Articles

Remote Learning and First-Year Academic Literacy during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Interaction and Collaborative Learning among EAL Students

Steve Marshall, Joel Heng Hartse, Ismaeil Fazel, and Gahyun Son

During the rapid shift to remote teaching and learning that came with the COVID-19 pandemic early in 2020, for many students and instructors, important interactions and collaborative learning took place via online platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Our study focuses on the impacts of remote learning on first-year English as an additional language (EAL) students taking academic literacy/writing courses. For these students, the shift from face-to-face to remote learning environments had major impacts on their ability to interact and collaborate with peers, key factors for successful academic literacy development and for success in their studies.

We present selected data from a broader one-year study at a university in the Vancouver Metropolitan area, specifically, interviews with EAL students about their experiences in remotely taught academic literacy classrooms. Our analysis is informed by the theoretical lenses of academic literacies and academic discourse socialization in higher-education contexts, while also considering recent literature on remote learning in higher education. When asked about their experiences in interviews, participants described challenges related to interacting and collaborating with peers, making friends, and developing competence in English language and academic literacy. We conclude by discussing the lessons we can bring forward into the post–remote teaching era.

Dans le contexte du virage rapide vers l'enseignement et l'apprentissage à distance qui a accompagné la pandémie du COVID-19 au début de l'année 2020, les interactions importantes et l'apprentissage collaboratif ont eu lieu sur des plateformes en ligne telles que Zoom et Microsoft Teams pour de nombreux étudiants et enseignants. Notre étude examine l'impact de l'apprentissage à distance sur des étudiants de première année de l'anglais en tant que langue additionnelle (ALA) qui suivent des cours de littératie académique et d'écriture. Pour ces étudiants, le passage d'un environnement d'apprentissage en personne à un environnement

d'apprentissage à distance a eu un impact majeur sur leur capacité à interagir et à collaborer avec leurs pairs, des facteurs clés pour un développement réussi de la littératie académique et pour la réussite dans leurs études.

Nous présentons des données sélectionnées issues d'une étude plus large menée au cours d'un an dans une université de la région métropolitaine de Vancouver, à savoir des entretiens avec des étudiants ALA sur leurs expériences dans des cours de littératie académique enseignés à distance. Notre analyse s'appuie sur les théories des littératies académiques et de la socialisation au discours académique dans les contextes de l'enseignement supérieur, tout en tenant compte de la littérature récente sur l'apprentissage à distance dans l'enseignement supérieur. Interrogés sur leurs expériences lors des entretiens, les participants ont décrit les défis liés à l'interaction et à la collaboration avec leurs pairs, à se faire des amis et au développement de leurs compétences en anglais et en littératie académique. Nous concluons en discutant des leçons que nous pouvons mettre de l'avant dans cette ère qui suit l'enseignement à distance.

The growth of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 led to a rapid shift in teaching and learning in higher-education contexts across the globe. In many cases, this shift to emergency remote teaching took place at a fast pace and in a rather unstructured way (Oliveira et al., 2021). As institutions shifted, some gradually, others suddenly, to hybrid and remote modes of teaching, both instructors and their students had to adapt to new modes of teaching and learning. For many students and instructors, the classroom became a computer screen at home, and peer interactions took place in breakout rooms on platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. While a great deal of research has already been published about the shift to remote learning in higher-education contexts, there remains a relative lack of published work that has focused specifically on the impacts of remote learning on English as an additional language (EAL) students taking academic literacy/writing courses during their first year of study. For these students, the change from face-to-face to remote learning environments had major impacts on their ability to interact and collaborate with peers, key skills for successful academic literacy development and for success in their studies.

We present selected data from a broader one-year qualitative study that took place at a university in the Vancouver Metropolitan area of British Columbia, Canada, in which we interviewed EAL students taking a first-year academic literacy course (ALC), and their instructors, about their remote learning experiences. The theoretical approach to the study reflects a coming together of two of the closely related analytic lenses of the research team, namely, academic literacies and academic discourse socialization in higher education contexts, while also considering recent literature on remote learning. In the broader study, we found that students and instructors raised numerous issues ranging from the inability to make friends and interact in familiar ways during the first year of university (students) to students' unfamiliarity with remote learning modes and the pedagogical challenges that this posed (instructors). Our specific focus in this article is on a subset of data from interviews with EAL students in which we discussed how the remote

learning environment affected their interactions and collaborative learning with peers. We focus on instructors' perspectives in other ongoing work.

While the concept of interaction has been much discussed in the field of second language acquisition (see Gass & Mackey, 2013, and Mackey et al., 2013, for an overview of interactionist approaches in SLA), our use of the term *interaction* reflects a methodologically and philosophically distinct qualitative orientation to how students communicate and work together in the specific contexts of the study. For example, while we recognize the importance of interaction from an interactionist perspective as an essential stage in academic literacy development between input (what the teacher teaches) and output (students' effective application of knowledge in context), our study focuses on interaction in terms of what the participants shared in interviews, guided by our questions: communication (or the lack of it) as a way to make friends, communication with instructors and peers to ask questions about course content, interacting with peers to build social networks, and the effects of remote as opposed to in-person interactions in their classes. Moreover, our focus on how EAL students interact and collaborate with peers in remotely delivered classes takes place in a setting where the distinction between language and academic literacy/writing is not always clear. For many of the student participants in our study, their academic literacy class is their "English class," and many informally refer to it as such. In this sense, particularly for EAL students, learning and improving academic communication go hand in hand with, and are inseparable from, improving English language competence.

Theoretical Framing of the Study

Our framing and analysis are a reflection of two complementary, overlapping theoretical perspectives that have influenced the research team and are of relevance to the first-year experiences of EAL students in higher education: academic literacies and academic discourse socialization. We build on these two perspectives by referring to recent related literature on remote learning in higher-education contexts and, more specifically, in academic literacy classes. In bringing together these perspectives, we aim to analyze the experiences of participants through important theoretical lenses that inform our practice as educators. In a relatively short article such as this one that focuses on empirical data and on the impacts for practitioners, it is beyond our scope to go into considerable theoretical depth in our review of related literature. Instead, we highlight key areas of relevance that we will draw upon in our data analysis.

