

Critical Literacy Stories Untold: Exploring Students' Identities in an Out-of-School Context

by

Salmah Adedeji Quadri

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg

Copyright © 2025 by Salmah Adedeji Quadri

Abstract

This dissertation explores how students construct, negotiate, and express their identities through storytelling-based literacy practices in an out-of-school learning context. Grounded in Critical Theory of Education, Critical Literacy, and Affect Theory, the study introduces the concept of *Affective Liberation Literacy*, a framework that integrates critique, emotion, and identity as co-constitutive forces in transformative learning. Drawing on practitioner inquiry and narrative inquiry, the research examines a five-week program titled *Tell Your Story Academy*, where students engaged in multimodal storytelling activities structured around the Tree of Life framework. Findings reveal that when literacy practices are rooted in relationality, embodied engagement, and student voice, young people develop a deeper sense of self, agency, and belonging. This study offers both a theoretical and practical contribution to identity-centered literacy education, urging educators to create learning environments that prioritize connection, critical reflection, and the affirmation of students' lived experiences.

Acknowledgements

All praise to the Almighty - for the strength, clarity, and perseverance that allowed me to carry this work through to the end. This journey has been one of deep reflection, both academic and personal, and I am grateful for the guidance, seen and unseen, that sustained me throughout.

This dissertation is more than a document; it is a tapestry of stories, questions, and connections that have shaped my understanding of identity, education, and community. Writing it allowed me to hold space for others' experiences while making sense of my own. It is a labor of love rooted in the belief that education must center humanity, voice, and belonging.

To my advisor, Dr. Charlotte Enns, thank you for your steadfast support, thoughtful feedback, and unwavering confidence in my vision. Your mentorship has shaped not only this research but also the educator and scholar I am becoming. To my committee members, Dr. Jennifer Watt and Dr. Jessica Senehi, thank you for your generous insights, patience, and encouragement. Your belief in this work pushed it toward greater depth and clarity.

I would also like to thank Dr. Michelle Honeyford for her thoughtful support whenever I had questions or needed directions. Her generosity and encouragement were invaluable. Though he joined my journey later, I am deeply grateful to Roger Berrington for recognizing my potential and believing in my vision. His encouragement came at a crucial moment and helped propel my work forward with renewed purpose.

To my family, your support made this possible. Daddy (Alhaji Tajudeen Ayinde Quadri), your wisdom continues to be my compass. Mummy (Alhaja Fatimah Abike Quadri), your prayers and gentle strength have carried me through more than words can say. To my devoted and supportive husband (Alhaji Issah Adewale Ejalonibu), thank you

for standing by me in every season of this journey - your calm and belief in me grounded me when I needed it most. And to my lovely sister (Dr. Saadat Omowunmi Quadri), your joy, laughter, and encouragement have been a constant source of light.

I carry this work forward with deep gratitude for every story shared, every moment of doubt that became clarity, and every person who reminded me I was never walking alone.

Dedication

To my children—

Ihsan, whose name means *goodness* and *excellence*, born at the beginning of this journey
and symbolizing the hope and promise of new beginnings.

Iqbal, whose name means *strength* and *prosperity*, born in the middle of this journey,
reminding me—at a time when I needed it most—of the resilience within me to keep
moving forward.

And to Idris, whose name means *knowledgeable* and *wise*, soon to arrive at the end of this
journey, marking not just a completion but a beginning filled with deeper insight and
purpose.

You are my living chapters, the heartbeat of this story. This work is for you.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Dedication.....	v
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Figures.....	viii
Chapter 1: Embarking on a Journey.....	1
The What.....	1
The Where.....	6
The Who.....	7
The Why.....	10
The How.....	12
Chapter 2: Mapping the Theoretical Terrain.....	15
Critical Theory of Education.....	17
Critical Literacy as a Pedagogical Approach.....	20
Affect Theory: Emotions, Relationality and Embodied Identity.....	37
The Intersections of Criticality, Literacy, and Affect.....	41
Bridging Toward Practice.....	50
Chapter 3: Storying My Journey to Methodologies.....	51
Reminder of Guiding Research Questions.....	52
Interconnected Research Methodologies.....	53
Tree of Life: Pedagogical Approach to Exploring Stories.....	58
Research Design.....	61
Data Analysis Process.....	68
Ethical Considerations.....	70
Methods to Application.....	73
Chapter 4: Preparing a Leveling Ground.....	74
Facilitator as a Learner.....	75
Mentors as Learners.....	91
Students as Learners.....	106
Toward Relational Understanding.....	111

Chapter 5: Creating a Relational Home.....	114
Expectations versus Reality.....	114
The Role of Building Relationships.....	125
Talking about prior experiences.....	146
Home to Meaning.....	163
Chapter 6: Discussing Matters of Significance.....	167
Engaging in Multiliteracies.....	168
(De)Storytization.....	200
Witnessing.....	220
Trailing the Clues.....	236
Chapter 7: Illuminating the Research Findings.....	241
From I to Us – Identity as Difference.....	242
From Intrinsic to Extrinsic – Identity as Self.....	247
From Social to Personal – Identity as Mind and Consciousness.....	252
From Context to Text – Identity as Narrative.....	256
From Here to There – Identity as Position.....	259
The Path to Synthesis.....	261
Chapter 8: Synthesizing the Journey.....	264
Summary of the research findings.....	264
Theoretical implications.....	267
Methodological implications.....	271
Pedagogical implications.....	273
Moving forward.....	276
References.....	280
Appendices.....	307
Appendix 1: Letter to the Community Program Management.....	307
Appendix 2: Tell Your Story Lesson Plan.....	308
Appendix 3: Mentors’ Interview Protocol.....	312
Appendix 4: Assent Form.....	315
Appendix 5: Parents’ Consent Form.....	318
Appendix 6: Letter to Parents.....	322

Appendix 7: Mentors' Consent Form.....	324
--	-----

List of Tables

Table 1: Emerging Categories – Themes and Subthemes.....	70
--	----

List of Figures

Figure 1: Intersection of critical theory of education, critical literacy, and affect theory.	15
Figure 2: My initial first-week plan.....	85
Figure 3: My initial second-week plan.....	86
Figure 4: Amy's creative ideas.....	108
Figure 5: Juliet's affirmations of the languages she spoke.....	109
Figure 6: Grace's expression of her conflicted identity.....	110
Figure 7: Storytelling sketch.....	122
Figure 8: The class before arrangement with chairs randomly placed.....	128
Figure 9: The eight constant chairs.....	130
Figure 10: How supplies and pictures were arranged for easy access.....	130
Figure 11: A piece of cake.....	138
Figure 12: Juliet's list of her likes and dislikes.....	142
Figure 13: The first picture book we read.....	170
Figure 14: The second picture book we read.....	172
Figure 15: The Tree of Life project.....	174
Figure 16: Random storytelling pictures.....	176
Figure 17: Juliet's story formation.....	177
Figure 18: Sarah's summary of their group's story.....	178
Figure 19: Random storytelling pictures.....	180
Figure 20: Grace's note on their group story.....	181
Figure 21: Random storytelling pictures.....	183
Figure 22: Amy's written story.....	184
Figure 23: Grace's bead choice.....	193
Figure 24: Grace's comment on her artifact.....	193
Figure 25: Sarah's bead choice.....	194

Figure 26: Sarah's comment on her bead choice.....	194
Figure 27: Amy's bead choice.....	195
Figure 28: Amy's detailed note on her artifact.....	196
Figure 29: Juliet's bead choice.....	197
Figure 30: Juliet's comment on her bead choice.....	198
Figure 31: Shelly's bead choice.....	199
Figure 32: Amy's Tree of Life in progress.....	210
Figure 33: Amy's finished Tree of Life.....	211
Figure 34: Juliet's Tree of Life in progress.....	212
Figure 35: Juliet's finished Tree of Life.....	213
Figure 36: Sarah's unfinished Tree of Life.....	214
Figure 37: Sarah's completed Tree of Life.....	215
Figure 38: Grace's Tree of Life in progress.....	216
Figure 39: Grace's finished Tree of Life.....	217
Figure 40: Shelly's Tree of Life in progress.....	218
Figure 41: Chang's Tree of Life in progress.....	218
Figure 42: Shelly's finished Tree of Life.....	219
Figure 43: Chang's finished Tree of Life.....	220
Figure 44: My Tree of Life.....	223
Figure 45: Our Forest of Life.....	232
Figure 46: Participants' validation of one another's stories.....	235

Chapter One: Embarking on a Journey

The What

This research marks a pivotal point in my journey as both a teacher and a student, a journey that, for as long as I can remember, has been defined by the idea of "the real world." Since childhood, I have been told that each stage of my life was a step into this so-called real world. I recall the excitement surrounding my transition to secondary school—family and friends congratulating me, emphasizing how I was stepping into a more serious phase of life. The same sentiment echoed when I gained admission into the university. My family sat me down and said, "*Salmah, now you are going into the real world.*" Then, at my convocation ceremony, in a vast hall filled with jubilant graduates in caps and gowns, the Vice Chancellor stood before us and declared, "*You are now entering the real world. We have done our best to prepare you for it*". Yet, with every repetition of this phrase, a question lingered in my mind - *What is the actual real world, and when will I ever get there?*

As I grew older, the meaning of this so-called real world became clearer. It was not a singular moment or a final destination; rather, it was a world of imbalances and inequalities, one where privilege and power dynamics shape lived experiences. I began to see the unspoken rules that determined access, opportunity, and status. As a teenager, I noticed the subtle ways people looked at me differently, the material differences that distinguished my peers—some owning the latest gadgets at a young age while others struggled with basic necessities. I found myself categorizing people socioeconomically, not out of malice but because society had conditioned me to see the world through this lens.

These differences, these silent yet pervasive social markers, became an integral part of how I understood myself and my place in the world. Identity, after all, is shaped by experiences, by the ways we are positioned and the ways we position others. However, as a young girl trying to make sense of my surroundings, I wished I had the space to openly discuss these observations—a place where my peers and I could talk not as students and teachers, not as the privileged and the struggling, but as people navigating a shared yet deeply unequal world.

The need for critical conversations is precisely why critical literacy has gained prominence in education. Described as “the power relations of language” (Yoon & Sharif, 2015, p. 9), critical literacy shifts education from a teacher-centered, subject-focused model to one that centers students' experiences, identities, and critical engagement with the world (Vasquez et al., 2019). It enables students to recognize how language and texts shape, reinforce, and challenge power structures (Bacalja, 2018; Harste, 2014). Thus, critical literacy is not just about reading and writing—it is about empowering learners to interrogate texts, uncover inequalities, and take action toward social justice (Luke, 2014, 2018). This aligns with Lewison et al.'s (2015) four dimensions of critical literacy, which involve questioning the commonplace, considering multiple perspectives, examining sociopolitical contexts, and using literacy as a tool for social change. Together, these dimensions position literacy as an active, critical practice that does not merely prepare students to function within society but equips them to challenge and reshape it.

Central to this critical approach to literacy is the recognition that language, power, and identity are deeply intertwined (Yoon & Sharif, 2015). Traditionally, discussions of critical literacy have focused on language and power, but identity and multimodality have

emerged as equally vital dimensions. This study focuses specifically on identity—on how students' identities shape the way they engage with texts, make meaning, and interpret their world. Janks (2018) asserts that our identities are formed by the communities we inhabit and the discourses we use. These discourses shape our beliefs, our values, and how we position ourselves in relation to the texts and messages we encounter. In today's world, where students are constantly bombarded with information from multiple sources, it becomes even more critical to understand how their identities influence their meaning-making processes (Harste, 2014; Kaya et al., 2022).

While critical literacy research has explored how identity influences learning, much of it has focused on isolated aspects of identity, overlooking how different identity dimensions intersect and shape students' meaning-making processes. The five identity metaphors (Moje & Luke, 2009), identity as difference, self, mind and consciousness, narrative, and position, have been examined separately (as identified in the reviewed studies in Chapter Two), even though identity is inherently fluid, relational, and dynamic (McCarthy, 2002). If multiple overlapping influences shape identity, then understanding how these metaphors interact is key to fostering a more holistic view of critical literacy.

