Salwa negotiated school-based literacy practices mostly through engagement (my observations do not reveal examples of resistance to school-based literacy practices pertaining to Salwa), Zein, Haytham, and Suha resisted school-based literacy practices. Participants' negotiation and resistance reflected their engagement in

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<sup>9</sup> Zein's avoidance of the past may be a defense mechanism to suppress the recall of painful memories. Similarly, Salwa and Suha reported avoiding topics that had to do with the conflict in Iraq, and listening to the news about “bombs” in Iraq with his father, made Haytham feel sad.

literacy practices that they practiced out-of-school (e.g., Zein's and Haytham's interest in practices related to videogames). Such out-of-school literacy practices were either hidden or undervalued in school. In the next section, I explore some of the students' multilingual and multimodal out-of-school literacy practices that were only visible outside of the school context.

### **Multilingual and Multimodal Out-of-School Literacy Practices**

Participants' negotiated engagement and resistance to school-based literacy practices opened a window to their out-of-school literacies and interests that remain hidden from teachers or are undervalued at school. Thus, it is important to learn more about how the participants' out-of-school literacy practices are different from their school-based literacy practices. Two aspects of difference that emerged from the data were language and modality. For example, while it was no surprise that students' school-based literacy practices were in English, students were also literate in Arabic and were actively involved in a hybrid form of writing – Arab/English. For Zein in particular, his out-of-school literacy practices were not only multilingual, but also multimodal.

**Multilingual practices.** Zein, Haytham, Suha, and Salwa have reported use of Arab/English to communicate with Arabic speaking friends or family via texting, YouTube, or Facebook audiences. Zein, who uses Arabizi to text and communicate with YouTube commenters on his channel, explains:

Zein: Yes, for example, the word “zi8” (writes it on my notebook) means a little mistake. It's a small swear word, but since there's no /*ع*/ sound in English, we use the number 8.





Interviewer: So 8 means /*ع*/?

Zein: Yes, and 3 means “ع” in Arabic [due to their orthographic similarity]. It’s like a different language. 1 is a “hamza” (/ʾ/ sound in Arabic). 5 is /خ/ and 6 is /ط/ and 7 is /ح/ and 8 is /غ/ and 9 is /ص/.

Haytham explains that he has learned Arab/English from his brother, Zein (Fieldnotes, 12/10/15), and explains how the numbers stand for sounds in Arabic that do not have equivalent letters in English. He also reports texting his cousins and family in the US and in Iraq in a variety of languages including English, Arabic, and Arabizi. Haytham writes an example of a “typical” correspondence between him and one of his cousins via text messaging (Interview, 12/09/15) and reports his use of Arabizi on Facebook and on his YouTube channel as the following interactions between Haytham and two of his YouTube commenters on his channel reveal:

Table 8

*Haytham’s Online Interactions*

Original (Deidentified)	Translation
 <b>User 3 Date</b> المونتاج خورافي king واصل يا	User 3: The editing is out of this world!  Go on, King.  Haytham: Thank you, User 3
 <b>Haytham Date</b> tslm ea moza [Arabizi text]	
 <b>User 4 Date</b> :] لايك استمر يمددع	<b>User 4:</b> Like :] Go on, you are creative  [player]  <b>Haytham:</b> Thank you my friend
 <b>Haytham Date</b>	

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 tslm ea 8lpe [Arabizi text]
 

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Haytham is described by commentators as “king” and “creative”. Not only is Haytham to expand his limited peer social network through such online interactions, but he is also able to use Arab/English to communicate with a specific audience that follows him on YouTube. He also constructs an identity of an excellent gamer and demonstrated his skills on a technological and linguistic level. Thus, to communicate with Arabic speaking YouTubers, Haytham uses gaming content in the form of videos and a hybrid language that enables him to communicate with a wide Arab audience that uses this language online.

Similarly, Salwa has some level of expertise in this Arab/English language. She says, “I can write this language, but I sometimes don’t understand what people are trying to tell me through this”. Salwa adds that she sometimes uses Arab/English to communicate via text with one of her cousins who is in Turkey (Interview, 12/14/15). When asked about Arab/English, Suha explains that she used to use this “language” in Jordan where this language was popular among younger generations (Fieldnotes, 12/11/15). Upon my request, she demonstrates her skills in Arab/English by writing me the message below (translation in brackets):

2lyom ri7 aro7 to a Madrasa and Ba3den ri7 aro7 to XXX, w ba3d had ana ri7 aro7 3ala al home.

[Today I will go to school and then I will go to XXX, and after I will go home.]

Ana kter bokrah al school. 3an jad ano ana kteer hate all school. atmana li’alak al 7adi’ al jaed fee sho3’lak.



[I hate school so much, really I do hate all school very much. I wish you good luck with your work] (Fieldnotes, 12/11/15)

In a later interview, (12/15/15) Suha explains that she uses Arabizi to communicate with some of her friends in Jordan via text messaging, but that most of her texts in the US are in English. She also explains how her choice of language is dependent on context: “It depends. If I’m sending text messages, I prefer writing in English. But if the person doesn’t prefer writing in English, I will write him in Arabic.”

**Multilingual and multimodal practices.** As mentioned above, Zein believes that coding is a language through which he can communicate with the computer. “Coding is trying to make the computer do something. It’s like another language” (Fieldnotes, 10/20/15). Through writing this language (or coding), Zein has the creative ability to produce a variety of texts in different modalities and genres. Opportunities for such creative literacy practices may not always be available within school contexts where students may not have the chance to engage in their favorite genres and modalities. For example, Zein prefers digital modes of writing and reports that his favorite genre is “story” as he explains below (Interview, 12/09/15):

*Interviewer: Do you like a particular kind of writing here at school?*

*Zein: I like to type. I don’t like to write. You see my handwriting?  
It’s so awful!*

*Interviewer: Why do you think it’s awful?*

*Zein: Because that’s me! Even when I used to write in Arabic, my mother used to tell me that my handwriting should get better.*

*Interviewer:* When you type, what kind of writing do you like typing?

*Zein:* Funny.

*Interviewer:* Funny stories?

*Zein:* Stories about gaming.

In the above interview excerpt, Zein highlights his preference of digital modes of writing due to his “awful” handwriting. He also indicates his preference of a certain writing genre: comic stories. It is true that Zein is able to negotiate engagement in multimodal tasks in Mr. LeBlanc’s class (e.g., his videogame project); however, throughout the semester, I do not observe Zein write “funny” stories about gaming within his classroom context. Nonetheless, he is able to do this outside of school on his YouTube channel. Zein records his computer screen where he is found playing a multiplayer videogame, and juxtaposes a story upon the recorded events by inserting Arabic text over the video. Zein and two other characters are featured in Zein’s story. Zein’s narrative is indeed a story as it has all the structural characteristics of a story (Derewianka, 1991) as shown in Table 9:

Table 9

*Structural Characteristics of Zein’s Story*

<b>Story Text Type Features</b>	<b>Zein’s Story</b>
Orientation	Zein meets two videogame characters and asks them to play
Complication	They refuse to play with Zein
Episodes	Zein feels sad and isolates himself.  He returns to fight them because they did not

want to play.

A sword fight ensues between Zein and the other two players.

Resolution Zein is triumphant over the two characters.

Conclusion “The end of friendship.”

The “comic” aspect of the story is mainly displayed through Zein’s dramatic choice of music, shifting between jovial operatic music (while he asks the other players to play with him) and sad low key music (to represent the change in mood within the story as he faces rejection from the two players) (see Appendix I for a detailed transcript of Zein’s digital narrative). His choice of “sad” music as he walks away from the other two characters who do not want to play with him can be seen as a dramatic and potentially exaggerated response against the two characters’ rejection. In addition, Zein’s juxtaposition of this narrative (using superimposed text on the video with different fonts) upon a video game excerpt adds a comic aspect to this story. Zein’s story and YouTube have provided him with the content and the framework (respectively) to interact with other YouTubers and engage in Arabic and multimodal forms of writing that he is invested in. This example is by no means exclusive and Zein’s YouTube channel includes many more video productions that involve a diverse array of writings (including interacting with YouTube commentators) and narrated videos in English and Arabic. Zein also explains how he is proficient in two computer languages – Boolean and C-sharp – and provides examples of both.

Learning more about Zein’s out-of-school multilingual and multimodal literacy practices enables us to better understand his negotiated engagement in Mr. LeBlanc’s *The*

*Outsiders* project. Zein negotiates a connection between his school-based and out-of-school literacy practices and is able to introduce part of his identity as a coder and gamer into the classroom, demonstrating his diverse skills in coding and writing. We learn from his out-of-school practices that he has so much potential to creatively produce texts in various genres and modalities, and if given a chance, it is possible to incorporate those funds of knowledge into the classroom.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter has sought to answer the research question pertaining to how participants negotiated academic school contexts and more specifically, school-based literacy practices. Findings reveal students' agentive use of language to engage in or resist (overtly and covertly) in school-based literacy practices and make connections where possible to their out-of-school literacy practices and interests. As refugee students, some of their multilingual (e.g., Arab/English) and multimodal out-of-school literacy practices may be hidden from their teachers at school or undervalued if compared to their school-based practices. In an increasingly digital age where the concept of literacy and text is in constant flux due to advances in technology, it becomes more important for educators to better understand the various out-of-school literacy practices that students are involved in. This is important if we are invested in creating opportunities where students can democratically negotiate their engagement in pursuit of the various possibilities of self-hood (Ivanič, 1998) that are increasingly available for them through technology. In addition, literacy practices that matter most at schools are in English, and the fact that students engage in multilingual interactions with friends and family outside of school is irrelevant to how students are evaluated academically at school.