According to an academic literacies approach to researching reading and writing in higher education (Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 2004), the term itself, *academic literacies*, serves as a broad umbrella that encompasses several aspects of academic communication in higher education. Accordingly, academic writing in higher education is understood as a social practice that is determined in part by the contexts, cultures, and genres in which it occurs. In this sense, students' academic communication practices should be understood in terms of a range of social factors that influence learning. For example, students' practices can be seen as being shaped in part by students' socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, including educational background, social class, ethnicity, and the cultural communities that they participate in, among many other factors. The concept of culture here also extends to national, social, and academic cultures within higher education: cultures of here, there, and in-between for transnational students; the different academic cultures in which students study (for example, education, business, applied sciences); and all of the associated and competing practices and expectations therein when it comes to producing different genres of writing for learning and assessment.

An academic literacies lens also allows us to focus on identities and epistemologies. The focus on identities brings to the fore factors such as students' identities (essentialist, multiple, hybrid, and fluid)

perceived and performed in their daily lives as well as through their academic practices in higher education. In addition, a focus on epistemologies recognizes that the different ways in which students construct knowledge and form ways of knowing in and around their learning relate to how and why they communicate academically. While employing these multiple lenses under an academic literacies umbrella, it is important to recognize that students may be going through one or more of the following complex processes of transition: transitions from secondary to higher education, from teenage years to adulthood, and from studying generic academic literacy in a first-year course to discipline-specific literacies concurrently and/or after the course. Through these multiple transitions, the ALC course plays an important role in first-year students' socialization into the many academic communities and practices that they need to successfully navigate to succeed in their studies.

Academic discourse socialization also provides us with a closely related conceptual lens for understanding and researching how novice EAL students in higher education learn the discourses and practices of target academic communities. According to Duff (2010), academic discourse socialization involves a "bi- and multidirectional, contingent process" (p. 171) whereby novices both influence and are influenced by the norms and conventions of the target academic discourse community. From this perspective, learning is mediated mainly by (formal and informal) social interactions in and outside the classroom, both in person and virtually, with peers and mentors (Duff, 2020; Duff et al., 2019). Within the broad body of literature on academic discourse socialization, as stated by Zappa-Hollman & Duff (2015) in their analysis of 22 students' processes of academic socialization at a Canadian university, the academic literacy classroom can be understood as a particular discourse community, within which new members must go through complex processes of socialization and adaptation in the process of becoming legitimate members. These processes involve a combination of social, discursive, and cognitive factors (Duff, 2010) that change according to time, space, and context.

One such context, and the focus of our study, is EAL students in academic literacy classes (Duff & Anderson, 2015; Kobayashi et al., 2017; Morita & Kobayashi, 2008) in which students' interactions with peers and negotiation of ESL/EAL identities (Burhan-Horasanlı, 2022; Godfrey, 2015; Marshall, 2009; Waterstone, 2008) play key roles in their development and socialization. In this sense, students' processes of academic socialization are constructed discursively (e.g., affected by powerful social and institutional discourses) and through classroom practices (e.g., via perceptions and performances of identities and through peer interactions). In this regard, it has been argued that macro-social dimensions (evident in both academic literacies and academic discourse socialization approaches) are constituted in the micro-social practices that novices are being inducted or socialized into in higher education (Duff, 2002; 2010; Haggerty, 2019). Additionally, a small body of research has explored students' academic discourse socialization in and through digitally mediated spaces, including online discussion boards (Beckett et al., 2010; Yim, 2011), social networking platforms such as Facebook (Reinhardt & Zander, 2011), bilingual chat rooms (Lam, 2004), and digital reading platforms (Burhan-Horasanlı, 2022). By and large, the findings of these studies have highlighted the potential capacities of various online spaces, which can catalyze students' processes of academic discourse socialization. While the present study does not offer insight into its participants' actual processes of academic discourse socialization, as some of the above studies have, we do understand the participants' experiences as being inherently related to the process of learning how to "do" academic discourse in a uniquely challenging environment, nonetheless.

In our analysis, we also consider the large body of literature that has emerged on a range of issues related to the shift to remote learning in different higher-education contexts around the world. For example, Fayed and Cummins (2022) have presented a comprehensive edition on teaching in the post-COVID era, including studies from higher-education contexts, which has brought together a collection of works from 30 settings worldwide around dilemmas, teaching innovations, and solutions. Ali's (2020) widely cited work, a meta-analysis of related studies, highlighted the vulnerability of education systems around the world and the need for flexibility and resilience in light of the global pandemic, also highlighting the need

for staff readiness and confidence as well as student access to courses. Similarly, Post et al. (2019) provided a review of literature on the effectiveness of remote labs in higher education, suggesting that the 23 articles they reviewed showed that students were satisfied and engaged and were able to gain conceptual knowledge in remotely taught labs. Additionally, Ghazi-Saidi et al. (2020) studied five undergraduate and graduate courses that had transitioned from in-person to remote learning in a US university, focusing on instructors' previous experience teaching online, their self-reflection, and recommendations for successful teaching and learning, as well as student satisfaction. And in Oliveira et al.'s (2021) exploratory qualitative study of the emergency remote education experiences of higher-education students and teachers, the authors focused on the role that technology plays in mediating such processes, finding a juxtaposition between positive experiences using ICT platforms and more negative perceptions around self-adaptation among students and their teachers.