Due to the complex yet flexible nature of identity, this study adopts Moje and Luke's (2009) identity framework as a guiding lens. This framework conceptualizes identity through the five interrelated metaphors. Each of these metaphors provides a different yet connected perspective on how identity is constructed, negotiated, and expressed. Identity as difference recognizes the ways individuals define themselves in contrast to others based on social, cultural, or linguistic markers. Identity as self emphasizes the reflexive process of self-awareness and self-construction. Identity as mind

and consciousness highlights the cognitive and affective processes that influence how individuals understand themselves in relation to their environment. Identity as narrative foregrounds the role of storytelling in shaping and expressing identity, while identity as position explores how individuals are socially situated and positioned within discourses of power.

Narratives, which are the stories we tell about ourselves and others, play a fundamental role in identity construction and expression (Senehi, 2002; Kraus, 2007). Through storytelling, individuals make sense of their experiences, define their place in the world, and negotiate their identities across different social and cultural contexts (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). As narratives are retold, they are often reshaped, allowing individuals to reinterpret their past, construct meaning in the present, and envision possible futures. This study employs the Tree of Life narrative therapy approach (Ncube, 2006) as a structured yet flexible tool for students to explore their identities through storytelling. The metaphorical framework of the tree enables students to reflect on their origins (roots), strengths and skills (trunk), relationships (leaves), and aspirations (branches), while also acknowledging life's challenges (storms). This approach fosters connection, resilience, and critical engagement, allowing students to reimagine their identities beyond societal constraints and develop a deeper awareness of themselves.

In many educational contexts, students have limited autonomy over their learning, as instructional approaches often emphasize structured curricula and predetermined knowledge (Pescatore, 2015). Freire (1998) critiques this by arguing that when knowledge is merely transmitted without allowing students to engage critically with it, it becomes domesticated, stripped of its transformative power and disconnected from students' lived

experiences. To counter this, he advocates for an education that embraces students' identities, experiences, and questions about the world, rather than one that treats them as passive recipients of knowledge.

This study seeks to bridge that gap by investigating how students construct, negotiate, and express their identities through critical literacy practices in an out-of-school context. To explore this, I ask: *In what ways do relational and affective experiences influence students' identity construction during planned activities?* Since storytelling is central to critical literacy, this study also examines: *What role does storytelling play in enabling students to reflect on, critique, and reimagine their identities?* Additionally, because this study employs the Tree of Life narrative therapy approach, I consider: *How does the Tree of Life approach foster connection, resilience, and critical engagement among students as they explore their identities?* Lastly, given my dual role as both teacher-practitioner and researcher, I ask: *How did my positioning influence students' participation, engagement, and identity construction during the activities?*

This study not only contributes to critical literacy scholarship but also provides practical insights into how identity can be explored in out-of-school contexts. Through this exploration, students gain opportunities to become more self-aware, critically engaged, and agentic in shaping their own narratives. In examining the intersections of identity, storytelling, and literacy practices, this research study highlights the transformative potential of critical literacy in fostering connection, resilience, and deeper self-understanding beyond the traditional classroom.

The Where

The decision to conduct this study outside the traditional classroom was not immediate, but rather, a realization that unfolded as I reflected on the kind of learning environment that truly fosters storytelling, self-expression, and identity exploration. Schools have long been positioned as spaces of knowledge, yet scholars like Giroux (2024) and Bishop (2024) argue that they often reinforce dominant societal structures rather than challenge them. The rigidity of standardized curricula, the pressure of assessments, and the hierarchical nature of authority within schools can leave little room for students to engage with learning in deeply personal and reflective ways (Arendt, 1961; Aronowitz, 2024).

For many students, classrooms become spaces where success is measured by performance (Honeyford & Watt 2024), not by personal growth. Their experiences, perspectives, and identities remain secondary to the demands of structured learning, which often prioritizes compliance over curiosity. Yet, literacy is not confined to textbooks and tests—it is woven into the way people make sense of their world, their histories, and their relationships with others (UNESCO, 2018; OECD, 2019; International Literacy Association, 2021; Vasquez et al., 2019; Comber, 2016; Luke, 2014). I wanted a setting where students could engage with literacy not as an academic requirement but as a tool for self-discovery and connection, and an out-of-school context offered precisely that. In a space free from the constraints of formal schooling, students could explore who they are beyond institutional labels, unbound by the expectations of grades, rules, and standardized assessments. Here, storytelling was not a task to be graded but a means of self-exploration, a way for students to shape and reshape their narratives.

The setting for this study is an out-of-school mentorship and educational enrichment program located in Central Canada. This program serves youth in Grades 5 through 12, offering a diverse range of educational experiences designed to develop participants' academic, social, leadership, nutrition, and health skills. The program operates on post-secondary campuses, where university students serve as mentors, fostering meaningful connections and guiding younger participants through hands-on learning experiences. Hence, this out-of-school context allows students to explore their identities more freely, engage in storytelling, and reflect on their lived experiences in an organic and meaningful way. Also, stepping beyond the classroom walls allows this study to create space for students to reclaim their voices, engage with literacy in meaningful ways, and navigate the evolving journey of their identities on their own terms.

The Who

For this study, the participants included four students in Grades 7 to 9 and two undergraduate students who served as mentors. The younger students were engaged in structured activities designed to encourage critical literacy, self-expression, and identity exploration, while the undergraduate mentors played a dual role—both as facilitators of the activities and as participants reflecting on their own identities within the mentorship dynamic. In chapter four, I will provide further detail about each participant as I begin to describe the research process in detail and describe the learning community that was formed in this out-of-school space.

My role as a teacher-practitioner and researcher is integral to this process, as I navigate both facilitating the learning experience and critically examining how students construct and express their identities within this unique educational setting. The vignette

below offers a glimpse into how my personal educational journey—and the realization of the interconnectedness between individual identity, societal needs, and meaningful learning—shaped my commitment to a more humanizing approach to education. .

A Vignette of My Positionality

Although my father was never a teacher due to the low financial benefits that come with it in my country, Nigeria, he always said that teaching was natural to him and would love to venture into it after his retirement as a civil servant. During my undergraduate days, most people in my class never chose to study education; most of us aimed for courses like law and mass communication. However, because the demands for those other courses were high, instead of denying new students admission, the administration would rather switch people's courses to education, where the demand was quite low. This was my situation, as I thought being a lawyer would make my parents proud. With good entrance grades, I was given admission to study English Education. At first, I was not glad about it because I cared too much about what people would say. I did not want anyone to see me as inferior because I would be studying to become a teacher. I was considering forfeiting the admission to reapply the following year to study law, but my father encouraged me to see the good in teaching by explaining that I would be able to impact more lives as a teacher than being a lawyer. As organized as I can be, I had always loved explaining points to my peers and encouraging people younger than me to see the good in life. I decided to try taking some courses in the first year, with the aim of retaking the entrance examination if it turned out I do not like the course I was given. Fortunately, I enjoyed every bit of the classes I attended and at that time, I felt education as a course is my calling.

My ever-growing passion for education and learning made me join different associations where I would facilitate some students in specific courses they found difficult. At each point, I made my students realize that as much as I am a facilitator, I am also a learner, ready to pick up new things from them. One day, during one of my classes, a student asked me what a topic like ‘stress patterns’ would do for him in the real world. The only response I could give at that time was that such a topic is relevant to pass the national examination, which would eventually lead to having a better life afterward. After the class, I thought deeply about this and discovered that although we cannot do without teaching what had been stipulated in the curriculum, there is still a great need for the students to see what they learn as relevant to them. And what is relevant to the students will invariably be relevant to the society they live in, as the individual cannot be seen as separate from their society. This mutual relationship between these two is evident in Freire’s (1998) *Pedagogy of Freedom* when he referred to the ‘awareness of unfinishedness’ (p. 51). To him, his unity and identity, in relation to others and the wider world, form his unique and necessary mode of experiencing himself as a cultural, historical, and incomplete being in the world, cognizant of his unfinishedness at the same time. Because the individual is not separate from society, Fafunwa (1991) stated that education must be sought as a tool for liberty, social advancement (cultural advancement), and economic advancement. And one of his philosophies is that since failure in school does not equal failure in life; certification should be less of a focus in education and the practical success of students should be highlighted.

Freire’s (1998) and Fafunwa’s (1991) philosophies have guided the structure of my own philosophy, which is that grades do not determine how successful one can be as an unfinished individual in an unfinished society. Since students are victims of the educational

system, it is only fair that classroom contents should be tailored to meet their needs, based on their experiences and identities (Giroux, 2024; Bishop, 2024). Perhaps, if my experiences have not been alienated from the classroom since I was a child, I would have found my passion earlier, rather than initially diverting my attention to studying what people count as a serious or lucrative course.

The Why

In a world that is increasingly shaped by cultural diversity, sociopolitical challenges, and digital influences, the need to explore students' identities and critical literacy practices has never been more urgent. The ways individuals construct, negotiate, and express their identities are deeply intertwined with the texts they encounter, the social narratives they engage with, and the structures that shape their lived experiences (Vasquez et al., 2019; Moje & Luke, 2009; Janks, 2018). While traditional schooling often reinforces dominant discourses and limits students' ability to explore identity holistically (Lyiscott, 2017; Aronowitz, 2024; Janks, 2018; Bishop, 2024; Berhman, 2006), this study seeks to provide an alternative space—one that fosters self-reflection, storytelling, and critical engagement beyond the constraints of formal education.

Identity is relational and shaped by social interactions, texts, and societal structures (Yoon & Sharif, 2015), yet mainstream schooling often overlooks this complexity, prioritizing rigid academic expectations over self-exploration and personal storytelling (Honeyford & Boyd, 2015; Peel, 2017). This study addresses that gap by creating a space for students to critically engage with narratives that reflect their realities. Also, as media and digital literacies increasingly shape self-perception and identity negotiation (Albers et

al., 2017; Marsh, 2016, 2018), students must develop the tools to critically engage with these influences (Vasquez et al., 2013; Baker-Bell, 2020). Without such engagement, students risk internalizing oppressive narratives and power dynamics embedded in language and representation (Freire, 2005; Janks, 2018; Luke, 2012; Demoiny & Ferraras-Stone, 2018). This study positions critical literacy as a means for students to navigate these complexities, fostering self-awareness, agency, and critical engagement in an evolving cultural and digital landscape.

Identity and literacy are deeply intertwined—not just as academic concepts but as lived experiences. Literacy is the means through which individuals make sense of the world and position themselves within it (Harste, 2014; Luke, 2018, 2012; Janks, 2018; Anwaruddin, 2016). Through storytelling, students not only interpret texts but actively construct their identities (Moje & Luke, 2009; Mishler, 2004; Rogers & Labadie, 2015; Jones & Curwood, 2020). The Tree of Life approach provides a structured framework for this process, allowing students to reflect on their past, make sense of their present, and envision their future (Ncube, 2006). Research shows that identity-centered literacy practices foster resilience (Cartun & Dutro, 2020), self-awareness (McCarthy, 2002; Christensen, 2017), and advocacy (Christensen, 2017; Demoiny & Ferraras-Stone, 2018; Wargo, 2019). Therefore, integrating this approach ensures that students are not just responding to narratives but creating their own, developing a stronger sense of agency and belonging.

Therefore, this research underscores the importance of educational spaces that empower students to navigate their identities with confidence and awareness. It enhances critical literacy pedagogy through self-reflection, engagement with diverse narratives, and

the transformative role of storytelling in shaping identity. In doing so, this study not only enriches academic discourse but equips students with the tools to shape their own narratives and reimagine their place in the world.

The How

As I explore further in the next chapter, this study is guided by three key theoretical frameworks: critical theory in education, critical literacy, and affect theory. Critical Theory of Education challenges traditional schooling structures that reinforce power hierarchies and calls for an approach that empowers students to question, critique, and reshape dominant narratives (Freire, 2005; Aronowitz, 2024; Lyiscott, 2017; Janks, 2018). This aligns with the study's focus on identity and critical literacy, as it positions students as active agents in their learning. Affect Theory complements this by highlighting the emotional and relational dimensions of identity construction, recognizing that identity is shaped not just by cognitive reflection but by embodied experiences and interactions with others (Ahmed, 2004; Massumi, 2015; Zembylas, 2021; Truran, 2022; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010).