Students' negotiated engagement and resistance to school-based literacy practices have created connections to their out-of-school literacy practices (multilingual and multimodal), their concerns, linguistic beliefs, histories, languages, and identities. For example, Zein shares his identity as a coder with his classmates, Haytham shares how he fought injustice online, Suha pleads to eliminate SSTs, and Salwa shares her experiences as a refugee student. Through their use of language, participants negotiate school-based literacy practices and construct identities that transcend the classroom. To make the classroom a more democratic environment where students in general and refugee students in particular have opportunities to negotiate their engagement, it is important to learn more about the diverse multilingual and multimodal out-of-school literacy practices that those students are involved in to help them negotiate academic (and social) school contexts effectively.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

In this section, I aim to achieve four objectives. First, I provide an overview of the findings with respect to the research questions outlined in the previous chapters and provide theoretical links to the principles that frame this study. Second, I discuss the limitations pertaining to this study and how these limitations have been addressed. Third, I frame the findings of this study within the body of literature on refugee education in the US, providing theoretical and pedagogical implications. Fourth, I suggest future directions for research with adolescent refugee populations in general and Arab refugees in particular before I conclude this study.

#### **Overview of Findings**

Participants in this study negotiated academic and social contexts of school through using language in creative and agentic ways. For example, participants used writing, verbal resistance, silence, and multimodal and multilingual out-of-school literacy practices to negotiate discriminatory practices and limited peer social networks in social school contexts. They also resisted or negotiated engagement in school-based literacy practices, using language to make connections to out-of-school literacy practices that they were invested in. In negotiating academic and social contexts of school, and through using language in an agentic manner, participants constructed their identities as multilingual and multi-literate adolescents that can navigate life in real and online

contexts. The four participants in this study negate the stereotypical image of the helpless refugee and highlight the importance of language and student agency as tools to adapt and succeed in refugees' countries of resettlement. In the following sections, I revisit illustrative examples from each participant's experiences and discuss how Zein, Haytham, Suha, and Salwa used language to challenge discriminatory discourses and gain access to new communities of practice (e.g., online gaming communities) that transcend the classroom and the possibilities of selfhood (Ivanič, 2006) that the classroom offers.

**Zein: A gamer with a sense of humor.** As Ivanič (1998, 2006) argued, identity is discursively constructed and relational. Through Zein's funny story, we see how Zein's identity is constructed in part by address (how YouTube users talk to him) and attribution (how YouTube users talk about him). On his YouTube channel, Zein is described as a "creative", "competent", and "funny" gamer; he has a voice and a sense of humor. In contrast, Zein is silent in class – he is voiceless, he explains, mainly due to his shyness about his accent. This is in line with Ivanič's (2006) view of relational identity and how an individual may construct an identity in one social context that is very different than another identity within another social context. One variable according to Ivanič (2006) is people. One can be very different with one group of people than with another group of people. However, in Zein's case, it is not only the people, but also the medium, language, power structures, and possibilities of selfhood that are available through each medium.

In class, Zein's possibilities of selfhood include using language to discuss teacher selected topics (e.g., Anne Frank) in English within the context of a traditional classroom – something he is not invested in. On YouTube, Zein is free to choose the language (e.g.,

Arabic, English, or Arabizi), the genre (e.g., funny story), and modality (e.g., videos). In addition, he has more options with respect to possibilities of selfhood. Within the context of his funny story, Zein chose to construct the identity of a funny gamer. However, in other videos, he has the flexibility to show other aspects of his identity. For example, in another video Zein demonstrates how he gets rid of a hacker on one of his videogames. Zein's YouTube followers and commenters probably do not know Zein in person, but they know him through the YouTube videos that he posts, where he shares his skills as a coder and gamer. Those followers and commenters form part of Zein's virtual community.

Zein dreams of becoming a professional gamer and coder – an imagined community that he is working to gain more legitimate access to. In order to achieve his dreams, Zein uses language as a means, object and mark of identification as Ivanič (2006) argues. In other words, Zein uses language as a way to gain access to the community of gamers and achieve a sense of belonging by speaking the same language. In this case, the language is not one uniform language – it is multilingual (computer code, English, Arabic, and Arab/English) and multimodal (edited videos, juxtaposed text, and music). While Zein feels that he may not have the “right to speak” (Norton, 2013) in class due to his accent as a marker of difference (Lippi-Green, 2012), online he feels that he has the right to speak in any language and mode he wants. He has even posted videos where you can hear his voice speaking in Arabic and English to explain what is taking place in the videos that he posts. His investment in this out-of-school literacy practice yields returns in terms of an expanded peer social network and access to a virtual and imagined community – that of gamers and coders.



In the few instances when Zein's out-of-school literacy practices intersect with his school-based literacy practices, Zein shows an increased level of engagement (Philp & Duchesne, 2016) and investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). For example, he spends seven hours on his videogame project for Mr. LeBlanc and feels very proud to present his project to the class. It is important here to acknowledge Mr. LeBlanc's flexibility in providing space for Zein to negotiate his engagement in this task. In another example, when given the chance to chat online with classmates in the same classroom, he "speaks" to students whom I have not observed him communicate with before. In class, Zein is limited in terms of language, media, and topics; he is mostly silent. Online, Zein is also Yasuo, a champion who walks with confidence through the battle ground, slaying his enemies and gaining victory badges that are displayed to other gamers.

**Haytham: "Just because I am from Iraq / Doesn't mean I can't speak English".** Haytham writes a poem to resist stereotypes that other people construct about him. In it, he explains that just because he is from Iraq, it does not mean that he is "dumb", and does not mean that he cannot speak English. Haytham is aware of these linguistic stereotypes associated with his identity as an Iraqi citizen. This kind of discriminatory discourse projects a stereotypical image of Haytham (and indeed all Iraqi citizens) that is discursively constructed by address (how people talk to Iraqi people) and attribution (how people talk about Iraqi people). However, Haytham is given the opportunity to resist such stereotypical constructions of his Iraqi identity through a writing task in Ms. Hilton's class. Haytham did not initiate this effort to resist stereotypes of Iraqis, but he wrote within the genre of a "Just Because" poem, writing a poem that is similar in structure and style to other poems that students from previous years have

written and that Ms. Hilton shared with the students in class to write similar “Just Because” poems. In this sense, Haytham has adopted an “affiliation” (Ivanič, 2006) strategy to write about the stereotypes that are relevant to him. In other words, Haytham is writing like other students who have preceded him in previous years to reconstruct discriminatory discourses about Iraqis and the English language. Haytham is also achieving “deep learning” through identifying (Ivanič, 2006) with the writing style and language that Ms. Hilton wants the class as a community of practice to adopt. Hence, Haytham writes a “Just Because” poem and constructs the identity of a poet/writer who is resisting stereotypes about Iraqis through writing. Haytham does not use text only, but uses multimodal techniques to include pictures that support his point. For example, he shows his pride of his Iraqi identity by inserting the picture of an Iraqi flag and other pictures in the poem.

What is unique about this example is that it took place in class where Haytham is able to reflect upon the stereotypes that people make about him and make connections to his out-of-school experiences and how he fights injustice online too by reporting “bad” players. In Haytham’s case, he is empowered by a teacher who has created an opportunity for him to exercise his “right to speak” (Norton, 2013) and resist discriminatory discourse through writing. He is allowed to negotiate his engagement in this task to reflect his own beliefs and values – his identity as a proud Iraqi.

**Salwa: “I just know them online”.** Just like Zein and Haytham, Salwa has a virtual community of friends online, mainly through the “Roblox” platform – her favorite online game that she spends hours each day playing. Although Salwa’s peer social network seems to include two friends in Mr. Ronaldo’s class, Salwa interacts online with

gamers from all over the world using English as a lingua franca to communicate with multilingual gamers. She even has an Iraqi friend online that she communicates with in English. Thus, Salwa uses language as a means to expand her peer social network. Salwa also reports using language as a means to fend off bullying as when she verbally resists the bully at the school cafeteria. She emphasizes the importance of language for refugee ELs by arguing that refugee students are sometimes bullied “because they don’t know how to speak English”. Because of her accent, Salwa does not like to read aloud in class and prefers to avoid reading because she may pronounce the difficult words in a wrong manner. As such, her fear of negative responses to her accent seems to deny Salwa the “right to speak” (Norton, 2013), or in this case, the right to read, despite a supportive classroom environment where students often help her when she mispronounces words. Although Salwa seems invested in reading *La Linea* in class as a group, she does not seem invested in reading aloud in Mr. Ronaldo’s class. Here, it is important to highlight Mr. Ronaldo’s use of culturally relevant literature (see Stewart, Araujo, Knezek, & Revelle 2015) with his class of culturally and linguistically diverse students and how this positively affected Salwa’s engagement in class.