Other studies have looked specifically at remote learning during the COVID pandemic in language learning and academic literacy contexts in higher education. With a focus on language learning classes, Moorhouse and Kohnke (2021) provide a systematic review of empirical studies pertaining to English-language teaching (including, but not limited to, higher-education contexts) during the COVID-19 pandemic, while Moorhouse et al. (2022) analyzed classroom practices related to assisting and mediating interaction in synchronous online language classes in higher-education institutions in Hong Kong. With a specific focus on the effects of the transition to remote learning in academic literacy classrooms, in Magogwe et al.'s (2022) quantitative study of the experiences of 180 students taking an online communication and academic literacy course in Botswana, the authors focused on the challenges that students faced and their use of online resources to meet these challenges. Similarly, Dankers et al.'s (2022) study analyzes the experiences and perceptions of digital academic literacy tutors during the COVID pandemic at a university in South Africa, in particular on the limitations of access to online resources. And with a focus on academic literacy classrooms in Colombia, Doria and Mendinueta (2021) also raise important issues related to access to resources and equity, highlighting factors such as household assets and living conditions, quality of electrical supply and internet access, and the related challenges that come with teaching students with limited literacy skills in the first year of higher education. The authors suggest that lack of access and effects of the pandemic on students' literacy skills could serve to widen the equity gap in question.

As we sum up this brief review of some of the recent studies of remote learning in higher education, it is worth noting the related themes that stand out in this field of study, and in our practice: equity and access to online resources for students and teachers alike; the dilemmas that teachers face and the innovations and strategies that they employ in their classes; students' challenges and perceptions of success in remote learning environments; and the need to bridge gaps in academic literacy knowledge and skills among students, particularly during their first year of studies in higher education. With these key themes in mind, we aim to build on this emerging body of literature by focusing on related themes that have had less focus in the existing literature, namely, the experiences of EAL students in remotely delivered academic literacy classes in Canada, with a specific focus on how remote learning environments affect students' interactions and collaboration with peers as a key part of the academic literacy–learning process.

In Figure 1, we highlight the three complementary, interrelated lenses that frame our study and analysis of students' interactions and collaboration in remotely taught academic literacy classes. The three lenses in Figure 1 should be understood as complementary, overlapping, and interrelated rather than mutually exclusive. In this sense, key factors are present in more than one category. For example, discourse and the discursive construction of students' experiences are present in two of the three categories;

engagement and interaction with peers come to the fore in two categories; and equity as a concept and goal is present in all three, although it is stated explicitly in only one of the three.

Figure 1

Framing Interaction and Collaboration in Remote Academic Literacy Classes
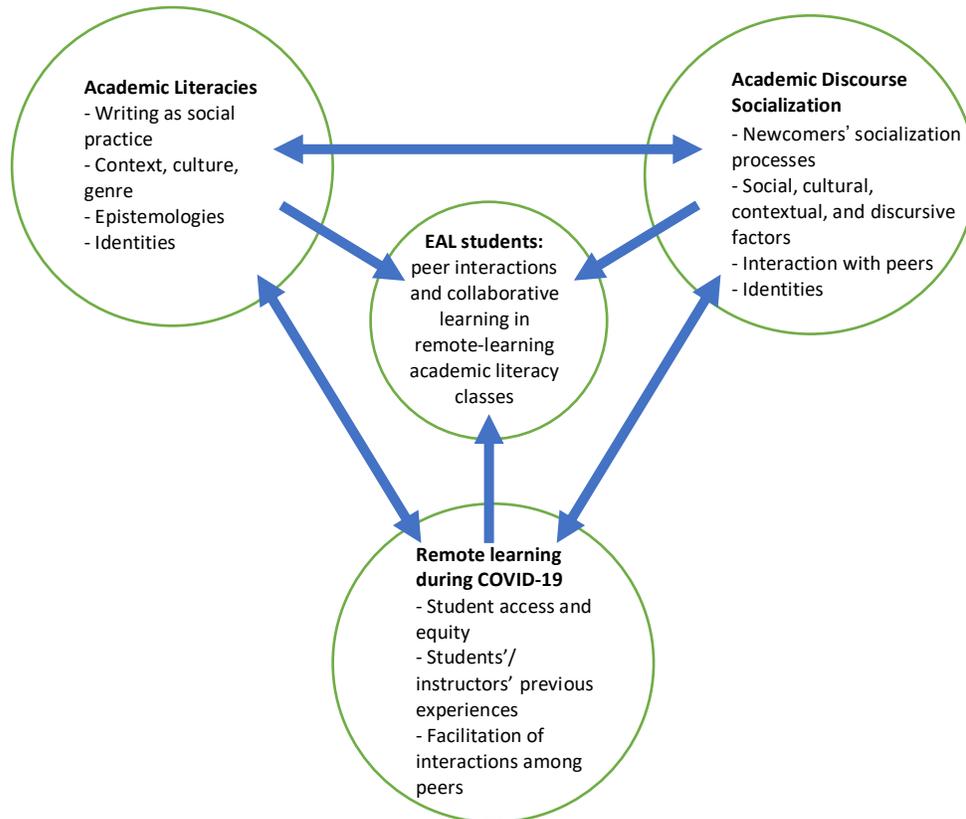
Context of the Study

While participants' multilingual practices are not a main focus of the data presented in this article, the multicultural backdrop of the city where the institution is located merits a mention. The study took place at a multilingual, multicultural university that we have called Western Canadian University (WCU), located in the Vancouver Metropolitan area, which has a population of 2.6 million people. Statistics from the most recent census, conducted in 2021, show that a total of 42.4% in the Greater Vancouver area reported speaking a mother tongue other than the two official languages of Canada, English and French. Within this group, 17.2% reported speaking Mandarin, 16.5% Yue (Cantonese), 16.2% Punjabi, 6.1% Tagalog, 4.7% Korean, 4.1% Spanish, 3.9% Farsi, and 2.5% Hindi (Statistics Canada, 2023). Moreover, more than 1.3 million people in the given area reported being able to conduct a conversation in a non-official language (Statistics Canada, 2023). As a result, it is a normal practice for people to use languages other than English in their daily lives in Greater Vancouver, including in the city's higher-education institutions. Recent data collected internally at WCU which analyzed incoming students' self-declared language use during the enrolment process revealed that approximately 35% of students at the university reported using

English as an additional language, while other surveys with smaller response rates have put the figure at 41%.