Methodologically, this study employs practitioner research inquiry and narrative inquiry, both of which align with the study's objectives (see Chapter Three for further elaboration). Practitioner research inquiry allows me, as the researcher, to critically reflect on my role as both an educator and facilitator in this process (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, Fisher et al., 2018; Johnston & Harper, 2021; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020; Campano, 2009). This self-reflective stance acknowledges the fluid relationship between teaching, learning, and identity exploration, ensuring that the research remains grounded in practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Narrative Inquiry complements and intertwines with this

by centering the lived experiences and stories of students, offering a means to explore how identity is shaped through storytelling and relational engagement (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Gordon et al., 2019; Butler-Kisber, 2018). Additionally, to support identity exploration through storytelling, this study incorporates the Tree of Life narrative therapy approach (Ncube, 2006) as a methodological tool that allows students to articulate their experiences. By merging these theoretical, methodological, and narrative-based approaches, this study creates a meaningful space for students to reclaim their voices and explore the evolving nature of their identities.

Therefore, this dissertation unfolds in several key stages: Chapter Two establishes the theoretical foundation by exploring the intersections of critical theory of education, critical literacy, and affect theory, leading to the development of affective liberation literacy as a guiding conceptual framework. Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach, detailing how practitioner research inquiry, narrative inquiry, and the tree of life framework guide the research process. Chapter Four focuses on the shifting roles I assumed as researcher, facilitator, and participant, and how trust was cultivated within the out-of-school context to support authentic storytelling. Chapter Five expands on the idea of a “relational home” (Finlay & Hewitt, 2022), analyzing how participants’ expectations, interactions with people and objects, and the creation of a supportive space shaped their willingness to share their stories. Chapter Six explores the diverse ways students expressed their stories—verbally, visually, and through embodied modes—highlighting both participation and resistance in the process of identity formation. Chapter Seven uses a deductive approach to analyze participants’ experiences through Moje and Luke’s (2009) five identity metaphors, offering a layered interpretation of identity as dynamic, relational,

and situated within broader sociocultural and critical literacy frameworks. Finally, Chapter Eight concludes the study by summarizing key findings, discussing implications for literacy education, and offering insights into how identity-centered literacy practices can be further developed in both formal and informal learning contexts.

Chapter Two: Mapping the Theoretical Terrain

This chapter maps the theoretical terrain that guides this study. Rather than treating theory, concepts, and research as separate layers, I weave them together to reflect identity's relational and dynamic nature. This research draws upon the frameworks of critical theory of education, critical literacy, and affect theory, which are represented in the Venn diagram below.

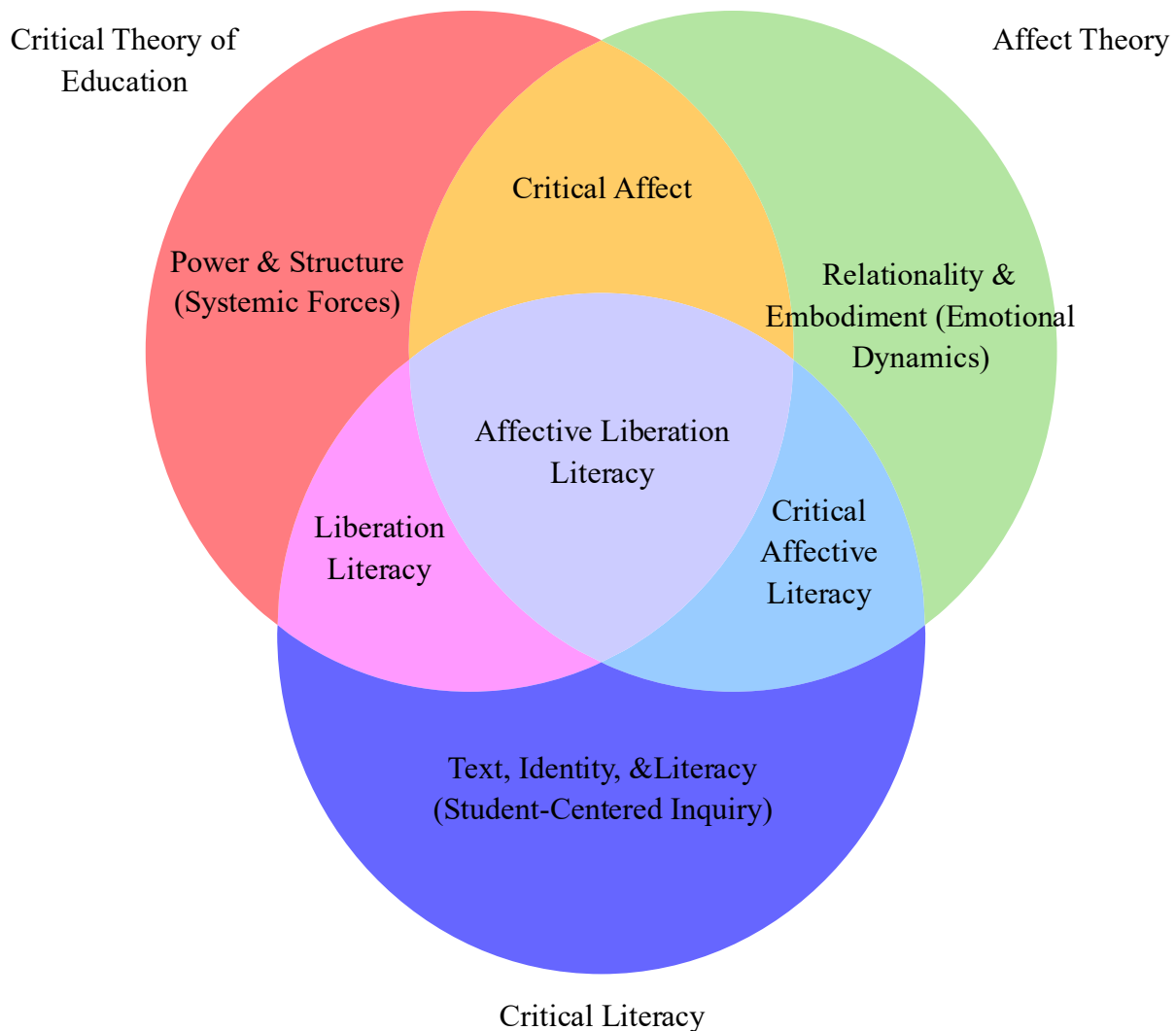


Figure 1. Intersection of Critical Theory of Education, Critical Literacy, and Affect Theory.

Critical theory of education and critical literacy are interconnected concepts with similar perspectives. However, I represent critical literacy as a distinct circle because it functions differently in this study as the pedagogical space where theory meets practice. On the other hand, while less often paired with critical theory of education, affect theory adds an essential layer by drawing attention to the emotional, relational, and embodied aspects of identity that are not always visible through discourse alone. The overlapping regions in the diagram illustrate how these frameworks work in concert to expand our understanding of identity as constructed, felt, and expressed. At the convergence of all three lies what I conceptualize as **Affective Liberation Literacy**, a generative space where critical consciousness, relational affect, and transformative literacy practices coalesce to support meaningful identity exploration.

Therefore, this chapter is structured to follow the conceptual logic of the diagram. It begins with critical theory of education, which serves as the ideological foundation of this work that informs this study's contextual focus on out-of-school settings. Next, it expands on the concept of critical literacy, which represents its pedagogical enactment, including Moje and Luke's (2009) framework of identity and literacy. Then, I turn to affect theory, which complicates and enriches the discussion by attending to learning and identity's emotional and relational aspects. Next, I explore how these frameworks intersect, shaping the nuanced understanding of identity and learning that this study offers. The chapter concludes by reflecting on how this theoretical terrain leads into the study's methodological design.

Reading the chapter in this order allows for a gradual build-up: from structural critique (critical theory of education) to pedagogical application (critical literacy), to

embodied emotional experience (affect theory), and finally, to a nuanced conceptualization of learning and identity, which is the intersection of these theories. This sequence mirrors how the study itself was conceived and carried out—rooted in critique, enacted through practice, and interpreted through relationships, emotion, and story.

Critical Theory of Education

This research was guided by critical theory of education, which critiques traditional classroom practices and reimagines learning spaces that prioritize student agency and personal exploration. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005) was foundational to this framework, particularly his critique of the "banking model" of education, where students passively receive teacher knowledge. Freire's alternative approach emphasized dialogue and co-construction of knowledge, fostering critical thinking and personal growth. These principles informed this study, which sought to create an out-of-school context where students could explore their personal stories and develop their identities in ways often constrained by traditional classrooms.

Traditional education tends to focus on prescriptive curricula, leaving little room for personal storytelling or identity exploration. This study challenged those limitations by providing students with a space to reflect on and share their stories through meaningful, student-centered activities. Guided by critical theory, I acted as a facilitator rather than an instructor, creating an environment that encouraged collaboration and student ownership of the learning process. This aligns with Freire's concept of praxis, combining reflection and action, as students engaged in activities that allowed them to articulate their identities and envision new possibilities (Freire, 2005; Mejia et al., 2018).

Critical theory of education offered the transformative potential for identity exploration in educational spaces. When dialogue, reflection, and agency are prioritized, students move beyond passive participation. The out-of-school context provided a liberatory space where traditional hierarchies were dismantled, empowering students to explore their stories and connect with others. This research highlights the importance of creating educational environments that honor the personal and relational dimensions of learning (Freire, 2005; Mejia et al., 2018). Therefore, the vision of education as liberatory and student-centered naturally led me to consider not just how students learn, but where meaningful learning takes place. If traditional classrooms often limit opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and identity work, then exploring literacy in more flexible and relational settings becomes essential. Rooted in the principles of critical theory of education, the next section considers how non-traditional learning environments—particularly out-of-school contexts—can offer students the space to engage critically with texts, experiences, and their own evolving identities.

Literacy in Non-Traditional Educational Settings

Researchers like Giroux (2024) and Bishop (2024) have highlighted how formal schools often reinforce practices that uphold existing dominant societal structures. Similarly, Aronowitz (2024) critiques the formal school system for failing to fulfill its promise of equal opportunities for all students. While many school curricula are designed with the learner in mind, they often prioritize standardized testing, holding students accountable for their performance under the threat of demotion or expulsion. This rigid structure, as Arendt (1961) argues, reflects education's reliance on authority and tradition, which inherently limits flexibility and innovation.

I found Wentling's (2024) perspective particularly compelling, as it emphasized that learning environments require careful attention. These spaces are never neutral; they are dynamic arenas where ideologies, representations, stories, and memories converge in the embodied minds of students. Each learner brings their complex histories, uneven knowledge, and diverse lived experiences into these spaces, yet formal classrooms often fail to accommodate such complexity. This inflexibility underscored the need to look beyond traditional classrooms and consider non-traditional contexts. Berman (2006) supports this shift, noting that the hierarchical structure of most classrooms contradicts the goals of critical literacy, which emphasize democratization and social justice. He argues that no pedagogy presuming a hierarchical relationship can truly support the development of critical literacy learning.

In my search for a more flexible and empowering environment, I turned to studies that explored out-of-school contexts. Bishop (2024) found that students in such settings often reported positive experiences that filled the gaps left by traditional schooling. Similarly, Dooley and Exley (2015) observed that out-of-school spaces fostered relaxed environments where students built meaningful relationships with peers and adults, resulting in high levels of attention and engagement. What resonated with me most was their finding that students engaged deeply because the content was desirable and relevant to their lives. Honeyford and Boyd (2015) also observed that students who had felt inadequate as language and literacy learners in school became confident and creative meaning-makers in an after-school visual literacy program. These examples reinforced my belief that out-of-school contexts provide the flexibility and relational dynamics needed for meaningful identity exploration. In stepping outside the rigid boundaries of traditional

classrooms, I created a space where students engaged in critical literacy practices that honored their unique perspectives and empowered their voices.

To move beyond simply identifying out-of-school spaces as more relational and flexible, it became important to consider what kinds of meaning-making practices students could engage in within those settings. Hence, understanding the significance of where learning happens also requires deeper consideration of how students interact with texts, language, and meaning-making within those spaces. Critical literacy offered the pedagogical grounding for this inquiry, enabling students to question taken-for-granted assumptions, explore identity through language, and co-construct knowledge that reflected their lived realities.

Critical Literacy as a Pedagogical Approach

Critical literacy empowers students to understand their cultural world and critically engage with texts. Bacalja (2018) describes it as a pedagogical approach fostering new understandings of texts, while Luke (2018) emphasizes its role in examining how texts and discourses shape identity, power, and capital. Unlike inferential reading, critical literacy interrogates texts for standpoints, agendas, and motives (Stevens & Bean, 2007). Some view critical literacy as a teaching framework, while others see it as a way of life aimed at achieving equity. For instance, Wargo (2019) links critical literacy to understanding power relationships within texts to inspire social action. Bishop (2014) highlights its foundation in exploring identities and contradictions to understand societal politics, empowering students to envision more equitable realities (Poulus & Exley, 2018). Also, Janks (2018) argues that critical literacy equips students to challenge texts critically, while Demoniy and

Ferraras-Stone (2018) propose using it to analyze whose voices and perspectives are missing.