Despite his commendable use of culturally relevant literature, Salwa reported limited opportunities to engage in writing tasks in Mr. Ronaldo’s class. This is unfortunate considering Salwa’s love of writing. Language in general, and writing in particular, is an act of identity according to Ivanič (1998), and a medium through which students can explore possibilities of selfhood. By having fewer opportunities to engage in writing tasks, Salwa consequently has fewer opportunities to explore possibilities of selfhood and develop her identity and school-based writing practices.

**Suha: “[L]anguage is the hardest thing to do”.** Suha’s lack of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) in the literacy practices in Ms. Hills’ class is evident. Her lack of investment in the curriculum-mandated literacy tasks in Ms. Hills’ class drives her to overtly resist (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005) these school-based literacy practices. She rarely writes more than a few lines in her journals, and explicitly writes in her journal how she dislikes the writing prompts. Outside of class, Suha has produced a passionate persuasive letter that she addresses to the state governor’s office. In this sense, her identity as an author is relational (Ivanič, 2006). In Ms. Hills’ class Suha shows minimal investment and lack of engagement, while outside of class when she is writing about something that “motivates” her, she is capable of producing far more extended and sophisticated writing.

In her letter, Suha tries to resist some of the deficit perspectives of ESOL students. She emphasizes that “language is the hardest thing to do” for “second language people” and that it is not for lack of trying that ELs find difficulty in passing the SSTs. Salwa argues that “people from different countries are tried hard enough than everyone who has been born here”, but language remains the main obstacle behind passing SSTs. Through practicing writing as an act of identity construction (Ivanič, 1998), Suha seems to attempt to challenge the “dominant practices and discourses” (p. 32) surrounding ELs, and repositioning immigrant and refugee ELs as agentic and hard-working – students who “tried hard enough than everyone who has been born here” according to Suha. She invests in writing a persuasive letter to the governor’s assistant with the “hopes of return” on her investment as Kramsch (2013, p. 155) explains. Suha’s return on her investment in writing this letter is linked to her aim of helping ELs graduate and reducing their

frustration by eliminating the SSTs or considering lower scores for ELs as she pleads in her letter.

To cope with the frustration of her not passing her reading SST, Suha actively works to gain access to her imagined community (Norton, 2013) of professional dentists by completing a course at a technical institute related to dentistry. I often watched her take out her “dentistry” folder in Ms. Hills’ class and study highly content specific words. She translates these words into Arabic and write them repeatedly until she has learned the correct spelling. It is unfortunate that the tasks in Ms. Hills’ class are mandated by a fixed curriculum as this has limited Suha’s possibilities of self-hood in that class (Ivanič, 1998). Engaging Suha in tasks revolving around her interest in dentistry can have a potential positive effect on her participation. In short, Suha does not have a space to negotiate her engagement in that class, and that seems to have driven her toward overt resistance of curricular hegemonic literacy practices (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005) in Ms. Hills’ class. Of course, Ms. Hills’ also has limited space to invite negotiated engagement as she is limited with the set curriculum in that particular class. A piece of good news is that I have recently learned from Ms. Hills that Suha has passed her SST and can now move on toward achieving her goal of getting into college and working toward becoming a dentist.

**Cross-participant findings.** The cross-participant findings from this study are obviously based on the four participants’ experiences and cannot be generalized to all refugee EL students in the US. Nonetheless, we can glean insights from these experiences that may apply to other refugee or immigrant EL students. In the sections below, I present these cross-participant findings, discuss how they challenge or align with the current

literature, and discuss to what extent these findings are refugee specific or more broadly related to immigrant ELs as well.

First, all participants experienced some form of discrimination. While discrimination is often experienced by refugee and immigrant students, Arab Muslim refugee students are often the target of religious discrimination that is based on this aspect of their identity. Suha's recount of how her hijab-wearing friend was bullied finds echoes in the literature on refugees (e.g., Oikonomidou, 2007). Despite the fact that Suha did not wear a veil, she still experienced discrimination related to her religious-based belief in refraining from eating pork. As such, this study reveals other aspects of discrimination than the hijab. In addition, this study brings to the front online discriminatory discourse where veiled forms of bullying can take place. Zein's experience with the "prank" YouTube video is an example and also echoes another form of discrimination in the literature: equating Muslims with terrorists. These experiences are likely not unique to my study participants, but are shared by other student populations: a recent survey by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) has highlighted growing fears among immigrants, children of immigrants, and Muslim students in light of the recent discriminatory discourse used by a presidential candidate. Ignoring discriminatory practices that influence refugee students' experiences at school can foster feelings of alienation and isolation, and therefore more proactive steps are needed at schools to address discriminatory discourse and actions.

Second, all participants experienced limited peer social networks, especially upon first arrival into the US. Students negotiated limited peer social networks through building small friend groups with other EL students in-school (as Salwa and Suha did)

and/or engaging with multimodal and multilingual literacies that enabled them to communicate with peers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Haytham's Russian friend via Skype). This study confirms findings from other studies regarding the social implications of engaging in multimodal practices that allow refugee students (and indeed other transnational populations) to (re)connect with peers and family across time and space (e.g., Omerbašić, 2015). Such literacy practices provide students with the flexibility to enact what they know and who they are through non-linguistic (e.g., Zein's use of videos) and multilingual (e.g., using Arabizi) media.

Engaging in in multilingual and multimodal literacies had interesting parallels to Omerbašić's (2015) findings relating to her participants' out-of-school multilingual literacy practices. More specifically the use of Romanized script to represent Burmese language was very similar to how participants in this study used Arabizi. In addition, the theme of refugee students' multimodal literacy practices and its potential on a pedagogic level is echoed in several studies (e.g., Emert, 2013, 2014; Gilhooly & Lee, 2014; Hepple, Sockhill, Tan, & Alford, 2014; Omerbašić, 2015). Thus, teachers can invest (Darvin & Norton, 2015) in this potential source of students' funds of knowledge to create bridges between their school-based and out-of-school literacy practices and interests.

What these cross-participant findings reveal is that multiple students negotiated academic and social school contexts in similar ways (e.g., experiencing discrimination and limited peer social networks). These themes are helpful at better understanding refugee students' experiences and respond to calls for more research (e.g., Lerner, 2012; McBrien, 2005) – case studies more specifically (Stewart, 2013) – on this topic.

Nonetheless, these participants' experiences are still unique on an individual level. For example, while Zein covertly resists school-based literacy practices, Suha chooses overt resistance. Both thematic trends and individual aspects of these four participants' experiences carry implications that I discuss in the next section.

### **Implications: What do Zein, Haytham, Suha, and Salwa teach us?**

While the experiences of Zein, Haytham, Suha, and Salwa are not generalizable to all Arab refugee students, they certainly can shed more light on how refugee students negotiate academic and social school contexts in English speaking countries of resettlement and reveal some pathways that K-12 educators can pursue in order to address the needs of this population of students. In fact, my observations and dialogues with those four students not only reveal pedagogical and theoretical implications for this line of research, but have also opened windows for self-reflection on a personal level. In the sections below, I discuss the connections to theoretical, policy-related, pedagogical, and personal learnings that the four participants in this study have opened for me and hopefully other educators and researchers who are interested in helping and learning from this special population of students.

**Theoretical implications.** On a theoretical level, findings from this dissertation suggest that the four participants' negotiation of academic and social contexts occurred at the intersection of language learning, identity, and literacy practices. This is in accordance with sociocultural theory and hardly comes as a surprise. However, one theoretical contribution of this dissertation is pairing Ivanič's (1998, 2006) conception of language, learning, and identity with that of Norton's (2013). While the two models have many aspects in common, Norton's (2013) model's emphasis on issues of power (e.g.,



right to speak) provides an additional layer to Ivanič's (2006) conceptualization on the interrelatedness of language, learning, and identity. It is important to note here that Ivanič (2006) does not exclude power from her argument, but Norton's (2013) concepts of investment and the right to speak complement rather than fill a gap in Ivanič's (2006) model. More specifically, since Ivanič (2006) focuses on how identity is discursively constructed, the "right to speak" carries special importance in the sense that if students do not have the "right to speak" and are not invested in learning within a sociocultural context such as school, this will have a significant influence on how their identities are constructed, and the possibilities of self-hood (Ivanič, 2006) that are available for them.

Another theoretical contribution is the emerging concept of negotiated engagement. As mentioned earlier, negotiated engagement builds on the concepts of appropriation and resistance (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005), yet it is different in its emphasis on negotiation of power (as opposed to negation) and on student/teacher collaboration. In this sense, it is a respectful approach not only to refugee students (and immigrant/EL populations), but also teachers as students practice their sense of agency within the curricular parameters that are set to ensure students' success. When school-based hegemonic practices involve discrimination or racism, resistance can be a better option, but most often, teachers and curriculum experts work with the students' best interest in mind. As such, a respectful approach such as negotiated engagement can be more effective in encouraging change. By teachers showing flexibility (e.g., Mr. LeBlanc with Zein regarding the videogame project) and students showing agency (e.g., Zein incorporating his multimodal and multilingual out-of-school literacy practices), the two can meet half way to negotiate rather than negate (or resist) engagement. Appropriation is

closer to negotiated engagement but it still involves the students' focus on their "own purposes, rather than those purposes designated by those in power" (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005, p. 9). Within a classroom context, teachers are in power, but it is wrong to assume that they are abusing this power or ignoring the students' needs. Most teachers have the students' best interest in mind and act with good intentions. Negotiated engagement is one approach that allows the purposes of students and teachers to meet. To make this possible, teachers should learn more about their students and be willing to relinquish power and extend invitations for students to exercise their agency. Trust should be built in such a way where students feel safe to negotiate engagement and share some of their rich literacy practices (especially out-of-school practices) that often remain hidden from educators and thereby undervalued or unutilized. But how can we practically achieve this in the classroom? In the next section, I propose a way forward based on my learnings from the students' school experiences.