The course in question is a first-year academic literacy course that is taken by several hundred students each year. Students entering the university with a final Grade 12 (the final year of secondary education in British Columbia) English score of above 70% but below 75%, or with an overall IELTS score of at least 6.5 but under 7.0, are required to take the course. Students are required to pass the course with a grade of C or higher as a pre-condition to taking required writing in the disciplines courses in their chosen subject areas. International students admitted on the basis of other tests, such as TOEFL or Duolingo, are also required to take the ALC course. The course follows a foundational approach, with class size limited to 18, focusing on a range of academic literacy skills required for success in higher education, with the main focus on academic writing and scaffolded teaching of key assessed texts such as summaries, response papers, and research essays.

Methodology

After gaining ethics approval from the relevant institution, we sent an email to all students taking ALC and their instructors during the summer and fall semesters of 2020, inviting them to take part in the research. Despite the large number of students taking the course, only a small number of students (7) agreed to be interviewed about their experiences—perhaps as a result of the stresses and strains of adapting to remote learning during a global pandemic and varying degrees of local lockdown. The first three authors carried out individual semi-structured interviews remotely with the participants (see interview questions in the Appendix). Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews and our qualitative approach to collecting and analyzing data, we recognize the data that we collected to be the result of an interview space in which meanings are co-constructed by interviewers and interviewees (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018), sometimes following a clear question-and-answer format while in other instances moving to a more conversational type of interaction. The transcription of the interviews was conducted by the fourth author, and all original grammar and vocabulary was preserved to offer a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the participants' accounts of their experiences. After thoroughly reading and taking memos to familiarize ourselves with the transcripts, we generated initial codes, mostly descriptive rather than interpretive, following the guided interview questions. These codes were then collapsed and reviewed more interpretively during the construction of potential themes based on our theoretical framework, with the central themes of interaction and collaboration with peers coming to the fore. Consequently, three themes that relate to this concept were refined and named during the iterative analysis process and are presented in the next section.

The student participants were in their first year of higher education and were registered in different faculties across the university. All spoke and wrote English as an additional language. Due to the small sample size, and to protect confidentiality, we have chosen not to provide further information on students' backgrounds. Nor have we given student participants pseudonyms, choosing instead to refer to students with numbers 1 to 7.

Findings and Analysis

Our analysis of the data below focuses specifically on students' accounts of interactions and collaborations with peers. Data will be presented according to the three themes that stood out in our analysis, all of which relate to and are informed by the three analytic lenses that form the framing of the study in Figure 1. Our

analysis aims to form connections to issues and themes raised in the literature review above while also bringing into focus issues related to interaction and collaboration among EAL students in their classes.

Data excerpts are presented in their original forms without corrections to non-standard grammar and vocabulary, and with three periods (…) to illustrate where sections have been cut, two periods (..) for pauses, and square brackets [insert] for insertions that clarify meaning.

Interaction and Collaboration with Peers

As stated above, interaction and collaboration with peers and instructors are essential components of a successful academic literacy class, for both EAL students and their instructors. Students need to be able to share ideas and interpretations with their peers, review and discuss each other's work, and generally get to know each other and develop friendships, particularly in a course such as ALC, which students take during their first year of university, and in many cases during their first term. Equally, for instructors, it is important to work in a learning environment that encourages students to ask questions, for instructors to explain and ask questions, and for instructors to be able to develop a rapport with students and create a welcoming classroom environment for learning. Nonetheless, for all parties, the rapid switch to remote learning resulted in changes in essential modes of communication that previously would have been taken for granted in a face-to-face class. In this regard, the focus of one of the interview questions was on the extent to which students were able to interact and collaborate with peers in the remote ALC class.

Student 2's response below to a follow-up question asking why interaction and collaboration had been difficult is representative of many of the participants' reported experiences:

> Student 2: 'Cause I don't know them, so it's like impossible for me to just like say to someone and say hi to make friends. So I feel hard to do that so I would say it's not easy to interact with other students.

The participants reported that they were able to ask and answer questions in different modes of communication in the ALC remote learning class. During class, students would type their questions to the chat or verbally ask, while after class, they would post their questions to the course discussion board or send emails to instructors. However, Student 3 and Student 5 explained that they were not always willing to ask instructors or peers questions in class or on the discussion board:

> Student 3: You know sometimes I would have a question but you know it comes back to not being able to see anyone or it's not personal, I wouldn't ask … It's just a whole learning vibe you know, 'cause when you see someone in class every day, you get to know them.

> Student 5: I prefer not using the discussion board because I don't like everyone can see my questions and I think it's a little bit like um… I don't know. I just don't like them to see my questions. Maybe my questions can be little bit like really simple and for some people, they [the questions] are stupid or something like that.

Student 6, however, reported never having tried to interact with peers in the class in response to the interviewer's question:

> Interviewer: And did you find it easy to interact with other students in the course to collaborate with them?

Student 6: I never really did. I never tried. I wouldn't know how to if I were to communicate with them. [In a face-to-face class] you can ask for help easier from other students just like in class ask them, if you didn't hear something or if you had a challenge you couldn't understand something, they would help you for sure but with online classes, I don't really know other students. I don't even know how to reach them or if they're even willing to help.

Student 2's response above was framed around not making friends and lack of social interaction in terms of just saying hi, while Student 3 refers to the impersonal "learning vibe" of remote learning classrooms, which relates to not being able to see other students and deciding not to ask questions that may come up. Student 5 expresses a reluctance to use the online course space where all peers can see each other's questions; and finally, Student 6 described not knowing fellow students, not having interacted with peers, and being unsure if they would be willing to collaborate.

      In the four excerpts above, the remote learning environment seems to have removed the (inter)personal aspect of an in-person class, as described in different ways by the four participants. The lack of space for interaction and collaboration is presented as a problem. However, Students 1 and 7 (below) presented additional angles to consider with regard to a problematic lack of interaction or collaboration in classes. Student 1 explained that communicating in a remotely delivered class provided a certain degree of protection against feeling embarrassed, or showing embarrassment, in face-to-face communications:

Student 1: if you use face to face like a method to communicate with others, if you don't answer any question, you feel kind of shame. Or you feel not responsible because all the other group mates, they talk about something. But during the remote learning, since it's not face to face, you kind of talk whenever you want and maybe you turn off the video, they don't even see like their face. You can just speak.