Aligned with social justice theories, critical literacy repositions students as language researchers who respect diverse perspectives and challenge dominant narratives (Comber, 2015). Hence, teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to understand the power of language while valuing all cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, Bishop (2014) identifies critical literacy's transformative elements as disrupting the commonplace, analyzing multiple viewpoints, addressing sociopolitical realities, designing social justice actions, and reflecting to envision future change. The development of critical literacy has become fundamental to twenty-first-century literacy pedagogies, shaping contemporary international educational policy and research (Humphrey, 2018). Although its roots are most often associated with Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Bishop, 2014; Luke, 2012; Vasquez, 2017), Yoon and Sharif (2015) suggest that its history can be traced back to the fifth century, during the time of Socrates and Plato. However, this study focuses on the development of critical literacy, starting with Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which emphasizes dialogue and critical consciousness.

Distinctively, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* sought to empower Brazilian peasants in the 1960s by introducing the concepts of critical literacy and power. As Luke (2018) states, "critical education received its most formal statement in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*" (p. 217). Freire remains one of the most influential theorists in critical literacy and pedagogy, blending theory, ideological engagement, and political practice (Brady, 1994). He made a clear connection between critical literacy and the humanization of people. By the 1980s, critical literacy began influencing education

specifically (Luke & Freebody, 1999). Educators started teaching students to analyze texts critically, considering the social, political, and economic contexts behind them. Language was no longer viewed merely as a set of rules for communication but as a tool for understanding power dynamics (Halliday, 1994; Bourdieu, 1991; Firkins, 2015). Many educators regarded critical literacy as “higher-order reading comprehension and sophisticated personal response to literature” (Luke, 2018, p. 217). Schleppegrell and Moore (2018) further emphasize Halliday’s contributions to literacy education, arguing that being literate extends beyond mastering written registers to include awareness of their ideological force.

In the 1990s, the recognition of diverse forms of communication emerged alongside growing cultural and linguistic diversity (The New London Group, 1996; Honeyford, 2014). Literacy was redefined to include visual, digital, and cultural texts, extending beyond traditional reading and writing practices. The New London Group (1996) introduced the concept of multiliteracies, highlighting various modes of meaning-making, including linguistic, visual, audio, and digital literacies. They also emphasized the role of context, asserting that literacy is shaped by social, cultural, and technological factors. The 2000s saw an expansion of critical literacy discussions around power and social justice, focusing on how students’ intersecting identities influence their experiences of injustice (Leland et al., 1999; Leland et al., 2005; Beck, 2005; Behrman, 2006). Critical literacy practices increasingly incorporated frameworks such as critical race theory (Rogers & Mosley, 2006), feminist theory (Sato, 2004; Thompson & Clay, 2008), and postcolonial theories (Fiedler, 2007).

From 2010 onward, the rise of technology ushered in digital literacy as a crucial component of critical literacy (Vasquez et al., 2013; Albers et al., 2017). Digital literacy has profoundly impacted access to information, communication quality, and identity formation. Byfield et al. (2016) and Pérez-Torres (2024) explored how the digital world influences identity development, finding a direct relationship between digital environments and identity formation.

While critical literacy offers a powerful pedagogical framework for analyzing texts and engaging with social issues, its relevance to this study lies most deeply in its connection to identity work. Beyond enabling students to critique power and language, critical literacy provides a space for individuals to reflect on who they are, how they are seen, and how they want to be understood. Therefore, identity is not a peripheral concern in critical literacy—it is foundational. As such, the next section turns attention to the relationship between critical literacy and identity exploration, drawing on key scholars who position identity as central to meaning-making, reflection, and transformation.

Critical Literacy and Identity Exploration

Before streamlining this section to focus on identity, it is essential to highlight identity as a crucial element in critical literacy. Yoon and Sharif (2015) identify four themes relevant to critical literacy: power, language, identity, and multimodality. However, this study centers on the theme of identity. The subject of identity has long been connected to critical literacy, with its roots traceable to ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle. Aristotle viewed the 'self' as an assemblage of characteristics that not only distinguished humans from animals but also categorized one human from another (Yoon & Sharif, 2015). Janks (2018) supports this perspective, asserting that “our identities are formed by the

communities we inhabit and the discourses they use” (p. 97). Similarly, Yoon and Sharif (2015) argue that identity is integral to critical literacy practices because variations in identity are valued and upheld without privileging one identity over another. Critical literacy approaches also support the exploration of personal identity while promoting the examination of broader social constructs of identity. As Freire (2005) emphasizes, “Those who, in learning to read and write, come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves, often take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation” (p. 29). This transformative awareness of injustice shapes identities by heightening sensitivity to discrimination and suffering.

Cho (2018) defines identity as “an ongoing process between internal definitions of the self and external definitions offered by others” (p. 17). McCarthy (2002) adds that identity is relational, emerging from interactions among individuals, institutions, and practices. Through these interactions, individuals construct their identities by comparing and contrasting themselves with others. McCarthy (2002) also highlights how the perception of identity depends on how others view us. Furthermore, Foucault, as cited in Jones and Raisborough (2007), argues that identity is fluid, contested, potentially problematic, and always dependent on context. This suggests that discourses attached to identity shift based on circumstances. The complexity of identity lies in its intertwining positions across various situations and its connection to the beliefs and values available to individuals within their social environments. These social settings include the culturally and socially constructed understandings, beliefs, and actions associated with language (Cho, 2018).

Against this backdrop, Moje and Luke (2009) examined how academics' perspectives on identity influence their understanding of literacy and how meanings about identity are constructed. They proposed five metaphors for identity: identity as difference, sense of self/subjectivity, mind or consciousness, narrative, and position. While each metaphor recognizes that individuals experience identities, none assumes that identities are fixed or static. Instead, all five metaphors emphasize the social dimension of identity, its fluid nature, and the role of recognition in its construction. Moje and Luke (2009) also observed that these identity metaphors intersect and overlap significantly and intriguingly. This perspective aligns with Laverick's (2007) assertion that individuals draw from a range of competing or contradictory schemas and aspects of identity when choosing between different subject positions and modes of action. In this process, the realization of one form of identity can lead to the emergence of another. Such dynamics suggest that identity metaphors should not be viewed as isolated or independent from one another but rather as interconnected and interdependent.

Although Moje and Luke's (2009) framework was published over a decade ago, I deliberately draw on it because of its conceptual richness and enduring relevance to literacy and identity research. Their five metaphors—difference, self/subjectivity, mind or consciousness, narrative, and position—offer a flexible and interconnected lens through which identity can be explored as fluid, negotiated, and socially constructed. Contemporary scholarship continues to apply this framework across diverse contexts, such as doctoral literacy identity formation (Howard et al., 2017), children's content-area identity development (Wagner, 2023), and classroom positioning through texts and discourse (Twiss & Bingham, 2023). Other studies have used Moje and Luke's conceptualizations to

advance socially just, culturally responsive pedagogies that affirm identity as relational and context-dependent (Jones & Thomas, 2022; Scholes & Stahl, 2022). Together, these works affirm the framework's ongoing relevance and show that it remains one of the few models that explicitly bridge identity theory with critical literacy and multiliteracies.

Identity as Difference. Moje and Luke (2009) argue that identity as difference is most commonly perceived in contemporary and popular discourse through a focus on national, racial, ethnic, or cultural identities. This metaphor examines how individuals are distinguished from one another based on their group memberships and how these groups' knowledge, behaviors, and values shape an individual's sense of self. Identity as difference thus highlights group membership and often emphasizes the variations within groups rather than between individuals. Moje and Luke (2009) note that literacy itself becomes an artifact of the targeted difference, appearing to be performed differently depending on the group with which one identifies. For example, students from diverse cultural backgrounds may approach language uniquely in how they speak, read, and write. Furthermore, identity as difference can reflect both empowerment and marginalization. Moje and Luke (2009) highlight that specific differences can devalue or marginalize some groups, while other differences may empower individuals based on their competence, skills, or knowledge of cultural practices. This dual perspective underscores the dynamic impact of identity as difference on both individual and collective experiences.

Recent scholarship underscores how diverse identities within classrooms shape both learning experiences and literacy practices. Identity as difference emphasizes the ways group memberships and cultural and linguistic diversity influence individuals' sense of self. This framework draws attention to how differences can serve either as a source of

empowerment or marginalization, depending on the classroom context and instructional practices. For example, inclusive educational practices demonstrate the potential of leveraging cultural and linguistic diversity to enrich learning environments. Yoon (2016) highlighted how a teacher's intentional efforts to include students' cultural backgrounds and personal experiences facilitated a sense of belonging for English Language Learners (ELLs). By encouraging students to share their experiences and actively engaging them in literacy activities, the teacher helped students feel valued while simultaneously promoting cross-cultural understanding among peers. Such practices align with the core principles of identity as difference, where diversity becomes a resource for learning rather than a barrier.

However, identity as difference also reveals the systemic barriers that marginalized students face. Christensen (2017) observed that students often resist curricula and pedagogical approaches that fail to reflect their lived realities. For example, when students encountered rigid grammar instruction detached from their personal experiences, they disengaged. Yet, when the curriculum addressed relevant themes such as racial injustice and class exploitation, students actively participated in discussions, demonstrating a deep capacity for critical thought. This highlights the importance of aligning classroom content with students' experiences and struggles, allowing their voices to be heard and their identities to be validated. At the same time, linguistic differences often become sites of marginalization in educational contexts. Baker-Bell's (2020) research on Black Language (BL) revealed how systemic preferences for White Mainstream English (WME) perpetuate anti-Black linguistic racism. In such settings, students often internalize negative attitudes toward their linguistic identities, leading to a sense of inferiority and disengagement from the educational process. Baker-Bell advocated for an anti-racist pedagogy that affirms

linguistic diversity and challenges the hegemony of standardized English. By fostering critical linguistic awareness, this approach encourages students to embrace their linguistic and cultural identities while resisting oppressive narratives.

Taken together, these studies illustrate the multifaceted nature of identity as difference, showing how diversity extends beyond visible markers such as race or nationality to encompass linguistic, cultural, and experiential dimensions. Effective educators recognize that diversity plays a pivotal role in learning and actively work to create inclusive spaces where all identities are valued. This involves not only acknowledging and addressing systemic inequities but also leveraging students' unique perspectives and experiences as assets in the learning process. By situating identity at the center of literacy practices, educators can transform classrooms into spaces of empowerment, where differences are celebrated rather than marginalized.

Identity as Self/Subjectivity. Valsiner (2007) defines the self as encompassing personal-cultural processes mediated by semiotics, presenting it as a lens to observe the coherence of personal experiences. Erikson, as cited in Moje and Luke (2009), adds that interactions with others play a key role in shaping the self over time. Humans, being reflexive, adopt the perspectives of others and adjust their behavior accordingly, creating a self that is deeply connected to social processes. According to Moje and Luke (2009), the self emerges from this awareness of one's relation to the broader social context and to others within it. Critical literacy connects identity as self with literacy, as reading and writing can play vital roles in the development of self-identity (Yoon & Sharif, 2015). Murdock (2016) describes the development of self-related knowledge systems, or identity, as a lifelong process shaped by the incorporation of self-related information to ensure

coherence and consistency. However, self-assessments, such as self-esteem, and the organization of self-identity vary among individuals, highlighting the complex interplay between identity as self and identity as difference.

Researchers have explored how literacy practices, critical pedagogy, and creative expression foster self-construction, highlighting the transformative potential of educational spaces to nurture students' self-identities. One example of this is Christensen's (2017) approach to integrating students' personal narratives and community histories into the curriculum. By inviting students to write and share stories about their homes, experiences, and struggles, Christensen created a space for students to explore their self-identity in connection with broader social themes like gentrification, racial injustice, and economic inequality. The act of writing allowed students to reflect on their lived experiences and share their perspectives, fostering a sense of agency and community. This process not only gave students a platform to express themselves but also enabled them to build connections with their peers, reinforcing the relational aspect of identity as self. Similarly, Sanders-Bustle and Lalik's (2017) community-based mosaic project demonstrated how artistic design could encourage self-expression and self-awareness among marginalized groups. Through collaborative art-making, participants—students and homeless individuals alike—developed their creative and literate identities, redefining how they viewed themselves and their potential. This project highlighted how identity as self extends beyond traditional reading and writing practices to encompass diverse modes of expression, such as visual and tactile forms. The collective process of creating the mosaic not only fostered social connections but also provided participants with a tangible representation of their evolving self-identity, grounded in collaboration and creativity.