**Policy implications.** Another implication is related to policy and how in the US, language assessment relies chiefly on high-stakes standardized testing (Menken, Hudson, & Leung, 2014). In this study, we have seen how SSTs were an obstacle to Suha's graduation from school and how she argued in her letter to the governor's office how difficult those tests are for ESOL students "cause it needs more language" (see Appendix G). Menken and colleagues (2014) question the validity of standardized tests based on the premise that these tests are mainly intended for monolingual students, yet ELs are included in such assessments without appropriate differentiation. As such, ELs are at a disadvantage in taking such high-stakes tests due to language. This has serious implications for refugee and other ELs such as Suha who dream of graduating school and

“[making] this country proud of me, and also to make my family proud of me” (Appendix G).

**Pedagogical implications.** Negotiated engagement was one aspect in which the participants in this study engaged in school-based literacy practices. As mentioned earlier, negotiated engagement can be a respectful means of engaging students in classroom tasks, and can thereby be a useful instructional approach in the hands of teachers that can lead to more culturally and linguistically diverse literacy practices that reflect the increasingly diverse student populations in American classrooms, and address the needs of not only refugee students, but also other marginalized student populations. In its focus on student agency, negotiated engagement aligns with adolescents’ developmental transitions toward autonomy from adults (e.g., Noom, 1999). But how can we nourish students’ agency and ability to negotiate engagement of school-based literacies? Considering the important prospective applications for ELs and refugee students, I propose the following roadmap as also shown in Figure 7 below: 1) inviting students to learn; 2) respecting possibilities of self-hood and students’ identities and interests, 3) investing in learning with, about, and from students; 4); ensuring that all students have the right to speak in our classrooms; and 5) planning inclusive and flexible tasks.

Teachers extend invitations to learn (Tomlinson, 2002) “when they strive to meet the students’ needs for affirmation, contribution, purpose, power, and challenge in the classroom” (p. 6). On a practical level, invitations to learn can be extended through many ways, one of which is learning more about who the students in the classroom are and their interests. For example, with the current available technology, teachers can ask

students to complete online surveys at the beginning of the year to identify student interests. Great insight can also be gleaned from students' journals as well. For other students who may be less willing to share, teachers can interview them and ask about what they do after school, what their interests are, and what literacy practices they engage in and in what languages. Some students may even be more comfortable with multimodal interviews (see Omerbašić, 2015) via Skype or other technology. For example, Zein was more comfortable chatting to his classmates online rather than doing so in person in the classroom. In addition, multimodal interviews can facilitate students' sharing of their multimodal and multilingual practices. Students can share their internet browsing habits by sharing their screens with the interviewer and talking about their interests using visual aids and images on the internet.

Whether teachers use surveys, journals, interviews or other means, it is important to learn what the students' needs and interests (Noddings, 2005) are instead of making assumptions. For example, just because a student is a refugee does not mean that she/he is interested in reading about refugee experiences. Zein, for example, was interested in technology and viewed refugee issues and something from his past. Identity is in constant flux, and after two years in the US, Zein seems to be more interested in his future "imagined community" of program developers than reminiscing about his refugee experiences (another example is assigning Suha with a reading book about a hijab-wearing girl which she was not interested in). Learning more about students through invitations to learn allows teachers to respect students' identities and possibilities of self-hood. Learning that Zein can write computer code enables his teacher to create tasks that are respectful of Zein's interests. His identity is not limited to his refugee status – he is a

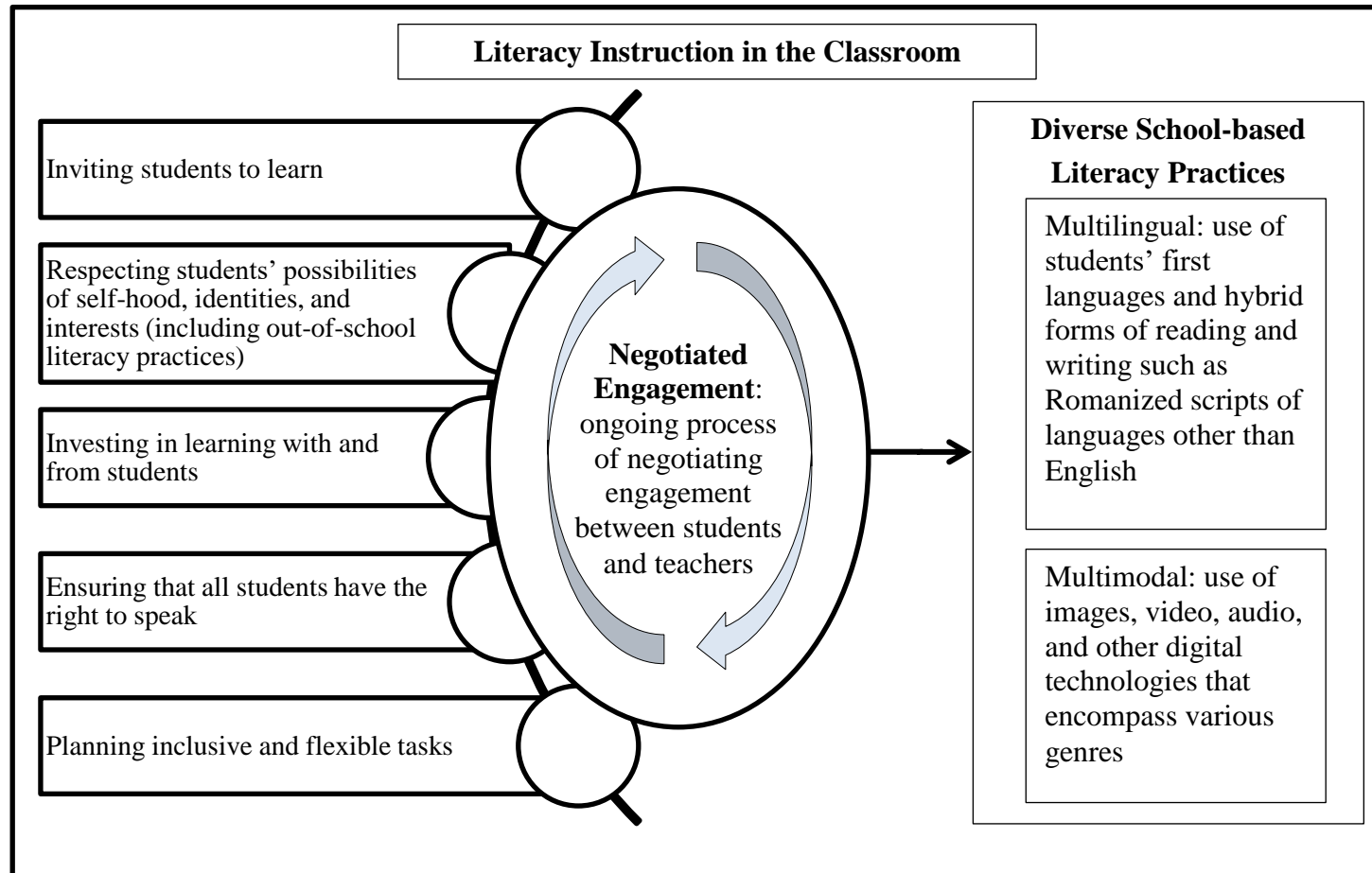


Figure 7. Negotiated engagement

game developer in the making whom I can learn from (he actually showed me how to download songs for free from the internet). However, it would be impractical to suggest that teachers choose texts that reflect students' interests only. Anyone who has been in a classroom knows that no text can necessarily satisfy the diverse interest of all students. However, teachers' awareness of students' interests allows teachers to make conceptual and thematic rather than literal ties to students' interests. In addition, when teachers choose reading texts for classrooms with refugee ELs, it is important to be aware that some students who have suffered or are suffering from trauma may seek to avoid reading about refugee experiences because such texts may trigger painful memories that refugee students are trying to avoid. As such, refugee students may not engage in reading such texts and their resistance or non-engagement should not be simply interpreted as not wanting to learn. Suppressing painful past experiences may be a psychological self-defense mechanism and teachers of refugee ELs should be aware of the complexities of these students' lives and experiences.

Exerting the effort to learn more about students highlights teachers' investment in serving their students' needs. In this sense, investment (Norton, 2013) should not involve students only, but also teachers who should be willing to learn with and from their students. In some cases, it is not only students who are learning a second language, but also teachers. Many of our students, including refugee students, are more computer literate than we are – at least I speak of myself and how humbled I was by Zein's ability to write computer code. As such, teachers should have the courage to invest in learning from their students and consequently incorporating this knowledge (especially students'

multiliteracies) into their planning. But before we get to planning meaningful tasks, we should make sure that all students have the “right to speak”.