Student 7 answered the same question first by recognizing that collaboration and interaction would be easier in a face-to-face class, before questioning the need for collaboration altogether:

Student 7: Collaborations and interactions with other students and also with instructors and TAs would have been easier [in a face-to-face class]. You could raise your hands and ask a question and just talk to whoever sitting close to you … Most of your progress depends on yourself. You have to work on it yourself and having collaborations would help, but seems, it wasn't necessary, we could say. It wasn't the key thing in our progress.

In the excerpts above, Students 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 offered different perspectives on the pros and cons of interacting and collaborating, or not, in a remotely taught academic literacy class. Their responses show that something that many would take as a given—that interaction and collaboration are problematic in a remotely delivered class—has multiple angles: despite the class being less personal, which makes questions and interactions more difficult, some may also see this space as a safe space that protects them from potential loss of face or as a space that is not seen to be key to success and progress. Interestingly, the diminished social interaction in the digitally mediated milieu that participants described differs from the findings reported in previous related research (e.g., Beckett et al., 2010; Burhan-Horasanlı, 2022; Reinhardt & Zander, 2011), which reported high levels of online interactivity, a key factor contributing to academic discourse socialization of students (Duff et al., 2019). It is important to note, though, that these cited learning contexts, with the notable exception of Burhan-Horasanlı's (2022) study, took place in the pre-

pandemic era. Moreover, and crucially, they will likely have been intended to supplement, rather than replace, face-to-face, in-person instruction. In contrast, the data in this study are from an academic literacy course that transitioned to remote delivery with little advance planning or preparation, as an emergency response to the pandemic.

Building Peer Networks with Cameras Off

A topic that both instructors and students may be familiar with is teaching and learning in remote classes delivered on platforms such as Zoom in which students do not turn on their cameras. In the excerpts below, Students 4 and 6 describe how interacting with students who did not turn on their cameras affected their learning experience:

> Student 4: Everybody's cameras were off, and when your cameras are on you kind of have that opportunity I guess to reach out to others and that's the same thing with in person, it was so much easier to make friends in person, and now that we are online it's like, "OK, I'm looking at a name and I have no idea what you look like."

> Student 6: Maybe in Zoom meetings actually see each other would be helpful probably because everybody would feel more engaged in the course. I remember [the instructor] did one assignment and put us in groups and no one ever talked to in my group. No one ever said anything in the group … Everybody's camera was off. It kind of does feel weird, the other people on the other side of your computer don't make me feel real.

According to Students 4 and 6, interacting and collaborating with students in remotely taught classes was impeded when their fellow students did not, or would not, turn on their cameras. Not knowing what another student looks like prevented Student 4 from reaching out to others and from making friends. Moreover, the fact that "no one ever said anything" in breakout room activities is linked to a lack of engagement and not feeling real for Student 6, which raises complex issues related to the ontological and epistemological contexts of the participants' learning. For Student 6, the real person on the other side of the computer is not visually identifiable, leading to a feeling of weirdness; moreover, the lack of visual confirmation of the other person's existence and presence affected Student 6's own ontological perspective: *the other people don't make me feel real*. Without the well-practised, familiar, face-to-face ways of making friends and learning about peers, some students were lost when they tried to make friends and interact with peers.

In an environment where familiar means of getting to know one another were challenged, exacerbated by students' not turning on their cameras, the desire for connection and interaction was strong enough that some students nevertheless found ways to get to know about each other, for example, through social media searches, rather than through direct communication. In this regard, Student 4 described using alternative ways to find out about classmates' lives, namely, searching classmates' names on social media to get some background:

> Student 4: I know a lot of people what they're doing right now is like you see a name and then you just like typing it into Instagram to try to find the profiles.

Student 4's response confirms the important role that interactions with peers play, we would argue not only in terms of learning course content but also in terms of finding out information about other students and reaching out to make friends. If online classrooms reduce students' means and ability to replicate in-

person strategies for building peer networks, students may use alternative online spaces to find out about classmates. The finding that some participants used social media to connect with classmates and to build peer networks resonates with similar findings (e.g., Lam, 2004; Reinhardt & Zander, 2011), which have shown the important role of social networking platforms in forging friendships and promoting peer interaction among students, which in turn can facilitate students' academic discourse socialization and academic literacy development.

Peer Interaction, Friendship, and English Language

For students during their first year of higher education, developing friendships is an expectation and an important part of making a successful transition from secondary to higher education and thus developing a sense of belonging (see, for example, Marshall et al., 2012). We would suggest that this may be even more important in the context of first-year academic literacy programs that students are required to take as a result of not meeting an institution's entrance requirements for English language and literacy. In such programs/courses, which may be ascribed institutional ESL/EAL/deficit identities despite students not self-identifying with the same labels (Marshall, 2009; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008), negotiating friendships can be quite complex; however, peer networks, especially among students from similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, can become crucial in students' successful navigation of academic programs (Fraiberg et al., 2017; Zhang-Wu, 2021). In this regard, the lack of face-to-face interaction was mentioned by Student 5, who attributed it to the inability to make friends and form peer networks with students from the same language background:

> Student 5: If I had a face-to-face class, I will have like some Chinese friends, like we will have a WeChat group and we will go to the class together and sit together and if there's something we don't understand, we can ask each other or ask other people. We can like set a time to…maybe study together like in school or like in the library, and go to the library together and write together for the final exam.