The role of digital and internet literacy in shaping identity as self is another area of focus. Harrison's (2018) research on critical internet literacy demonstrated how students' reader identities were shaped by their ability to navigate, evaluate, and integrate information from online sources. Through structured activities like collaborative internet searches, students developed skills that empowered them to critically engage with digital texts, boosting their self-confidence and their ability to assert their own voices. This process of critically interacting with digital media underscores how literacy practices contribute to self-construction by enabling individuals to interpret and challenge the information they encounter. Further extending this idea, Harvey and Palese's (2018) work on critical memetic literacy explored how students can construct and convey self-identity through the creation of internet memes. By blending visual and linguistic elements, memes serve as a powerful medium for self-expression and the negotiation of cultural meaning. In this study, students transitioned from passive consumers to active producers, using memes to engage with societal themes such as immigration and identity. The creative process of crafting memes not only allowed students to express their thoughts and opinions but also helped them explore the intersections of identity, language, and culture, fostering a deeper sense of self-awareness.

Jones and Curwood's (2020) study on spoken word poetry further illustrates how self-identity is constructed through literacy practices. Spoken word poetry provided students with a third space—a cultural and linguistic safe zone—where they could explore themes deeply tied to their identities, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status. By combining the written and performative aspects of poetry, students were encouraged to articulate their experiences and emotions, creating a platform for self-expression and

empowerment. The act of sharing their poetry in a supportive environment not only validated their voices but also allowed them to connect with others, reinforcing the relational and evolving nature of identity as self.

Across these studies, a common thread emerges: identity as self is shaped by opportunities for creative and critical engagement with texts, whether through personal narratives, collaborative art, digital media, or spoken word poetry. These practices encourage individuals to reflect on their experiences, articulate their perspectives, and connect with others, fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world. This relational and dynamic process underscores the transformative potential of literacy practices in constructing and evolving self-identity.

Identity as Mind or Consciousness. The metaphor of identity as mind or consciousness draws from Marx's assertion, as cited in Moje and Luke (2009), that individuals shape their reality through actions, which in turn shape their consciousness. This dialectical interaction creates a continuous cycle where altered consciousness inspires new activity, reshaping reality and, ultimately, identity. Vygotsky (1986) supports this view, arguing that tools such as language foster abstract thinking and higher levels of consciousness, transforming individuals' awareness. Moje and Luke (2009) position literacy as a tool for mind development, enabling individuals to advance to greater levels of consciousness and self-awareness. However, they caution that emphasizing literacy as a marker of consciousness risks devaluing those without literate competence, particularly in traditional print-based forms. The advent of technology and digital tools has expanded the possibilities for literacy and identity formation, altering how individuals engage with texts and others in their social worlds.

Pescatore's (2015) study illustrates this by engaging students labeled as academically deficient in journaling and dialogue to explore their beliefs, biases, and experiences. By reflecting on prompts and participating in class discussions, students began to recognize how systemic stigmas shaped their self-perceptions. For example, one student, John, used this process to advocate for his removal from a special education class, understanding how the label negatively influenced his identity. Through these critical literacy practices, students were empowered to challenge oppressive narratives and redefine their roles in the school community.

Educators also play a key role in fostering critical consciousness. Han (2015) examined how preservice teachers engaged with critical literacy materials to address diversity and social justice. Using non-mainstream literature, multimodal texts, and discussions, the study sought to challenge Eurocentric perspectives and encourage teachers to reflect on their own cultural identities. However, the study revealed resistance among participants, many of whom viewed the focus on multicultural and social justice themes as irrelevant. Despite this, the findings highlighted the importance of integrating diverse materials into teacher training to broaden educators' understanding of identity, privilege, and systemic inequities. Similarly, Bacalja's (2018) study on video games as critical texts demonstrated how students could analyze multimodal elements such as visuals, dialogue, and music to uncover the ideological messages embedded within games. This approach enabled students to connect their gaming experiences to broader societal issues, fostering a deeper awareness of how media shapes identity and perceptions of power.

The integration of creativity and activism further enriches the identity as mind and consciousness framework. Wargo's (2019) personal digital inquiry (PDI) framework

enabled young learners to address environmental issues through creative projects that combined critical inquiry and digital tools. One student, Theo, investigated the impact of climate change on birds and created a sound art installation to raise community awareness. By blending inquiry, creativity, and advocacy, Theo's project exemplified how literacy practices can inspire individuals to engage with societal challenges. Similarly, Young's (2018) work with students from diverse social positions revealed how critical literacy activities encouraged privileged students to recognize their complicity in oppressive systems while empowering marginalized students to challenge stereotypes. These studies highlight the transformative potential of literacy practices to cultivate critical consciousness, enabling individuals to actively question and reshape their realities.

Identity as Narrative. Identity as narrative emphasizes that the stories individuals tell about themselves and their experiences both represent and construct their identities (Moje & Luke, 2009). Narratives serve as temporal snapshots of a person's identity, reflecting specific moments in time and space while also constructing their self-concept. This metaphor aligns with other identity metaphors by portraying narratives as extensions of the self and consciousness, which differentiate individuals from one another. Mishler (2004) notes that personal narratives are not static; they evolve, often changing even within short periods. Moje and Luke (2009) assert that language plays a central role in identity as narrative, as it is the medium through which individuals construct and express their self-concepts. Sfard and Prusak (2005) equate identity with narrative, seeing it as a binding agent that organizes experiences. In the context of literacy, narratives serve two key roles: as representations of self through which individuals claim an identity, and as enactments of identity through interaction with the narratives themselves (Moje & Luke, 2009).

Rogers and Labadie (2015) demonstrated this framework in a kindergarten classroom where students explored social action through narrative texts. By engaging with books featuring socially active protagonists, students reflected on characters' actions, discussed their perspectives, and related these narratives to their own lives. Demoiny and Ferraras-Stone (2018) extended the application of identity as narrative to social studies classrooms by integrating master and counter-narrative picture books. Master narratives often present sanitized versions of historical events, while counter-narratives challenge these dominant perspectives, offering marginalized voices an opportunity to reshape collective memory. By juxtaposing these narratives, students critically examined historical injustices, such as the mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples, and developed a more nuanced understanding of history. This approach encouraged students to interrogate whose voices were missing from traditional textbooks and to advocate for the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

The interplay between narrative and identity is further enriched when students are encouraged to use storytelling as a medium for collective and individual action. Both studies underscore how narratives can serve as tools for students to represent their identities, critique social structures, and imagine transformative change. By constructing narratives, students articulate their beliefs and values while positioning themselves as active participants in the social world. Whether through writing, visual storytelling, or civic advocacy, narratives become a means of self-expression and empowerment, fostering students' abilities to connect with others and take informed action. These examples illustrate the power of narrative in shaping identities, promoting critical reflection, and inspiring social transformation.

Identity as Position. The metaphor of identity as position views identity as shaped by activity, movement, and the roles individuals adopt or resist within specific contexts and interactions (Moje & Luke, 2009). This perspective emphasizes the influence of time, space, and social dynamics on identity construction. For example, a toddler's tantrum to gain a parent's attention reflects the interplay of positionality, as the parent may accept or reject the role of co-player depending on external factors such as their schedule or the time of day. Yoon and Sharif (2015) suggest that identity as position shows how individuals construct their identities in relation to others through language. Foucault, as cited in Jones and Raisborough (2007), proposes that individuals are active agents who use reflexivity to navigate discourses that define their social realities. However, these discourses also constrain individuals, limiting their ability to step outside pre-established norms. Rejecting certain discourses, therefore, can become a form of empowerment and self-actualization. Moje and Luke (2009) conclude that identity as position integrates elements of narrative, difference, self, and consciousness, demonstrating the layered complexity of identity.

Yoon's (2016) study illustrates how a teacher's positionality shapes classroom dynamics. Mr. Brown, a sixth-grade English Language Arts teacher, positioned himself as a general education teacher with no responsibility for supporting English Language Learners (ELLs). By neglecting to engage ELLs in meaningful interactions or address their unique needs, he indirectly marginalized these students, leaving them isolated and disengaged from classroom activities. This positioning not only reinforced the exclusion of ELLs but also allowed non-ELLs to view their peers as outsiders. Yoon's findings highlight how teachers' positionality and actions directly shape students' identities within

the classroom community, reinforcing the need for educators to critically reflect on the roles they adopt.

Simmons' (2018) research demonstrates how language itself positions individuals and how critical literacy can be used to uncover and analyze these dynamics. Using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in a high school English class, Simmons guided students to examine the interpersonal, ideational, and textual meanings embedded in texts. Students used tools such as appraisal, identification, and modality analyses to evaluate how language influences emotions, constructs power relationships, and shapes perceptions. By critically analyzing these patterns, students developed a deeper awareness of how texts position individuals and groups, empowering them to question and challenge such representations. Similarly, Poulus and Exley's (2018) study further explored identity as position by equipping students with tools to identify biases and power dynamics in media texts. Through functional grammar activities, students analyzed themes, pronouns, and verbs to uncover the subtle ways in which language positions participants as aggressors, victims, or bystanders.

Across these studies, identity as position emerges as a dynamic and relational process, deeply tied to language and context. Whether through a teacher's classroom practices, the linguistic patterns in a text, or the biases in media, positions are negotiated and shaped by interactions within specific cultural and social frameworks. By critically analyzing these positions, individuals can gain greater awareness of their roles within social structures and develop the agency to resist or reframe oppressive narratives.

The five identity metaphors—difference, self/subjectivity, mind or consciousness, narrative, and position—underscore that identity is not static or individualistic but

constructed and negotiated through relational processes. Each metaphor reveals how interactions with others, societal discourses, cultural contexts, and material conditions shape identities. Whether it is the distinctions created by group membership (identity as difference), the reflexive awareness of self (identity as self), the critical consciousness developed through engagement (identity as mind), the stories shared and shaped in social contexts (identity as narrative), or the roles negotiated within power structures (identity as position), identity emerges from ongoing and interconnected relationships.

Having examined how identity is negotiated through critical literacy practices, it becomes necessary to consider the undercurrents that shape those negotiations—often beyond language and conscious thought. The ways students relate to themselves, others, and texts are not only intellectual or discursive, but also shaped by emotion, atmosphere, and sensation. These felt dimensions influence how identity is taken up, resisted, or reimagined within learning environments. To more fully understand these subtle, often invisible forces at play in students' meaning-making and self-expression, I now turn to affect theory. This next section explores how affective encounters, charged with emotion, memory, and relational energy, offer insight into the embodied nature of identity formation and educational experience.

Affect Theory: Emotions, Relationality, and Embodied Identity

Affect theory provided a powerful framework for analyzing the relational and dynamic nature of identity construction observed in this study. Grounded in the philosophical insights of Benedict Spinoza, affect is defined as the ability to affect and be affected, highlighting the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities (Truran, 2022). Deleuze (1988) expanded on this concept by describing affect as pre-personal

intensity—changes in the body’s experiential state that enhance or diminish its capacity to act. Similarly, Seigworth and Gregg (2010) emphasized that affect operates as “visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement” (p. 1). These movements were evident in the subtle ways participants shifted their thoughts, moods, and actions during the activities, often reflecting relational and embodied encounters that transcended conscious awareness. Valletly (2019) further describes affect as a continuous and ongoing process where bodies, concepts, and objects resist singularity and transcend specific events.

Through the lens of affect theory, this study revealed how participants’ identities were shaped by the interplay of emotions, embodied interactions, and their engagements with the physical and social environments in the out-of-school context. For instance, participants’ affective encounters during storytelling and collaborative activities often influenced how they constructed and expressed their identities. Affect theory allowed for analyzing these relational processes, demonstrating that identity is not static but somewhat fluid, interconnected, and shaped by ongoing interactions between human and non-human entities. These findings align with Truran’s (2022) assertion that affect explores “bodies, worlds, and forces that move and motivate things into relational existence” (p. 26).