All four participants reported facing the linguistic barrier of “accent” which impeded participation in classroom activities. As such, it is important to address issues of accent in classrooms with linguistically diverse students such as refugees and ELs in general. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to suggest a comprehensive plan to do this, but one suggestion is to discuss such issues openly with students and explaining, perhaps as Lippi-Green (2012) argues, that everyone has an accent! Ensuring the right to speak in class encourages students to have a voice and builds for a more respectful and positive learning community. In emphasizing the students’ right to speak, negotiated engagement can potentially help marginalized student populations such as refugees and ELs to achieve a sense of belonging to the classroom. The right to speak should not be confused with not respecting silence. As Schultz (2009) argues, silence in class does not necessarily mean passivity or not learning. For example, Zein pretends not to know (although he did know) the answers to Mr. LeBlanc’s questions because he is not invested in reading about Anne Frank. Thus, it is important for teachers not to interpret refugee ELs’ silence as mere passivity, and develop a more nuanced lens to understand silence and its functions in class in more sophisticated ways. Schultz comments, “Fighting to become visible – or conversely, to remain invisible – they [students] make daily choices about when to speak and when to remain silent” (p. 48), and as such, it is important for educators to understand and investigate the complexities of silence.

Inviting students to learn, respecting their identities and possibilities of self-hood, investing in learning with and from them, and ensuring that they have the right to speak

can facilitate planning tasks that are flexible and open to students' negotiated engagement. This does not mean planning unstructured tasks that revolve around students' interest and "fun" activities. In other words, just because students are interested in digital literacies and videogames, this does not mean that a teacher should allow them to play videogames. However, a classroom teacher can plan a class project that invites students to plan and publish their final products in multiple modalities and languages and choose topics that address their interests. A teacher can invite them to use their first language or hybrid languages (e.g., Arabizi) where appropriate, or provide reading texts in their first language. She/he can use the data about students' interests to make sure that my classroom library (or the school's) has the books that address my students' curiosity and provides multiple possibilities for self-hood. She/he can draw clearer connections between the students' out—of-school and school-based literacy practices. In short, a teacher can invite students to negotiate their engagement in classroom tasks in a respectful manner that is based on her/his knowledge of those students. Throughout this process, a teacher can learn new things herself/himself, and maybe *about* herself/himself.

Pedagogical implications from this study suggest that there is no "magic" recipe to address refugee students' diverse needs. As explained earlier, many of the approaches are not necessarily refugee "exclusive" and may or may not be helpful with other student populations. Nonetheless, negotiated engagement arose as a contextual approach that holds promise of diversifying school-based literacies and empowering students to negotiate engagement in an increasingly diverse literacy landscape both in and outside school.



**Personal implications.** I have not only learned from Zein, Haytham, Suha, and Salwa about theory and pedagogy, but I have also learned things about myself as an emerging scholar. First, I have to admit that these four students did not meet my expectations. My expectations were framed by my previous experiences with Syrian refugee students in Lebanon which shaped a stereotypical image in my mind of what a refugee student should look and act like (e.g., wearing ragged clothes and talking aloud). The four participants made me aware of these stereotypes and indeed disrupted them. I did not expect Suha to wear designer clothes to school, I did not expect Salwa to play videogames, I did not expect Haytham to write poetry, and I did not expect Zein to be able to build his own computer and create videogames.

Another issue was my fear of conducting this study after learning that I would not have access to the students' home environments. I had a proposal and a set plan to conduct research, but all of this changed and I felt insecure to not be able to carry on with the "plan". However, I quickly learned that qualitative research involves flexibility and reflexivity. I have always struggled with letting the data lead the way instead of design, but sometimes a qualitative researcher needs a balance of both. It has been difficult to relinquish control to the data – to what I will learn from the participants as opposed to what I believe I will learn by power of design.

My dissertation proposal's design was written to conduct research "on" refugee students. I use the word "on" because in reflecting back, "on" seems to be the more accurate term instead of the more politically correct term "with". The "participants" at that time were more objects of this dissertation than agentic subjects. However, this all changed with spending time with them and getting to know them. For example, I had no

idea that videogames would be a theme throughout this dissertation, but I soon found myself researching *League of Legends* to gain more insight into what they do at home. In short, the “participants” were no longer participants by the end of this study. They were Zein, Haytham, Suha, and Salwa.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations that I acknowledge in this section. First, I did not have access to speak to the parents and gain their perspectives of their children’s experiences in the US. All parents of the four participants declined to sign consent forms that allow me to interview them, with students reporting that parents are too busy to invest the time to participate in this study. I believe my data could have been much richer had I had the opportunity to learn more about the parents’ experiences, their histories, and their thoughts on their children’s life in the US. Another missing lens is observing the students engage in literacy practices outside of school. While the students describe and even show me (e.g., YouTube videos and videogame platform interactions) some of their out-of-school literacy practices, the study could have been richer if I had the opportunity to observe students at home.

Another limitation is observing the participants in their language arts or ESOL classrooms. This restricted my perceptions of the participants to how they were in those classes in particular, while other aspects of their identities and literacy practices may have remained hidden. Of course, being present in more than four classrooms per week would have been logistically very challenging, and the choice of the language arts and ESOL classrooms remained a practical one as these classes were rich in terms of language use and literacy practices.

Social desirability is often a common limitation in qualitative research. Students and teachers may have wanted to answer questions or project certain behaviors that were aligned to what I expressed as my research interests and inclinations. As I recruited students' through teachers, teachers were aware of my focus on refugee ELs. As such, my presence in the classroom could have motivated teachers to introduce refugee related readings such as Mr. LeBlanc's introduction of an article comparing Anne Frank's experiences to Syrian refugees or Mr. Ronaldo's incorporation of an article on Syrian refugees in Germany. While my presence in class may or may not have been a factor in the teachers' choice of these texts, the number of observations in each of the participants' classrooms (between 11 and 15 observations per student) enabled me to observe an array of teaching practices and various choices of texts. Other patterns relevant to choice of texts started to emerge such as Ms. Hilton's choice of virtues-related texts and Ms. Hills' adherence to the curriculum texts.

Social desirability may have also been a limitation with the students. I often asked participants what they liked or disliked to read and write inside and outside of school and in what languages. The focus on literacy practices and language naturally gravitated toward Arabic as this was the participants' first language and mine as well. As such, students may have displayed social desirability behaviors in telling me more about Arabic literacy practices and issues of accent. Nonetheless, I believe this added richness to the findings as having the same first language allowed students to share more about literacy practices in Arab/English for example.

To address issues of trustworthiness, prolonged engagement in the field (more than 90 hours of classroom observations), triangulation (corroborating findings through a

multiplicity of sources), and member checking measures were adopted as explained in the methods section. Where triangulation was not possible, data was presented with certain caveats such as when Suha claims that “white girls” look at her condescendingly, there was no means to verify those claims or provide triangulation. Therefore, Suha’s claims were acknowledged as her perceptions of the white girls’ gaze.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Based on the literature review and findings from this study, I suggest several directions for future research relating to topics, methodology, and theory. First, future studies on refugee education can benefit from an emphasis on the role that digital literacies play in refugee students’ acculturation to their new countries of resettlement. In addition, how refugee students’ out-of-school literacies connect to their school-based literacies can tell us more on how to guide instruction that addresses their needs. Another emergent theme that is worth following up is hybrid writing such as Arabizi. Why, where, and in what contexts do refugee students use this hybrid form of writing, and what are the pedagogical implications if any? On a methodological level, discourse analysis can be a powerful tool to investigate issues of power and discrimination relating to refugee students, especially in online contexts that escape the attention of educators and parents. Moreover, long-term analyses of refugee/immigrant students’ literacy practices can help us better understand how their identities and language skills evolve over time. On a theoretical level, studies that examine the emergent concept of negotiated engagement can provide insight into whether this can be a successful model in classrooms with refugee students and other marginalized populations. For example, a participatory study where the “roadmap” that I described earlier is implemented or

classroom observations that uncover different ways of negotiating engagement in school-based literacies can be two prospective studies that can have helpful pedagogical and theoretical implications for educators and researchers working with refugee students.