Student 5 has explained how EAL students may miss the chance to expand and enrich their learning experience in, and beyond, the classroom with their peers who speak the same language or who share similar backgrounds. For many EAL students, collaboration with peers through *plurilingual mediation* of course content/knowledge (Coste & Cavalli, 2015; Piccardo, 2012), through using shared languages other than English (Marshall, 2021), is a key interactional strategy to facilitate academic discourse socialization and academic literacy development in a more comfortable and effective way. For Student 5, the remote academic literacy classroom clearly impeded established interactional norms that serve as the initial stage to setting up networks and study groups in which course content is mediated through the same language, through physically sitting together during class and in study groups outside of classes. Student 3 highlights another possible problem for EAL students learning in remote classes—namely, a negative effect on English language learning:

> Student 3: I feel in-person, it's a lot more personable especially the course like that. There are always kids like you know may not have had the exposure to that type of course before, learning English, so in-person would be more personal and easier for them to learn as well.

It was stated above that many students taking ALC, an introductory academic literacy course, refer to the course as their English course. While this may be a continuation of naming practices that have their origins in the final years of secondary school, it also shows that for many EAL students, the English language and academic literacy are inseparable. For the students that Student 3 is referring to, who may lack previous exposure to learning through English, the lack of interaction with peers and instructors poses real challenges in terms of improving competence in general and academic English, both of which are essential for success in courses such as ALC where the final assessed products have to be written in academic English. However, as explained by Student 5 above, the learning process that some EAL students go through in creating the final monolingual assessed product often involves collaboration with peers, in and outside of classes, in languages other than English: or as stated by Marshall and Moore (2018), EAL students' learning strategies in first-year academic literacy courses are often characterized by a plurilingual process and a monolingual final product. Without the key stages of in-person peer interaction and collaboration, the learning process may suffer and students' progress may be impeded. In this sense, some participants in the study, similar to the EAL participants in Lam (2004), reported the desire to use plurilingual strategies to communicate with their peers, both in and out of the online classroom, regardless of whether instructors employed plurilingual pedagogy (Piccardo et al., 2021) in their academic literacy classes.

Conclusion

The data that we have presented and analyzed above have been from interviews with seven EAL students in a specific higher-education learning context, going through processes of academic discourse socialization and academic literacy development: in a remotely taught, required, high-stakes, first-year academic literacy course which aims to emphasize the assets that students bring to the class rather than the deficits or things that they may lack (Canagarajah, 2006; Marshall, 2009). In Figure 1, we presented the framing of our analysis in this study, highlighting three analytic lenses through which we attempt to analyze and understand the experiences of the participants in the study, in no hierarchical order: academic literacies (writing as social practice; context, culture, genres; epistemologies and identities); academic discourse socialization (newcomers' socialization processes; social, cultural, contextual and discursive factors; interaction with peers; identities); and remote learning during COVID-19 (student access and equity, students'/ instructors' previous experiences, facilitation of interactions among peers).

In terms of the three analytic lenses we described above, our data analysis suggests the following. First, in the contexts of novice students in a higher education institution replete with hegemonic rules and expectations about academic communication in English, students' discursively constructed practices and socialization processes are undoubtedly determined by these contexts and cultures, and in relation to the writing genres they are required to produce (Duff, 2010; Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 2004). Participants' membership in the ALC academic discourse community is indeed short-lived (Leki & Carson, 1994), but it is not without major struggles, not only when it comes to the ALC classes but also in the transition to writing in different disciplines either after the course (Leki, 1995; Leki & Carson, 1997) or concurrently.

In interviews, participants described their practices and perceptions that underwent major changes according to time, space, and context. For some, the sense of time and place changed as they connected remotely in different time zones across the world; others connected locally in the same time zone. All learned via online learning platforms in which knowledge was shared in a combination of synchronous and asynchronous modes. The remote nature of the class may have involved some students taking breaks to care for elderly family members, turning off the camera so that other students would not see their personal living situation, or not attending a synchronous session and following up with posted notes or videos later on (as we learned from other students in the course who did not participate in the study). Two

participants even went as far as to question the reality of their experience, stating "the other people don't make me feel real" in a remotely delivered ALC class that does not feel like "real" class. It is within this complex intermeshing of the social, discursive, and contextual aspects of participants' learning that they were required to find ways to interact, collaborate, and selectively opt in to or out of learning at different times for different reasons. Moreover, we suggest that, with the rapid shift to online learning, students may have struggled with social/affective factors (for example, the inability to make new friends) that hindered their interactions and communications, while both teachers and students needed to be able to adapt, innovate, and meet the daily challenges that came with learning in an online environment during a pandemic.

Our findings are inevitably limited within the parameters and contexts of our study, given the relatively small number of student participants and the specific nature of a course taught remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these limitations, our study offers insights into the nuanced experiences of EAL students navigating remote learning, which are potentially applicable to certain contexts in the post-pandemic period.

We concluded our analysis at a time when the shift to remote learning that came with the COVID pandemic had come to an end in many institutions in Canada and elsewhere in the world. It is important, therefore, to consider the lessons learned and their relevance and applicability in the return to in-person learning in both academic literacy and other classes. Due to the shift back to in-person teaching and learning that most educators have now completed, we do not conclude with recommendations for practice (in remote learning contexts during a pandemic); instead, we end by considering lessons learned that we may be able to carry forward into the current era. The first is the need for active and meaningful peer collaboration and engagement with ideas in our classes, in ways that allow students to feel like they belong to the class and the wider institution, and which enhance learning and retention of knowledge. In this regard, we stress the need for educators to develop instructional strategies and activities in online settings, and in person, that encourage student engagement and collaboration (Guillén et al., 2020; Ross & DiSalvo, 2020) and allow students to develop a "social presence" (Lomicka, 2020), thus promoting "the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as 'real' people" (Garrison et al., 1999, p. 94).

Moreover, we have also learned from interviews that remote learning brings a certain degree of time-saving and convenience to many students, particularly on campuses that are a long commute from students' homes. In this regard, there is room for courses such as ALC to offer blended, hybrid modes of delivery that make the most of the advantages without accentuating the drawbacks of remote learning. And finally, in a conceptual sense, our students have led us to understand the importance of time, space, and contexts in academic literacy education and academic socialization for novice EAL students—in terms of previously taken-for-granted time–space relations changing through technology and remote delivery, and in terms of more practical issues such as the importance of actually seeing the faces of, and being in the physical presence of, fellow students and instructors. As the move back to in-person teaching and learning brought its own challenges, and students and instructors have continued to benefit from some of the virtual platforms and practices instituted during the remote learning period, we feel it is important to highlight the issues that the students interviewed in this study raised regarding peer interaction and collaboration and their relevance to the face-to-face classroom.