This research uncovered how participants’ emotional and relational experiences extended beyond individual cognition and into their interactions’ collective and material dimensions. The affective forces observed in participants’ interactions provided insight into how the five identity metaphors—difference, self/subjectivity, mind or consciousness, narrative, and position—intersected and informed one another. Affect theory thus served as a critical tool for understanding how relational processes, emotions, and embodied

experiences shaped students' identities in this context, offering a nuanced perspective that complemented the structural and systemic analyses provided by critical theory.

Embodied and Relational Dimensions of Affect in Education

Affect theory has found resonance across diverse fields, including sociology (Clough, 2008; Berlant et al., 2022), anthropology (Povinelli, 2022; Ahmed, 2004, 2014; Rutherford, 2016), literary theory (Sedgwick, 2003; Leys & Goldman, 2010), interpersonal communication (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010), and more recently, education (Sobe, 2012; Zembylas, 2024, 2021, 2016; Honeyford et al., 2025; Mulcahy, 2019). Within educational research, affect theory enables a closer look at how learning is not only intellectual or linguistic, but also bodily, emotional, and deeply relational.

In educational settings, every curricular moment is animated by complex, layered responses—emotions, memories, bodily sensations, and social cues—all entangled in the present moment. As Honeyford and Ntelioglou (2021) argue, these relational and affective responses are shaped by past experiences and current encounters, making every learning moment a continuation of an ongoing affective story. Affect does not merely exist inside the individual student; it moves through the classroom as a dynamic force. It coalesces between bodies, materials, histories, and spatial arrangements—activating or inhibiting how students participate, connect, or withdraw. Hence, affect must be understood not as a discrete emotion housed in a single body (Zembylas, 2024; Massumi, 2015, Honeyford et al., 2025), but as a force that circulates between bodies, objects, and ideas.

Scholars such as Ahmed (2004), Seigworth and Gregg (2010), and Zembylas (2007) have emphasized that affect functions as an atmospheric force, shaping how individuals

come to feel in relation to one another. It builds over time, sticking to people, histories, and spaces, and through this movement, it contributes to the emotional texture of classrooms (Honeyford & Trussler, 2019). The mood in a classroom—the tension in silence, the energy of laughter, the heaviness of exclusion—can be understood through the lens of affect, as a set of forces that are constantly moving, accumulating, and transforming. As Massumi (2015) asserts, "there's an affect associated with every functioning of the body, from moving your foot to take a step to moving your lips to make words" (p. 7). Learning is therefore always embodied; it happens not just in the mind, but in movement, sensation, rhythm, and interaction.

Vogler (2021) and Massumi (2015) remind us that learning does not begin and end in the brain; rather, it emerges through ongoing interactions with people, materials, environments, and histories. Affect theory helps us understand how knowledge is generated in these moments of contact—through shifts in energy, through the body's attunement to others, and through the emotional charge carried by shared experience. This framing resonates with Holmes (2010) and Zembylas (2024), who argue that thinking and feeling are inseparable in educational contexts, where cognition is always mediated by emotion and embodiment.

These insights are not separate from foundational educational frameworks. Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, particularly the affective domain, already emphasized the significance of emotional engagement in learning. The stages of receiving, responding, and valuing point to how students internalize meaning not through detached logic, but through layered emotional and relational experiences. Affect theory reanimates this framework, providing

language for how those emotional responses take shape, circulate, and matter in real-time interactions.

Together, these perspectives affirm that the body is not merely a vessel for cognition, but a knowing subject (Honeyford et al. 2025), alive with affect, memory, and responsiveness. For students navigating complex identities, the classroom becomes not just a place of learning, but a relational space where emotions are negotiated, identities are felt, and knowledge is embodied. Affect theory thus offers a powerful framework for understanding how teaching and learning are shaped by what is felt, shared, and moved—sometimes even before it is spoken or understood.

The Intersections of Criticality, Literacy, and Affect

Having explored each framework independently, I now turn to the conceptual intersections that emerge between them. The overlapping relationships between critical theory in education, critical literacy, and affect theory give rise to three interrelated concepts: critical affect, liberation literacy, and critical affective literacy. These terms illuminate how critique, meaning-making, and emotional experience converge to shape identity in educational contexts. While these pairwise intersections offer valuable insights, it is at the intersection of the three core frameworks that I propose the concept of **Affective Liberation Literacy**, a term that captures the emotional, critical, and dialogic dimensions of identity formation. As an integrated framework, affective liberation literacy emphasizes how students' affective encounters, critical awareness, and literacy practices collectively support their becoming, especially within relational, student-centered, and liberatory learning spaces.

Critical Affect (Critical Theory of Education & Affect Theory)

The conceptual intersection between critical theory of education and affect theory gives rise to critical affect—a lens that foregrounds the emotional, embodied, and relational dimensions of critique. Rather than opposing emotion and reason, critical affect invites educators and researchers to dwell in the space where feeling and thinking converge. Beyes and De Cock (2017) characterize critical affect as a mode of knowing that resists rigid conceptual closure and opens inquiry to ambiguity, intensity, and relational engagement. It emphasizes not only what we know, but how we feel our way through knowledge in relation to others.

This approach resonates with Barnwell's (2020) provocation that academic methods are too often split along binaries: "structure or affect, critique or creativity, detection or description" (p. 2). She urges scholars to resist this fragmentation and instead embrace the methodological in-betweenness that critical affect offers. Her framing underscores how emotion and critique do not cancel each other out but enrich one another, especially when researchers remain attentive to the affective forces that shape inquiry and pedagogy. Massumi (2015) echoes this sentiment, critiquing traditional models of critique for their tendency to extract, fix, and finalize. In contrast, he proposes a more dynamic orientation—one that remains open to affective intensities and new possibilities. His notion of hope, for example, is not bound to outcomes but operates as an emergent, immanent force—a movement toward transformation grounded in the present. In this way, hope itself becomes an act of resistance against stagnation and despair.

This affective openness is central to Freire's (2005) philosophy of education, where learning emerges through "restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry" (p. 72). Freire's

insistence on reinvention, curiosity, and hope challenges us to rethink critique as an affective process—one driven not just by discontent, but also by possibility and collective struggle. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire (1994) reiterates that hope must be sustained through action and reflection, reinforcing the idea that critical pedagogy must also be emotionally engaged. Glapka (2019) builds on this by advocating for a *critical affect studies* framework, which situates emotions within discursive, ideological, and power-laden contexts. Affect, in this view, is not a personal or apolitical phenomenon; it is shaped through cultural norms, institutional structures, and social hierarchies. Similarly, Rice (2008) describes critical affect studies as a commitment to exploring “forms of affective life that have not solidified into institutions, organizations, or identities” (p. 202), drawing attention to the unspoken, the fluid, and the politically charged dimensions of emotional life.

Taken together, these perspectives affirm that critical affect is more than a theoretical intersection; it is also a pedagogical stance. It enables educators to hold space for complexity, discomfort, vulnerability, and joy, all of which are essential to authentic and relational teaching. By integrating critical analysis with affective awareness, critical affect offers a more humane and responsive way to engage with students’ lived realities, honoring both intellect and emotion as vital to learning.

Liberation Literacy (Critical Theory of Education & Critical Literacy)

Liberation literacy, as I previously explored (Quadri, 2024), can be understood as a subset of critical literacy that centers the theme of identity and its connection to social justice. While it aligns with the broader tenets of critical literacy—such as disrupting the commonplace, interrogating power, and promoting equity—liberation literacy pays particular attention to the lived experiences of marginalized students and the sociopolitical

dimensions of their linguistic and racial identities. It functions as a pedagogical and philosophical approach that helps students engage critically with texts and the world around them, especially where schooling contexts have historically marginalized certain voices (Lyiscott, 2017).

In the tradition of critical pedagogy, liberation literacy embraces voice as both a means and a marker of liberation. Lyiscott (2017) argues that the underrepresentation of Black textual expressions—spanning oral, written, visual, digital, and embodied forms—within school curricula is a direct consequence of the systemic disregard for Black identities in mainstream education. Liberation literacy, therefore, becomes a tool to redress this absence, creating space for students to engage the intersections of race, language, and power. Through multimodal texts and dialogue, students are encouraged to read the word and the world simultaneously, bringing critical literacy into conversation with personal and collective liberation.

Lyiscott's (2017) framework of the five A's—awareness, agency/access, actualization, achievement, and alteration/action—provides a powerful structure for enacting liberation literacy. Awareness begins with students recognizing and naming their social and linguistic identities. This awareness then expands into agency and access, where students leverage their identities to claim educational and social opportunities. Actualization calls for sustaining opportunities for students to express themselves in diverse ways. Achievement challenges institutions, not just students, to embody equity in meaningful and measurable ways. Finally, alteration and action demand transformative changes to curricula and classroom practices, ensuring they reflect and support diverse ways of knowing and being.

Although liberation literacy is embedded within critical literacy, it can be distinguished by its specific attention to racialized and linguistic forms of identity and its urgency toward social transformation. It emphasizes the spoken word, performative expression, and embodied literacy practices as legitimate forms of meaning-making—modes often devalued in traditional classrooms. Nonetheless, as Luke (2012) notes, critical literacy already recognizes language and discourse as tools for reshaping possible worlds, suggesting that liberation literacy extends and intensifies these commitments rather than departing from them.

Liberation literacy thus reflects a confluence of critical theory of education and critical literacy. It challenges dominant ideologies by encouraging students to read, write, and speak themselves into spaces of empowerment. It embodies a radical, justice-oriented pedagogy rooted in critique and hope by prioritizing students' lived experiences and centering identity as a site of inquiry and transformation.

Critical Affective Literacy (Affect Theory & Critical Literacy)

In the previous section, I elaborated on the concept of critical affect to highlight the broader relationship between critical theory and affect theory. Here, I turn to a more specific intersection, critical affective literacy (CAL), which integrates the emotional and relational dimensions of affect theory with the reflective, justice-oriented aims of critical literacy. This growing field of inquiry invites educators to consider how emotions, bodies, texts, and power circulate in literacy classrooms. As Anwaruddin (2016) argues, the rationalist orientation of critical literacy often "blurs our vision when we try to understand the suffering of others" (p. 388), which calls for a deeper engagement with affective processes in pedagogy.

Jiang (2023) notes that CAL emerged from theoretical intersections between critical pedagogy and affect theory, offering a more fluid and responsive framework for engaging with students' emotional and social realities. Anwaruddin (2016) similarly positions classrooms as emotionally layered spaces, where teachers must cultivate emotional competence to respond ethically and thoughtfully. These insights are situated within what Clough (2008) terms *the affective turn*, a shift that opens up new possibilities for how critical theory might benefit from studies of affect. More recent scholarship continues this trajectory by exploring the affective nature of teaching and learning (Leander & Boldt, 2012; Leander & Ehret, 2019; Lenters & McDermott, 2021; Zembylas, 2022; Dutro & Cartun, 2016; Ehret, 2018; Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Kuby et al., 2018; Lenters, 2016; Lewis, 2014; Muth, 2016; Thiel, 2015).

To guide CAL in practice, Anwaruddin (2016) proposes four pedagogical principles: (1) examining why we feel what we feel, (2) striving to enter a relation of affective equivalence, (3) interrogating the production and circulation of objects of emotion in everyday politics, and (4) focusing on the performativity of emotions to achieve social justice (pp. 390–393). These principles call for a nuanced approach to emotion—moving beyond surface feelings to examine their relational and political significance. Ahmed (2004), for instance, suggests that emotions are not things we possess but forces that orient us toward or away from others, shaping our relational attachments and collective actions.

The second principle—*affective equivalence*—encourages students and teachers to listen not merely with sympathy but with an openness that shifts attention from the speaker to the responder. In doing so, CAL emphasizes empathy as a political and pedagogical practice. The third principle calls for critical attention to how emotions such as fear, anger,

or shame are constructed and circulated as "objects" within political discourse and media. The fourth principle urges educators to consider how our words and emotional expressions can become tools for transformation, aligning with performative justice: "our words must do what they say" (Anwaruddin, 2016, p. 393).

Jiang (2023) contends that incorporating CAL into classroom practice can prompt students to critically reflect on their emotional experiences and develop more intentional ways of expressing them. Elwell (2022) adds that the discourses students bring to texts often surface as affective moments (p. 139), and educators should view these moments as invitations for democratic, critical dialogue (Bondy & Johnson, 2020). Cartun and Dutro (2020) describe classrooms as "alive and vibrating with affect," a sentiment that captures the dynamic and unpredictable nature of literacy spaces.