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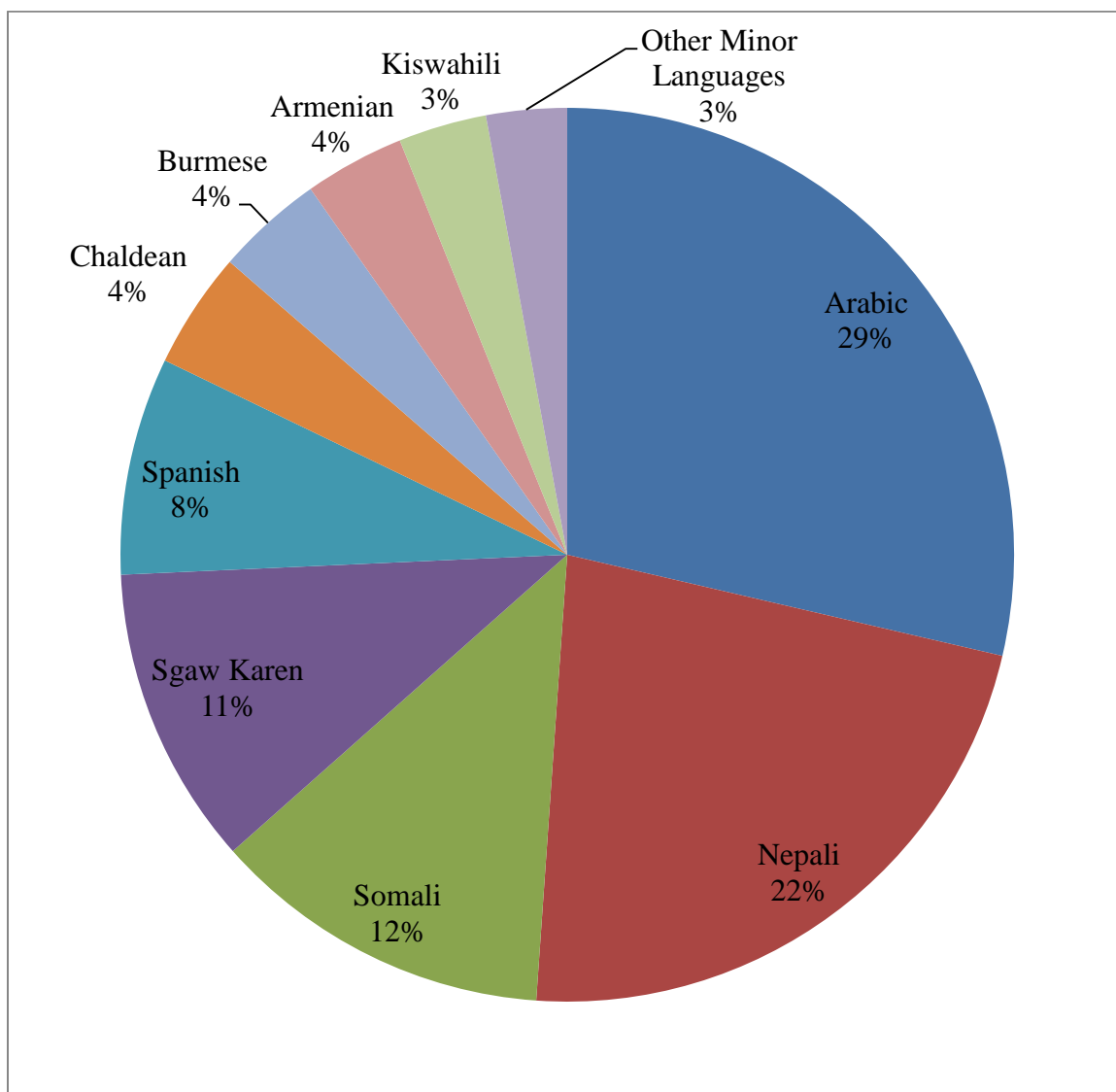
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## Appendix A

### Top Ten Refugee Native Languages

Fiscal Years 2008 through 2016 as of April 30, 2016\*



\*Based on data from the Refugee Processing Center, US Department of State, 2016).

## **Appendix B**

### Field Notes Protocol

General information:

Researcher name:

Teacher:

School and room number: (if a classroom observation)

Subject:

Month/day/year:

Time (beginning and ending):

#### **Summary of Observation**

(1 short paragraph, to be filled in after observation, summarizing key events):

**Resources:** (number of teachers in the room, books and learning materials, description of physical environment/accommodations, etc.)

**Map and Physical setting** (Scan and submit separately, but include any other relevant notes here about seating changes during the lesson, uncertainty on map, etc.)

#### **Detailed Class Session Observation**

Running Record: (highly detailed account of the observation):

#### **POST OBSERVATION:**

##### **Post-Observation Reflection**

(Researcher's thoughts about the observation, to be completed within 24 hours of observation):

##### **Data Uploading:**

Within a week, type up the notes and upload to UVA Box using the following naming system:

“ClassObservation/HomeObservation\_Year\_Month\_Date\_TeacherPseudonym\_Researcher'sInitials”.

For artifacts, use the following naming convention:

DocumentTitle\_Year\_Month\_Date\_TeacherPseudonym\_Researcher'sInitials

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocols

#### Student Interview Protocol

Thanks for taking the time to talk with me today. In order to help me remember everything you say, is it OK if I audio and video record this interview? (If yes, the interviewer will start audio/video taping). Are you ready to start?

#### **Narratives**

1. Tell me a story that your parents or grandparents used to tell you as a child, or a traditional story from your home country.
2. If you had a baby brother or sister, what story would you tell them before they went to bed? Can you tell me that story?
3. How would you describe your neighborhood? Do you like living there? Why or why not?

#### **Demographic Information**

1. When did you first arrive to the United States (US)?
2. When did you first start school? Where? In what language(s)? Were you ever absent from school for a month or more all at one time?
3. What language(s) do you speak at home? What language(s) are spoken by your family at home?
4. Have you ever participated in a program to learn English (ESOL, ESL, Bilingual, Dual Language)? For how long were you enrolled in each?
5. Do you have relatives in the US? Tell me more.
6. Do you communicate with family or friends from your home country? Tell me more.
7. Present the interviewee with a world map and explain that he/she can use it to help him/her answer the following questions:
  - a. In which country were you born? If it helps, draw a circle around that country on the map.
  - b. Which of the countries on the map would you consider home? You can choose more than one. If it helps, draw a circle around that country and write "HOME" next to it. Why do you consider this country to be your home?
  - c. Did you come straight from (name country of birth) to the United States, or did you live in any other country before coming here? If yes, name these countries. If it helps, draw squares around these countries on the map.
  - d. If student drew squares around the countries where he/she lived before coming to the US, ask him/her to connect these squares: Retrace your journey to the US by connecting these squares.

#### **Attitudes About School (about 5 minutes)**

1. How would you describe your experience at school in the US?
2. How is it similar or different to your school experience in \_\_\_\_ (any country where the interviewee has been schooled before coming to the US)? *Let the student speak freely, but you can use the below prompts if student is having difficulty focusing his/her thoughts.*
  - a. How similar/different are the teachers?
  - b. How similar/different are homework assignments?

- c. How similar/different are the school buildings?
- d. How similar/different are the classroom rules?
- e. How similar/different is the difficulty of the content that you learn?
3. Do you participate in any activities, sports, or clubs at school? Tell me more.
4. What do you want to be able to do after you finish high school? Why?

### **School-Based Literacy Practices**

1. What kind of readings do you read at school here in the US? What kind of texts did you read in school in \_\_\_\_ (country of residence prior to arriving into the US)? *Follow-up with questions on the purpose, context (social, academic, or practical), medium (digital or print), and language that is used.*
2. Do you like/dislike reading a particular kind of reading? (prompt student for examples) Why?
3. What kind of writings do you write at school here in the US? What kind of texts did you write in school in \_\_\_\_? *Follow-up with questions on the purpose, context (social, academic, or practical), medium (digital or print), and language that is used.*
4. Do you like/dislike writing a particular kind of writing? (prompt student for examples) Why?
5. Do you prefer reading/writing in Arabic or in English? Why?
6. Do you go to the school library often here at school in the US? What kind of books do you choose to read? How do you choose these books? Do you ask anyone for suggestions on what books to choose? Did you have a school library in \_\_\_\_? Tell me more.

### **Out-of-School Literacy Practices**

1. What kind of readings do you read outside of school? What kind of texts did you read outside of school in \_\_\_\_? *Follow-up with questions on the purpose, context (social, academic, or practical), medium (digital or print), and language that is used.*
2. Do you like/dislike reading a particular kind of reading? (prompt student for examples) Why?
3. What kind of writing do you write outside of school here? What kind of texts did you write outside of school in \_\_\_\_? *Follow-up with questions on the purpose, context (social, academic, or practical), medium (digital or print), and language that is used.*
4. Do you like/dislike writing a particular kind of writing? (prompt student for examples) Why?
5. Have you ever been to a public library in the United States? *If yes, follow-up with questions on what the student did there, how often does she/he go, and whether or not he/she has checked out any books from there.*
6. Do you watch TV or play video games? How often? *Prompt student for examples and ask follow-up questions on what kind of text is involved in each example that they provide you with.*
7. Do you spend time on social media (e.g. Facebook and/or Twitter)? How many minutes per day? Who do you mostly communicate with?
8. Do you like to hear news about what's happening in your home country? Tell me more.

### **Attitudes About Class**

1. How would you describe your experiences in this class in general?
2. What kind of reading/writing activities do you do in this class?
3. Do you like/dislike these activities? Why?
4. Have you ever felt that you don't want to participate in any of these activities? Why?

5. What do you do when you don't understand something in this class?
6. Do you find this class to be easy in any ways? Why or why not?
7. Do you find this class to be challenging or difficult in any ways? Why or why not?
8. Do you generally complete all, some, or none of your work in class? Explain.
9. Do you generally complete all, some, or none of your homework? Explain.

### **Attitudes About Teacher / Peers**

1. How would you describe your classmates in this class?
2. Who are your friends in this class?
3. Who do you speak to most in this class? Why? What do you speak about?
4. How would you describe your attitudes or feelings toward the teacher?

### **Follow-up Questions**

Ask follow-up questions relating to class observations.

Thanks for chatting to me. Do you have any questions for me?