The Authors

Steve Marshall is a professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. His research focuses on academic literacy, plurilingualism, international teacher education, and linguistic landscapes.

Joel Heng Hartse is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. His most recent book is *TL;DR: A Very Brief Guide to Reading & Writing in University* (On Campus/UBC Press, 2023).

Ismaeil Fazel is a term lecturer in the Faculty of Education of the University of British Columbia and a professor of liberal arts at Yorkville University. His research interests and scholarly publications focus on instruction and assessment of L2 writing as well as English for academic and publication purposes.

Gahyun Son is a PhD candidate in the Languages, Cultures, and Literacies program in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Her research interests include plurilingualism, academic literacies, and inclusive teaching and learning practices in higher education.

References

Ali, W. (2020). Online and remote learning in higher education institutes: A necessity in light of COVID-19 pandemic. *Higher Education Studies*, *10*(3), 16–25. https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v10n3p16

Beckett, G. H., Amaro-Jiménez, C., & Beckett, K. S. (2010). Students' use of asynchronous discussions for academic discourse socialization. *Distance Education*, *31*(3), 315–335. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2010.513956

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2018). *Doing interviews* (2nd ed.). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529716665

Burhan-Horasanlı, E. (2022). Digital social reading: Exploring multilingual graduate students' academic discourse socialization in online platforms. *Linguistics and Education*, *71*, 101099. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2022.101099

Canagarajah, A. S. (2006). Understanding critical writing. In P. K. Matsuda, M. Cox, J. Jordan, & C. Ortmeier-Hooper (Eds.), *Second language writing in the composition classroom: A critical sourcebook* (pp. 210-224). Bedford/St. Martin's.

Coste, D., & Cavalli, M. (2015). Extension du domaine de la médiation. *Lingue Culture Mediazioni / Languages Cultures Mediation (LCM Journal)*, *1*(1–2), 101–117. https://doi.org/10.7358/lcm-2014-0102-cost

Dankers, P., Stoltenkamp, J., & Donson, T. (2022). The perception of digital academic literacy tutors during the COVID-19 pandemic at the University of the Western Cape. *International Journal of Technology in Education and Science (IJTES)*, *6*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.46328/ijtes.318

Doria, C. M. H., & Mendinueta, N. R. (2021). "Not in the same boat": Navigating towards academic literacy teaching during the COVID-19 crisis. In I. Fayed & J. Cummings (Eds.), *Teaching in the post COVID-19 era: World education dilemmas, teaching innovations and solutions in the age of crisis* (pp. 111–118). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-74088-7_10

Duff, P. A. (2002). The discursive co-construction of knowledge, identity, and difference: An ethnography of communication in the high school mainstream. *Applied Linguistics*, *23*(3), 289–322. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/23.3.289

Duff, P. A. (2010). Language socialization into academic discourse communities. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *30*, 169–192. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190510000048

Duff, P. A. (2020). Language socialization in classrooms: Findings, issues, and possibilities. In M. J. Burdelski & K. M. Howard (Eds.), *Language socialization in classrooms: Culture, interaction, and language development* (pp. 249–264). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316946237.016

Duff, P. A., & Anderson, T. (2015). Academic language and literacy socialization for second language students. In N. Markee (Ed.), *The handbook of classroom discourse and interaction* (pp. 337–352). Wiley-Blackwell.

Duff, P., Zappa-Hollman, S., & Surtees, V. (2019). Research on language and literacy socialization at Canadian universities. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, *75*(4), 308–318. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.2019-0279

Fayed, I., & Cummings, J. (Eds.). (2022). *Teaching in the post COVID-19 era: World education dilemmas, teaching innovations and solutions in the age of crisis*. Springer.

Fraiberg, S., Wang, X., & You, X. (2017). *Inventing the world grant university: Chinese international students' mobilities, literacies, and identities*. University Press of Colorado.

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (1999). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education, 2*(2–3), 87–105. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1096-7516(00)00016-6

Gass, S. M., & Mackey, A. (Eds.). (2013). *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203808184

Ghazi-Saidi, L., Criffield, A., Kracl, C. L., McKelvey, M., Obasi, S. N., & Vu, P. (2020). Moving from face-to-face to remote instruction in a higher education institution during a pandemic: Multiple case studies. *International Journal of Technology in Education and Science (IJTES)*, *4*(4), 370–383. https://doi.org/10.46328/ijtes.v4i4.169

Godfrey, L. (2015). *Becoming a writer, becoming a student: The pedagogy of academic discourse socialization in a first-year writing course for non-native English speakers* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Minnesota. http://hdl.handle.net/11299/175441

Guillén, G., Sawin, T., & Avineri, N. (2020). Zooming out of the crisis: Language and human collaboration. *Foreign Language Annals, 53*(2), 320–328. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12459

Haggerty, J. (2019). *Multilingual undergraduate writers' discourse socialization in a sheltered academic English program* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of British Columbia. http://hdl.handle.net/2429/72303

Kobayashi, M., Zappa-Hollman, S., & Duff, P. A. (2017). Academic discourse socialization. In P. Duff & S. May (Eds.), *Language socialization. Encyclopedia of language and education* (3rd ed.) (pp. 239–254). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02255-0_18

Lam, W. S. E. (2004). Second language socialization in a bilingual chat room: Global and local considerations. *Language Learning & Technology*, *8*(3), 44–65. http://llt.msu.edu/vol8num3/lam/

Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, *23*(2), 157–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079812331380364

Leki, I. (1995). Coping strategies of ESL students in writing tasks across the curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly*, *29*(2), 235–260. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587624

Leki, I., & Carson, J. G. (1994). Students' perceptions of EAP writing instruction and writing needs across the disciplines. *TESOL Quarterly*, *28*(1), 81–101. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587199

Leki, I., & Carson, J. (1997). "Completely different worlds": EAP and the writing experiences of ESL students in university courses. *TESOL Quarterly*, *31*(1), 39–69. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587974

Lomicka, L. (2020). Creating and sustaining virtual language communities. *Foreign Language Annals*, *53*(2), 306–313. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12456

Mackey, A., Abbuhl, R., & Gass, S. M. (2013). Interactionist approach. In S. M. Gass & A. Mackey (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 25–41). Routledge.