However, engaging with affect in literacy classrooms also requires caution. As Janks (2010) warns, some students may perceive critical conversations as threats to their identity, resulting in resistance. Elwell (2022) acknowledges that these moments of discomfort can be unsettling, but they are integral to the relational work of teaching. Lennon et al. (2018) remind us that "the teaching and learning relationship is constantly being made and re-made—sometimes in ways that are unpredictable and/or undesirable" (p. 628). Rather than avoiding discomfort, educators should view such moments as critical affective literacy opportunities—windows into why students feel what they feel and how these emotions can be explored with care and purpose (Elwell, 2022; Ahmed, 2004; Anwaruddin, 2016).

CAL practices can surface in various literacy activities: during reading sessions (Moore, 2025), storytelling exercises (Jiang, 2023), testimony and narrative-sharing, and

moments of critical witnessing (Cartun & Dutro, 2020). These pedagogical encounters are not only sites of knowledge production but of emotional engagement, relational connection, and social transformation.

Affective Liberation Literacy (Intersection of Critical Theory of Education, Critical Literacy, and Affect Theory)

Bringing together the threads of critical theory in education, critical literacy, and affect theory, I propose the concept of *Affective Liberation Literacy*, a pedagogical stance that synthesizes critique, emotion, and identity as co-constitutive forces in education. While each of the preceding frameworks—*critical affect*, *liberation literacy*, and *critical affective literacy*—offers a powerful lens in its own right, their convergence highlights a more integrated approach to transformative pedagogy. Affective Liberation Literacy centers relationality and emotional intensity as much as critical inquiry and identity expression, emphasizing that social transformation in education must be both felt and enacted.

This framework is grounded in Freire’s (2005) call for “restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry” (p. 72), where learning becomes an emotional and political act. It also builds on Lyiscott’s (2017) liberation literacy principles, especially the emphasis on awareness, agency, and action, by infusing them with affective depth. Awareness, for example, is not only cognitive but embodied—an understanding of self shaped by emotional and social histories. Similarly, agency in Affective Liberation Literacy requires not just voice, but voice rooted in affective truth, where emotion is not dismissed but honored as epistemologically valid.

Drawing on the work of Anwaruddin (2016), this framework recognizes that literacy learning is never purely rational but "laden with complex emotions" (p. 388), and that emotional experiences must be integrated into critical engagements with language, power, and text. As Jiang (2023) and Elwell (2022) argue, students' discourses and emotional expressions emerge in literacy moments—moments that vibrate with possibility (Cartun & Dutro, 2020). When combined with Lyiscott's insistence that curricula reflect racial and linguistic realities, and Massumi's (2015) understanding of hope as an affective, non-linear force, a new vision of literacy emerges: one that does not compartmentalize critique, feeling, and identity, but holds them together as essential to liberation.

Affective Liberation Literacy, then, is not a new framework but a convergence—a relational praxis where structural critique, affective engagement, and linguistic agency intersect. It challenges educators to move beyond merely teaching texts to cultivating classroom ecologies that support emotional expression, political consciousness, and identity affirmation. In doing so, it builds a bridge between the intellect and the body, the rational and the felt, the personal and the political.

Drawing on the affective turn (Clough, 2008; Ahmed, 2004), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1994, 2005), and justice-oriented literacy practices (Lyiscott, 2017; Luke, 2012), Affective Liberation Literacy positions the classroom as a transformative space—one that not only names injustice but nurtures the emotional resilience and agency needed to challenge it.

Bridging Toward Practice

This chapter has mapped the theoretical terrain that underpins this study by weaving together three interrelated frameworks: Critical Theory of Education, Critical Literacy, and Affect Theory. Each framework contributes a distinct yet complementary lens for understanding identity, as shaped by power, language, and emotion. Through the intersections of these foundational traditions, I draw on three existing hybrid concepts—Critical Affect, Liberation Literacy, and Critical Affective Literacy—which collectively inform the development of Affective Liberation Literacy, a conceptual framework I propose to encapsulate the emotional, critical, and relational dimensions of identity formation in educational spaces.

These frameworks do more than provide theoretical grounding; they also inform the kind of methodological approach this terrain demands. Exploring identity as a lived, affective, and socially mediated process calls for a methodology that is dialogic, relational, and reflective. As such, in Chapter Three, I turn to teacher-practitioner inquiry and narrative inquiry—methodological approaches that allow me to remain accountable to the experiences of participants while also positioning myself within the research process. These approaches mirror the values embedded in the theoretical frameworks presented here: a commitment to co-construction of knowledge, to honoring stories as valid ways of knowing, and to engaging critically and compassionately with the world.

Chapter Three: Storying My Journey to Methodologies

A shift in my educational context from Nigeria to Canada allowed me to begin questioning many of the things I had once accepted as normal in an educational environment—particularly the emphasis on sticking rigidly to the syllabus, which was the case when I taught large classes in Nigeria. Even then, I often wanted to know my students personally and see them not just as learners, but as individuals with full lives outside school. Although I tried to open my door for personal conversations, only a few students came forward. I began to ask myself what I needed to do differently to create a space where students could feel safe enough to talk with me, to see me not only as a teacher but also as a human.

I knew that something had to change in the way I approached teaching. I started to question broader educational practices, including why education in Nigeria felt so limited in scope, with the curriculum being the top priority—a trend also present in other parts of the world. Ghiso et al. (2013) argue that the prevailing message in education is that teachers must follow a set of standardized practices prescribed by experts. Students who do not align with these practices are seen as deficient and in need of intervention. I found myself asking: why does education feel so disconnected from our lives outside of school? Why does it feel like everyone has to put on a kind of armor the moment they walk into the school building? Most importantly, why isn't what we teach, or are taught, evident in how we live our lives?

I began to wonder whether students might view education differently and enjoy it more if they understood how topics taught in school could help them succeed not just academically but socially and emotionally. These wonderings align with Burton and

Bartlett (2005), who state that education is not just about acquiring skills and knowledge but also includes moral and social dimensions. Teachers, they argue, should care for their students and foster mutual respect and tolerance—traits essential for life in a democratic society. As someone who had always been a "good student," I considered myself a good teacher of the curriculum. Yet, despite my desire to connect with students beyond classroom walls, I found that my own voice as a teacher was becoming lost in the pressure to deliver content. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2020) observe that teachers often strive to meet the needs of their students and implement reforms proposed by external stakeholders, but in doing so, they may lose their own voice in discussions about educational change.

My curiosity about how to improve my practice, both as a researcher and a practitioner, made me recognize the importance of practitioner research inquiry as a key methodology that shaped this study. Additionally, because this study explores stories from different dimensions, narrative inquiry became a necessary, intertwining research methodology. This chapter, therefore, explores these two methodologies and the ways in which they align with this study. I also explain the research design, including a description of the research terrain, how participants were selected, the various data collection methods used, and the approach to data analysis. Furthermore, I explain how the Tree of Life process was used in my study, highlighting its role in the data collection process and in engaging participants. Lastly, I discuss the relational ethical considerations that guided this research.

Reminder of Guiding Research Questions

Before I begin to discuss the two interconnected methodologies that ground this research study, I provide here a reminder of the research questions guiding this dissertation study:

- 1) In what ways do relational and affective experiences influence students' identity construction during planned activities?
- 2) What role does storytelling play in enabling students to reflect on, critique, and reimagine their identities?
- 3) How does the Tree of Life approach foster connection, resilience, and critical engagement among students as they explore their identities?
- 4) How did my positioning influence students' participation, engagement, and identity construction during the activities?

Interconnected Research Methodologies: Practitioner Research Inquiry and Narrative Inquiry

Practitioner research inquiry and narrative inquiry have been described as "cousins" because both emphasize observation, reflection, teacher agency, and the creation of transformative communities (Sis-Hilton & Meier, 2016, p. 18). However, these two interrelated approaches served distinct purposes in this study. Practitioner research inquiry focused on my own reflections for both personal and professional growth, a process that has been extensively explored in research on teacher identity, pedagogy, and literacy instruction (Kroll & Meier, 2015; Lee, 2023). This methodology enabled me to critically analyze how my pedagogical choices influenced students' engagement and learning, contributing to an iterative process of inquiry and refinement (Fisher et al., 2018).

While practitioner research inquiry was deeply introspective, narrative inquiry provided a framework for making sense of students' identities through their stories. This approach was essential for capturing the richness and depth of identity construction, allowing students to engage in storytelling as a way of reflecting on and reclaiming their

lived experiences. Thus, while practitioner research inquiry was used to examine my role as a researcher and educator, narrative inquiry was used to make sense of students' experiences and stories. These methodologies, though distinct, were intertwined in their shared goal of fostering reflection, dialogue, and identity exploration. The combination of both approaches provided a holistic perspective, ensuring that this study honored my reflections as a teacher-practitioner and the students' voices as storytellers in an out-of-school literacy context.

Teacher/Practitioner Inquiry

Practitioner inquiry serves as a powerful methodological tool and has been described by Dana & Yendol-Hoppey (2020) as:

a vehicle that can be used by teachers to untangle some of the complexities that occur in the profession, raise teachers' voices in discussions of educational reform, and ultimately transform assumptions about the teaching profession itself. (p. 2).

Practitioner inquiry is also a form of reflective practice, where the researcher, as a practitioner, engages directly with participants, systematically examining pedagogy in order to seek improvement and new knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kiss & Townsend, 2012). Studies have shown that practitioner inquiry allows educators to engage in reflective and iterative cycles of research, helping them address instructional challenges and transition toward student-centered literacy practices (Johnston & Harper, 2021; Seah et al., 2022). Mertler (2017) further supports this notion, arguing that practitioner inquiry provides educators with a framework to examine local challenges, implement solutions, and analyze their impact on teaching and learning.

As a practitioner and a researcher, I needed to reflect on my own practice and how to make it better, especially by humanizing the teaching and learning process. Campano (2009) suggests that teacher inquiry is an ethical process of responding to students with dignity and recognizing them "in their full humanity...within the dynamism and life-world of the classroom" (p. 327). Humanizing education is thus a way of creating positive change toward a fair and just experience for both teachers and students. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) argue that in practitioner research, subject matter is not fixed but is dynamic and fluid, constructed through the relationships and interactions between all participants in the learning process. What often seems to be missing in education is this kind of relational meaning-making and space for genuine conversations.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe five variants of practitioner research: action research, teacher research, self-study, the scholarship of teaching, and the use of teaching as a context for research. For this study, I conceptualize practitioner inquiry as action research for social justice, since my work seeks to challenge traditional assumptions about teaching and learning. Because practitioner research encourages educators to ask meaningful questions, collect data ethically, and make informed changes based on their own contexts, it is not simply a methodological choice for me. It is also a moral and pedagogical commitment to listening, reflecting, and making change from within.

Narrative Inquiry

From my perspective, humanizing the teaching and learning process is not one-sided. It is not only about reflecting on my own practices and improving them—it also involves understanding and representing the lived experiences of others through their

stories. Given the deeply personal nature of exploring identity through storytelling, I found narrative inquiry to be the most fitting second intertwined methodology for this study.

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method that focuses on individuals' stories as a means of understanding experience and the meanings attached to them (Chase, 2011; Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that narrative inquiry allows researchers to engage with the complexities of human experiences while recognizing the role of context, culture, and relationships in shaping stories. Similarly, Butler-Kisber (2018) emphasizes that narratives not only help convey information but also validate experiences and situate them within broader social realities. This approach views stories as essential to how people make sense of their lives and the world around them. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define narrative inquiry as:

a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives. Simply stated, ... narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (p. 20).

Narrative inquiry, as conceptualized by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), includes four key components: understanding experiences, collaboration between researcher and participants, the use of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, and the act of telling and retelling stories. Clandinin and Connelly's idea of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space draws on Dewey's educational philosophy. They use the dimensions of

personal and social (interaction), past, present, and future (continuity/temporality), and place (situation) to frame their work. These dimensions highlight the relational aspect of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), with the researcher acting not as a distant observer but as an active contributor to the meaning-making process. Temporality is especially important—Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that "locating things in time is the way to think about them" (p. 29).