### **After the interview:**

- Immediately after interview, listen to the audio and make sure it worked. Check beginning, several places in the middle, and the end. If it didn't record, use your notes to write down as much as you can remember immediately!
- Within 24 hours,
  - o Write reflection on major issues/surprises/areas of emphasis you noticed while conducting the interviews. Also include non-verbals that you put in your notes and anything else relevant that wouldn't have been captured in the audio.
- Within 1 week,
  - o Transcribe the interview. Add your reflection to the bottom of the transcription. Upload your transcription to box, using file name of: "TIntTranscript\_Year\_Month\_Date\_TeacherPseudonym\_Researcher'sInitials"
  - o Upload audio to box, using file name of "FCIntAudio\_year\_month\_date\_FCPseudonym\_InterviewerInitials" (e.g., FCIntAudio\_2014\_02\_28\_Stephen\_FK) to the Interview Audio folder on box.
  - o Upload each student's classroom map to box, using file name of "FCIntMap\_year\_month\_date\_FCPseudonym\_InterviewerInitials" (e.g., FCIntMap\_2014\_02\_28\_Stephen\_FK) to the Interview Maps folder on box.



## **Teacher Interview Protocol**

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today. In order to maintain the accuracy of what you say, is it OK with you if I audio and video record this interview? (If yes, the interviewer will start audio/video taping). Are you ready to start?

### **General Questions**

1. In general, how would you describe your approach to (or philosophy of) teaching?
2. In general, how would you describe your approach to teaching each of the English language arts strands (reading, writing, speaking, and listening)?
3. What kind of reading/writing activities/tasks are your students usually involved with in your class?
4. What kind of texts do they read? How do you choose these texts?
5. What kind of texts/genres do they write? How do you choose these topics and genres?

### **Teacher Background**

6. What is your background in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students (such as English language learners or refugee students)? Then, ask follow-ups as necessary:
  - a. How long have you done so?
  - b. What kinds of training have you had?
  - c. How would you describe your approach to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students? Is it similar to or different from your approach to teaching other students in your classroom, and if so, how?
  - d. What kind of professional development do you think would be helpful in preparing teachers to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students?

### **Scaffolding**

7. In reviewing my fieldnotes, I was particularly interested in... (locate 1 or 2 specific instances of their scaffolding/differentiation targeted at the focal student and observed in visits during the year). Can you tell me more about either that instance or others like it?
8. What are some successful ways you've found to scaffold for your instruction for students in your classroom? What are some ways you've tried that haven't been as successful?
9. What are some of the ways you adjust instruction in the moment to scaffold students' learning?

### **Focal student:**

10. What kind of information do you have on \_\_\_\_'s (the focal student's) home life?
11. Does \_\_\_\_ bring his/her culture into the classroom? If yes, how? How does that influence his/her learning experiences (including reading, writing, speaking, and listening)?
12. In general terms, how would you describe \_\_\_\_ in class?
13. Is he/she similar or different in out-of-class contexts? (e.g. in the hallways or during breaks)
14. How would you describe \_\_\_\_'s participation in class?
15. How would you describe his understanding and ability to achieve in each of the four strands of English language arts (writing, reading, speaking, and listening)?
16. How would you describe \_\_\_\_ as a reader, writer, speaker and listener?
17. How would you describe \_\_\_\_'s relationship with his/her classmates?
18. How would you describe your interactions with \_\_\_\_?
19. How would you describe \_\_\_\_'s ability to work individually in class? In groups?
20. How would you describe \_\_\_\_'s challenges and successes in class if any?
21. When planning your lessons, do you prepare any different work for \_\_\_\_?

22. Does \_\_\_\_ ask for help when needed? Explain.
23. Can you tell me a story about \_\_\_\_ that took place in your class or in school?
24. Do you think \_\_\_\_'s background as a refugee influence his/her learning at school? If yes, tell me more with a focus on reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
25. Do you think \_\_\_\_'s background as a refugee influence his/her social connections and interpersonal relationships at school? If yes, tell me more about this.

Thanks for your time. Do you have any questions for me before we conclude?


**After the interview:**

- Immediately after interview, listen to the audio and make sure it worked. Check beginning, several places in the middle, and the end. If it didn't record, use your notes to write down as much as you can remember immediately!
- Within 24 hours,
  - o Write reflection on major issues/surprises/areas of emphasis you noticed while conducting the interviews. Also include non-verbals that you put in your notes and anything else relevant that wouldn't have been captured in the audio.
- Within 1 week,
  - o Transcribe your interview. Add your reflection to the bottom of this transcription.
  - o Upload your de-identified transcription (using pseudonyms) to box, using file name of: "TIntTranscript\_year\_month\_date\_TPseudonym\_InterviewerInitials" (e.g., TIntTranscript\_2014\_03\_07\_Griffith\_AK) to the Interview Transcripts folder on box
  - o Upload audio to box, using file name of TIntAudio\_year\_month\_date\_TPseudonym\_InterviewerInitials" (e.g., TIntAudio\_2014\_02\_28\_Griffith\_AK) to the Interview Audio folder on box.

## Appendix D

### Coding Manual

Parent Codes	Sub-Codes and Definitions	Sub-sub-codes and Definitions	Examples
Social School Contexts	Discriminatory Practices: any act of discrimination experienced by the participants	Linguistic discrimination: an act of discrimination with underlying linguistic elements	Haytham: People imitate you if your accent is not nice. Interviewer: Which people? [...] Haytham: I have my American friends on Skype and they sometimes tease me. Interviewer: Do you get upset? Haytham: A little bit.
		Religious discrimination: an act of discrimination with underlying religious elements	Suha: Like for example, if somebody is wearing a head scarf, they start looking to her or whatever. That's how it goes.
		Racial discrimination: an act of discrimination with underlying racial elements	Suha: I know by the way they look at me. White girls think that they should be the best.
	Peer Social Networks: any event where participants reported or constructed social connections to peers or the lack thereof	Virtual and/or imagined communities (see Norton, 2013; Chapter 2)	Zein: I like the online friends better because I don't have friends here as much as I do have online. They are very few.
		Real communities: includes connections to peers in the participants' real environment as opposed to their virtual one	Salwa: Yeah, they [two peers in her class] both came to me and asked if I wanted to be their friend, and I was like, yeah sure.

Academic School Contexts	School-based Literacy Practices: includes any school-based literacy practice that participants reported or engaged in	Negotiated engagement: (see Chapter 5 for a complete definition)	*Zein creating a videogame instead of a board game for <i>The Outsiders</i> class project
		Overt resistance (see Clayton, 1998; Chapter 2)	Suha writing in her journal: “In my opinion I have nothing to say. Honestly, I don’t like this question.”
		Covert resistance (see Clayton, 1998; Chapter 2)	Zein scribbling on the portrait of Anne Frank in a teacher-selected article to read in class
	Out-of-school Literacy Practices: includes any out-of-school literacy practice that participants reported or engaged in	Multilingual	Ana kter bokrah al school. 3an jad ano ana kteer hate all school. atmana li’alak al 7adi’ al jaed fee sho3’lak. [I hate school so much, really I do hate all school very much. I wish you good luck with your work]
		Multimodal	 <p>* Zein’s videogame project</p>

\*Examples with an asterisk indicate prolonged events that extended beyond a simple “excerpt” that was tagged on Dedoose.

## Appendix E

Arabic Letters and their Arabizi Counterparts (Yaghan, 2008, p. 43)

Arabizi possibilities				Arabic	Arabizi possibilities			
numerals		letters			numerals		letters	
٢	2			ش			sh	ch
٢	2		a	ص	9			
٢	2e	e	i	ض	9'		d	
٢	2		o	ط	6		t	
ا			a	ظ	6'		th	
آ	2a		aa	ع	3			
ب			b	غ	3'			
ت			t	ف			f	
ث			th	ق	8	2	k	q
ج			j	ك			k	
ح	7		h	ل			l	
خ	7'	5		پ			m	
د			d	ن			n	
ذ			th	ه			h	
ر			r	و			w	o ou
ز			z	ي			y	i e
س			s					
			c					

## Appendix F

### Member Checking Handout

Participant's Name: Haytham

Date: June 1, 2016

#### Findings to check:

1. Some people stereotype Iraqi people that they do not know how to speak English. In Ms. Hilton's class, Haytham wrote a poem to show those people that Iraqis CAN speak (and write) English.
2. Haytham does not like reading *The Twits* in Ms. Hilton's class, but likes reading other things such as reading online information about soccer players and borrowing graphic novels from the school library.
3. Haytham loves to play videogames such as *League of Legends*, and he reports "bad" players when they do not play in a fair manner. He even learns English and new words by playing videogames with his friends.
4. Haytham knows how to write Arabizi (Arabic/English) and uses this in communicating with his friends online (e.g., Facebook)
5. Haytham has a Russian friend whom he communicates with online via Skype. This friend understands how difficult it is to have an accent and how others can tease you if you have an accent.

### Member Checking Handout

Participant's Name: Salwa

Date: June 1, 2016

#### Findings to check:

1. Salwa loves to play Roblox. She spends hours each day playing and chatting online with her friends who also play Roblox. She even sometimes plays Roblox at school, only in free time.
2. Her online friends understand her and listen to her in as much as her friends in class do. Her friends in class include two girls who come from different parts of the world.
3. Salwa can fight bullies because her English is good and she can speak to them in English (e.g., telling the cafeteria bully that "This pizza came from your mother's kitchen!")
4. Salwa likes to write a lot but she did not have many chances to write in the first semester and part of the second semester when Fares was observing in Mr. Ronaldo's class. She would have liked to write more because it is easy for her.
5. Salwa knows how to write in English, Arabic, and even Arabizi (Arabic/English).