Magogwe, J. M., Mokibelo, E. B., & Karabo, L. (2022). Online learning during Covid-19: Readiness of communication and academic literacy skills students at the University of Botswana. *TOJET: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, *21*(1).

Marshall, S. (2009). Re-becoming ESL: Multilingual university students and a deficit identity. *Language and Education*, *24*(1), 41–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500780903194044

Marshall, S. (2021). Plurilingual students' mediation of course content through the same shared language at a Canadian university. *Fremdsprachen und Hochschule 96*, 91–110.

Marshall, S., & Moore, D. (2018). Plurilingualism amid the panoply of lingualisms: Addressing critiques and misconceptions in education. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *15*(1), 19–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2016.1253699

Marshall, S., Zhou, M., Gervan, T., & Wiebe, S. (2012). Sense of belonging and first-year academic literacy. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, *43*(3), 116–142.

Moorhouse, B. L., & Kohnke, L. (2021). Responses of the English-language-teaching community to the COVID-19 pandemic. *RELC Journal*, *52*(3), 359–378. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882211053052

Moorhouse, B. L., Walsh, S., Li, Y., & Wong, L. L. C. (2022). Assisting and mediating interaction during synchronous online language lessons: Teachers' professional practices. *TESOL Quarterly*, *56*(3), 934–960. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3144

Morita, N., & Kobayashi, M. (2008). Academic discourse socialization in a second language. In N. H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (pp. 2805–2817). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-30424-3_210

Oliveira, G., Grenha Teixeira, J., Torres, A., & Morais, C. (2021). An exploratory study on the emergency remote education experience of higher education students and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *52*(4), 1357–1376. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13112

Ortmeier-Hooper, C. (2008). English may be my second language, but I'm not "ESL." *College Composition and Communication*, *59*(3), 389–419. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20457011

Piccardo, E. (2012). Médiation et apprentissage des langues : pourquoi est-il temps de réfléchir à cette notion? *Éla. Études de linguistique appliquée*, *3*(167), 285–297.

Piccardo, E., Germain-Rutherford, A., & Lawrence, G. (Eds.). (2021). *The Routledge handbook of plurilingual language education*. Routledge.

Post, L. S., Guo, P., Saab, N., & Admiraal, W. (2019). Effects of remote labs on cognitive, behavioral, and affective learning outcomes in higher education. *Computers & Education*, *140*, 103596. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2019.103596

Reinhardt, J., & Zander, V. (2011). Social networking in an intensive English program classroom: A language socialization perspective. *CALICO Journal*, *28*(2), 326–344. https://www.jstor.org/stable/calicojournal.28.2.326

Ross, A. F., & DiSalvo, M. L. (2020). Negotiating displacement, regaining community: The Harvard Language Center's response to the COVID-19 crisis. *Foreign Language Annals*, 53(2), 371–379. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12463

Statistics Canada. (2023, November 15). *Census profile, 2021 census of population* [Profile table]. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E

Street, B. (2004). Academic literacies and the "new orders": Implications for research and practice in student writing in higher education. *Learning & Teaching in the Social Sciences*, 1(1), 9–20.

Waterstone, B. (2008). I hate the ESL idea! A case study in identity and academic literacy. *TESL Canada Journal*, 26(1), 52–67. https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v26i1.390

Yim, Y.-K. K. (2011). Second language students' discourse socialization in academic online communication. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 67(1), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.67.1.001

Zappa-Hollman, S., & Duff, P. A. (2015). Academic English socialization through individual networks of practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, 49(2), 333–368. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.188

Zhang-Wu, Q. (2021). *Languaging myths and realities: Journeys of Chinese international students*. Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788926904

Appendix: List of the semi-structured interview questions

1. Can you describe your overall experience with remote instruction of the course (ALC)?
2. What were the best aspects of the course?
3. What were the weakest aspects of the course?
4. What challenges did you face in the course?
5. What didn't you like about taking the course remotely?
6. What activities in the course were most beneficial?
7. Did you find it easy to collaborate with other students in the course?
8. Did you find it easy to interact with other students in the course?
9. Do you think your learning (teaching—for instructors) experience with remote instruction in this course would have been different if they had been offered in-person (face-to-face)? In what ways?
10. Do you feel that your overall learning was less than, about the same, or greater than in a face-to-face course?
11. Overall, do you think you learn more in remotely offered courses than in face-to-face courses?
12. In general, do you prefer remotely offered courses to in-person courses? Why?
13. Can you talk about your sense of connection with others in a face-to-face course versus an online course?

14. Did you ever feel isolated from the rest of your classmates or all alone? If yes, what caused that feeling?
15. Did you feel fully engaged in the course? Please explain.
16. Did you feel you had enough support from the instructor and other learners when you needed it? What made you feel that way?
17. How does the course discussion board compare to discussions in face-to-face classes? Do you prefer one over the other? Why?
18. Do you have any specific recommendations for improving remote instruction in this course?
19. What suggestions would you give to a student who is taking ALC remotely for the first time?
20. What suggestions would you give to instructors teaching ALC remotely?
21. What suggestions do you have for improving this course?
22. Would you take another remote course if offered here at WCU?
23. Will you recommend this remotely offered course to a fellow student? Why? Why not?
24. Please provide any other comments that you think would be helpful in improving the learning experiences of students in remote instruction of this course and for other similar courses.