### Member Checking Handout

Participant's Name: Zein

Date: June 1, 2016

#### Findings to check:

1. Zein loves to play videogames and write computer codes to create games. He dreams of becoming a professional game developer one day.
2. Zein is mostly bored In Mr. LeBlanc's class and does not like to participate because he does not feel comfortable with the students in that class whom he is not friends with.
3. Zein has a YouTube channel with many followers, and he loves to post videos that show his skills at gaming.
4. Zein is trilingual. He knows English, Arabic, and computer language. He can also write Arabizi which a mixed Arabic/English language that he uses sometimes to text or communicate through social media.
5. Zein has created a videogame as a project for Mr. LeBlanc's class and scored an A on it. He felt proud that he was able to share his abilities as a game developer with the rest of his class, and was happy to hear Mr. Arquette give him good feedback.



### Member Checking Handout

Participant's Name: Suha

Date: June 1, 2016

#### Findings to check:

1. Suha was very frustrated with the fact that she could not graduate high school due to her failing the SOL exams required for college admission at her state. She wrote a letter to the governor's office to try to persuade him to lower the scores for ESOL students or cancel the SOLs.
2. Suha dreams of becoming a dentist and sometimes in Ms. Hills class she would read her dentistry notes and practice spelling of vocabulary words.
3. Suha does not like the reading and writing activities in Ms. Hills' class. She has sometimes explicitly refused to participate in class activities or write in her journal that she has nothing to write since the topic is not interesting.
4. Suha confronted Ms. Hills several times in class due to Suha's belief that Ms. Hills did not explain the concepts well or did not give proper direction in class.
5. Suha refuses to hang out with white girls at school who think that they should be the best. She has a Colombian friend whom she met at school in ESOL class and still hangs out with outside of class.
6. Suha is very active on social media and has several accounts. She uses Facebook messenger most frequently to communicate with friends and family.
7. Suha does not allow anyone to bully her and confronts them if/when they do. When one student told her she was "smoking" in class because she did not eat pork, she openly confronted him and said she was not, adding that it was a "free country" where she is free to eat or not to eat whatever she wants.

## Appendix G

### Suha's Letter

Suha

Oct, 7. 15

Dear Mr. Smith,

This the student Suha that I met you when you was in my city with the governor. Today am going to write this letter to explain to you more, and with more details about how second language people are feeling about the system to the state standardized tests. Most of the student of second language are not perfect in English, but they are trying their best to pass these state standardized tests. For second language students, it's literally hard cause it needs more language. It needs more vocabulary in order to be able to pass these tests. I am one of the student in High School, am one of these student who loves to study hard, try hard, put all my attention to be a successful person, to graduate and makes this country proud of me, and also to make my family proud of me. I been through alot of challenges since I came here like language is the hardest thing to do, student, new culture, and hard classes, but I haven't give up because give up is not one of my options in this life. Am trying to clarifying how people from different countries are tried hard enough than everyone who has been born here.

My consideration today, is to look for thes student, and help them to graduate, or help them by eliminate the state standardized tests especially the reading and the writing, or you make less scor for us, which is for second language people. Am going to school for just one subject, the reading state standardized test. Am smart, and super smart, but to be smart it's not enough to be able to pass language test, or a big comprehension test like this. So try to see the people that are trying so hard, putting all them attention, and at the same time learning new language. I am looking forward to change, improve, progress, and to change it for us cause we're all old enough to be in school. I personal can be in college and I can certainly can handle everything. Am super persist to make this aw change, so I can be in college, and I will definitely learn more amount of English, and knowledge. I'll also makes this country proud of me because I'll do my best, I'll persuade each individual professor will be through my life. I am begging you to help us, and work hard for us too in order to change. Please don't make student hate go to school, of the state standardized test system. Am more than thankful for giving to me your time and reading my letter. Wish for you good luck. I really appreciate you effort, and your time.

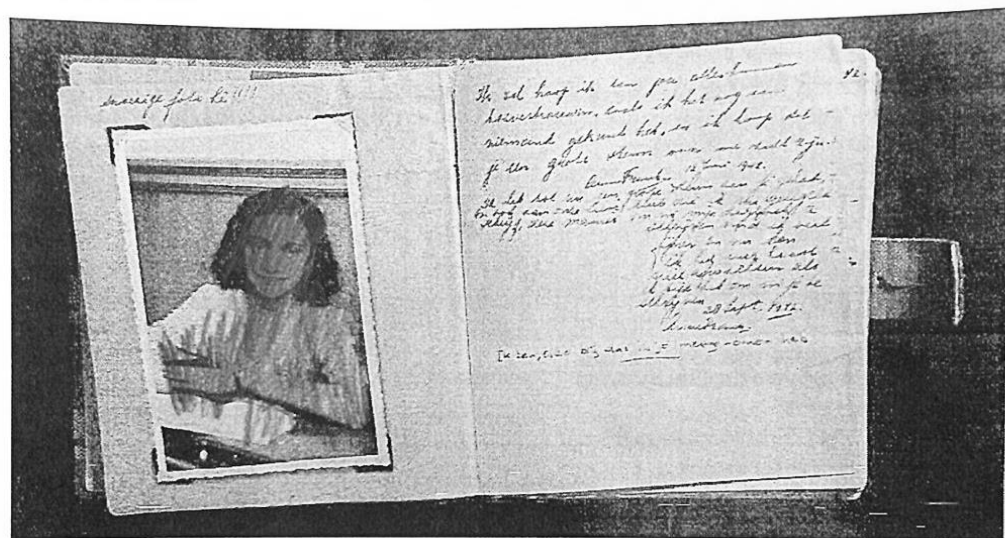
## Appendix H

Anne Frank's Text (Zein's Class)

# Syrian refugees' story mimics struggles by Anne Frank's family 75 years ago

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.01.15

Word Count 869



A picture of Anne Frank is pasted in a book at the exhibition "Anne Frank, a History for Today" at the Westerborn Remembrance Centre in Hooghalen, Netherlands, June 12, 2009. Photo: AP Photo/Bas Czerwinski

President Barack Obama has pledged to take in 10,000 Syrian refugees who are fleeing war in their homeland. There was another group of refugees — Jews trying to escape Europe on the eve of World War II — who also sought to come to the United States. Many have noted the similar obstacles that the two groups, more than 75 years apart, have faced.

Among the many who tried — and failed — to escape German persecution were Otto Frank and his family. His wife was Edith, and his daughters were named Margot and Anne, who was the author of "The Diary of Anne Frank." In 2007, American University history professor Richard Breitman wrote about the discovery of old documents. They told the story of the Franks' struggle to get permission to come to the U.S.

Otto Frank survived the Holocaust, the mass killing and imprisonment of European Jews during World War II by German Nazis. Breitman said that if immigration rules had been different "Anne Frank could be a 77-year-old woman living in Boston today — a writer."

Instead, she died at the age of 15 in a German concentration camp.

## Appendix I

### Zein's Digital Funny Story

Name	Transcript	Descriptive comments
Zein	Peace be upon you How are you Would you like to play <i>Soup</i> Would you like to play <i>Iron Sword</i>	Zein walks up to two Minecraft players and greets them. He asks if they would like to play “ <i>Soup</i> ” or “ <i>Iron Sword</i> ”. (operatic music is playing in the background)
Character 1	No	The first character answers no.
Character 2	No and NO	The second character answers no emphatically by repeating it twice.
Zein	I am starting to get angry... Are you laughing at me This is a stone sword (stabs Character 1)	Zein is starting to get angry which shows through his body language on the video and through stabbing Character 1.
Character 1	Be respectful <i>OK</i>	Character 1 asks Zein to be respectful.
Zein	This is the best <i>Diamond Sword</i> for you (pokes character 1) Why don't you want to play?	Zein pokes Character 1 with his sword and asks him why he doesn't want to play.
Character 1	Can you really beat me?	Character 1 challenges Zein and asks if he can beat him.
Zein	You are not a respectful person	Zein tells Character 1 that he is not respectful.
Character 2	Back off	Character 2 tells Zein to back off.
Zein	I will go to my beloved	Zein seems disappointed and says that he will go to his beloved.
Character 2	AH	
Zein	Is this how you draw (your sword) on me?	The background music changes from operatic to sad as Zein walks away dejectedly.
*Narrator	Team Tikfa!	“Team Tikfa!” appears on the screen. The music changes from sad to operatic.
Zein	Let's run Physical activity is life!! xD :D Let's run	Operatic music still playing.

Zein	Do you think you can run faster than I can (runs after Character 2 and stabs him) What an attitude (stabs character 2) wwe	Zein is running after Character 2 and stabbing him. It is not clear whether the characters are playing together or they are fighting (or both?)
Narrator	Close contact	
Zein	He can't see me	Zein is hiding behind a wall.
Narrator	The end of friendship	Zein stabs Character 2 and ends his life.

\*It is not clear whether the words are meant to be Zein's or an omniscient narrator.