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, narratives are both the subject of study and the method of study. Relationships are central to this process, or as Clandinin and Connelly note, "relationship is at the heart of thinking narratively" (p. 189). The act of telling and retelling stories is central to narrative inquiry. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, "collecting and analyzing stories is only part of narrative inquiry. It is in the living and telling of experience that we locate what represents our sense of the experience as narrative inquirers" (p. 189). Gordon et al. (2019) demonstrated the power of narrative inquiry in literacy research through their study of an African American Read-In, where they used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework to explore the personal, social, and temporal dimensions of the literacy event. Through storytelling, reflection, and participant narratives, the study illustrated how Black girls engaged with culturally relevant texts to affirm their literate identities and resist dominant narratives. Similarly, Jack-Malik and Kuhnke (2020) employed narrative inquiry as andragogy to examine how adult learners navigate literacy education and identity transformation. Their research focused on the evolving literate identities of an adult learner and her tutor, demonstrating how relational engagement and storytelling facilitated critical shifts in self-perception and agency.

Tree of Life: Pedagogical Approach to Exploring Stories

The Tree of Life Narrative Therapy approach was originally developed to support vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa (Ncube, 2006). Drawing on Zimbabwean folklore and collective narrative practices, this approach uses the metaphor of a tree to help individuals and communities overcome difficult life experiences (Lock, 2016). What stood out to me about this method was its ability to allow people to speak about their lives in ways that are not re-traumatizing but instead empowering. Through the Tree of Life, individuals strengthen their connections to their history, culture, and significant people in their lives (Ncube, 2006). Each part of the tree metaphor represents a different aspect of life: the roots symbolize origins and heritage, the ground represents nurturing environments and routines, the trunk signifies skills and abilities, the branches illustrate aspirations and goals, the leaves symbolize important people, the fruits reflect the gifts we give and receive, and the storms remind us of life's challenges that test our resilience.

As I delved into how the Tree of Life has been used in research, I found that while it is not widely utilized in literacy studies, it has been applied effectively in fields such as psychology, disability studies, refugee and immigrant studies, and health. One study by Mrema (2023) used the Tree of Life in an after-school academic support program in Tanzania. In this program, young people rediscovered their unique abilities, which had often been overshadowed by dominant narratives about living in an orphanage or falling short of academic expectations. I found this particularly inspiring, as it reinforced the idea that narrative practices can help participants see themselves in a more positive light. Another example came from Alhosseini's (2023) study on resilience among newcomer

students in Canada, where the Tree of Life approach yielded positive outcomes. Similarly, Mwale et al. (2022) demonstrated its potential benefits in neurorehabilitation, noting how participants left their sessions in a noticeably improved mood. Many reflected on how much strength and ability they had not previously recognized in themselves. These findings resonated with me, as they showed how the Tree of Life can foster empowerment and self-awareness. Rowley et al. (2020) also applied the Tree of Life with ethnic minority parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in a mainstream primary school. They found the approach to be highly effective in responding to diversity and empowering participants to share their stories. Across these diverse fields, the Tree of Life has consistently been used to provide individuals with a safe, supportive framework to explore their lives, reflect on their strengths, and embrace their unique experiences.

In this study, I applied the Tree of Life narrative therapy approach to create a space for students to explore their stories using a strength-based lens. Understanding that participants might feel hesitant to talk about themselves, I used the Tree of Life as a scaffold, allowing them to reflect on their lives and choose the aspects of their experiences they felt comfortable sharing. This framework not only helped participants articulate their identities but also supported them in recognizing their resilience, abilities, and connections to others. It became a critical tool in enabling students to engage with their stories meaningfully and confidently.

In alignment with both teacher practitioner inquiry and narrative inquiry, the Tree of Life offered a creative and structured framework through which participants—myself, the mentors, and the students—could explore and share our identities through storytelling. Its metaphorical structure enabled the co-construction of what Denborough (2008) refers

to as a second story, allowing us to reflect on our lives in ways that honored both our individual experiences and our shared wisdom. The metaphor of the tree provided a sense of safety and emotional distance, supporting us in deciding what parts of our personal experiences we were ready to include and share.

In practice, I facilitated the Tree of Life as a series of interactive sessions designed to guide participants through an imaginative and reflective journey. Rather than treating it as a one-time activity, I integrated the tree metaphor throughout the storytelling process. Each part of the tree—roots, ground, trunk, branches, leaves, fruits, and storms—was explored gradually over time using a series of prompts. To encourage deeper reflection, I embedded complementary activities into the process, including journaling and group dialogue. I also invited more outspoken students to share their experiences spontaneously, which often encouraged others to participate. While Ncube-Mlilo and Denborough (n.d.) recommend facilitating the Tree of Life in a single, full-day session, I adapted the structure to better suit our context. This included aligning with the broader program schedule and emphasizing a slower, more relational pace that allowed trust and connection to grow organically. Students revisited their reflections on the various tree parts across sessions—adding new insights, linking ideas to emerging stories, and engaging with peers—transforming the metaphor into a living, evolving narrative scaffold.

The Tree of Life also created a communal space for participants to reflect on their identities in relation to others. Originating from narrative therapy work with individuals and communities affected by trauma (Ncube, 2006; Denborough, 2008), the approach invites a shift from deficit-based narratives to those that emphasize strength, resilience, and relational connection. This aligns with the central aim of this study: to foster student voice

and agency while ensuring emotional safety. Participants were not required to disclose personal trauma in order to engage meaningfully. Instead, they were encouraged to share stories and values in ways that felt comfortable and empowering to them.

This pedagogical stance also resonated with my ethical commitments as a teacher practitioner-researcher. As someone working alongside students in both teaching and research capacities, I continually navigate relationships grounded in care, responsibility, and reciprocity. These same principles are embedded in narrative inquiry, which requires a deep attentiveness to relational ethics (Clandinin et al., 2018; Clandinin, 2023) and an ongoing negotiation of meaning between researcher and participants (Clandinin et al., 2010). This is not a dynamic of extraction, but one of mutual engagement—where stories are shaped in dialogue and through context. Similarly, Wilson’s (2008) concept of relational accountability invites researchers to consider how every action in the research process is embedded in relationships—with participants, with the community, and with knowledge itself. My role, therefore, was not to observe from the margins, but to co-construct meaning alongside participants, attending to the moments when their narratives revealed how they saw themselves in relation to others, to place, and to possibility. In honoring these stories, I was guided by an ethic of care that foregrounded dignity, voice, and agency—values that informed both the pedagogy and methodology of this research.

Research Design

Research Context

The research took place in a long-standing, community-based, out-of-school program run in partnership with a local university. This program, which began in 2010,

operates on university campuses and connects youth from across the city with opportunities to explore learning in different formats. It brings together hundreds of students from grades 5 to 12 and includes volunteers from post-secondary institutions, as well as staff and community partners. Each year, students rotate through a variety of programs, guided by university mentors, and participate in activities that help them build confidence and imagine new possibilities for their futures. The program is built on the idea that when young people feel hopeful and capable, they are more likely to succeed both in school and in life.

This space became the foundation for my research. During the winter term, undergraduate education students are invited to design and deliver a five-week program for middle years students (grades 7 to 9). With support from the university and community program staff, the undergraduates take on planning and mentorship roles. This setting offered a unique opportunity for me to observe how learning and identity intersect in a non-traditional learning space.

Gaining Access to the Field

At the community-university program, I met with one of the senior staff members in charge of community impact to talk about how my project could align with the goals of the program and also benefit the students involved. In that meeting, I found out I would be able to design the content myself, which stood out to me. It would have been more complicated to step into a structured classroom with a pre-set curriculum and try to make changes. This opportunity offered more flexibility and allowed me to co-create something meaningful with the students. (See Appendix 1: Letter to Program Management.)

The winter session ran between January and early February. Based on that, I developed a five-week experience I called *Tell Your Story*, where students could explore their identities, reflect on their experiences, and think about how who they are shapes the way they learn. I wanted them to see themselves as capable, creative, and able to make a difference, whether individually or as a group. (See Appendix 2: *Tell Your Story* Lesson Plan.) I also learned that two undergraduate mentors would be present throughout the sessions to support the youth. I saw this as an important opportunity to include their voices as well. Their perspectives could shed light on how identity shows up in post-secondary learning and mentorship roles. To capture this, I conducted two focus group interviews with the mentors; one at the beginning of the program and one at the end. (See Appendix 3: Mentors' Interview Protocol.) Being a PhD student working alongside undergraduates and younger students led me to reflect on our dynamics and how each of us, at different stages, views ourselves as learners.

Recruitment of Participants

Because my research took place within this existing program, the usual selection process was followed. Each year, over 60 schools in the city are invited to apply, and each school appoints a staff member—usually a teacher or guidance counselor—as the lead. This person helps students apply and coordinates with families. The program prioritizes students who are new to Canada, those who do well in school, and those who express an interest in going to university someday. As part of their registration, students and their families fill out forms with demographic, medical, and logistical information, along with program permissions and consent for media use, transportation, and emergency care. These forms are part of the usual intake process.

For the research itself, I created separate consent forms to ensure that students and their parents were fully informed about the project. Since the participants were minors, both an assent form (for the students) and a parent consent form were required. These included a clear explanation of the study, how the information would be used, and how it would be kept confidential and eventually destroyed. I also wrote a letter to parents explaining everything in accessible terms. (See Appendix 4: Assent Form; Appendix 5: Parents' Consent Form; Appendix 6: Letter to Parents.)

To help with logistics and follow-up, I worked closely with program staff, who shared the forms with students and their families and followed up as needed. Because they already had direct contact with the participants, communication was smoother and more efficient. For the mentors, I introduced the study in person. After they expressed interest in participating, I followed up by sharing the consent forms directly with them. (See Appendix 7: Mentor's Consent Form.) Through this process, I was able to bring together a group of youth and mentors whose experiences, voices, and reflections became the heart of my research.

Participants

As at the time of the research, the community-based education program in which the study was situated included three groups of students: grades 5 and 6, grades 7-9, and grades 10-12. This study focused on the middle group (grades 7-9), aged approximately 12-15. The program intentionally brings together a diverse range of students from across a large urban center, resulting in a multicultural and inclusive group. Many of the students, or their parents, are immigrants to Canada. This setting offered a rich opportunity to explore participants' cultural identities within a broader understanding of identity as multifaceted

and evolving (Young, 2018). The participant group included students of different genders (with Chang being the only male), races, and cognitive capacities. Eight grade-level students signed up for the Tell Your Story Academy, two undergraduate student mentors, and I, a PhD student, totaled 11 students in the group. Only four of the eight grade-level students consented to participate in the study. Hence, this study includes data from seven participants (four grade-level students, two mentors, and me), with detailed profiles of all participants presented in Chapter Four of the thesis.

Timeline for the Study

The winter program lasted approximately five weeks (every week in January and the first week in February). I met with participants once a week for one hour and fifteen minutes per day, for a total of five lessons.

Data Collection Process

Data for this study were collected using a combination of qualitative methods designed to foreground participants' experiences, reflections, and identity expressions in a naturalistic learning environment. These methods included semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the program, while journaling, observation, artifact elicitation, and photographs were used during the sessions. I will give a brief overview of the process now, but Chapters four, five, and six give a much more detailed narrative of the experience.

The research process began with a semi-structured interview with the undergraduate mentors, intended to understand how their identities were evident in their learning and mentoring practices. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a balance between guided questions and open-ended dialogue, creating space for participants to

express themselves in depth. As Qu and Dumay (2011) argue, interviews provide valuable insights into participants' lived experiences by opening up their “worlds of meaning” (p. 239). The interviews were audio-recorded with participants’ consent for accuracy and later transcription.

Journaling was also an integral part of the data collection process. Student participants were asked to write regularly during the sessions in response to open-ended prompts (see Appendix 2), reflecting on their thoughts, feelings, and evolving sense of identity. As Jackson (2008) notes, journaling can capture the complexities of individual experiences and the relational nature of identity formation. These entries provided insight into participants’ internal reflections that may not have been visible through observation or verbal discussion.

Participant observation was used throughout the learning sessions. During each session, I recorded brief descriptive notes and later expanded them into detailed field notes after the lesson, while observations and reflections were still fresh. These field notes included both descriptive information (e.g., student interactions, engagement levels, body language) and reflective insights (e.g., my interpretations, emotional responses, and emerging questions). I also recorded informal conversations and student feedback to help capture the relational dynamics within the group.

Additionally, artifact elicitation was used to further explore students’ meaning-making processes. While students were initially invited to bring personal artifacts that reflected aspects of their identities or experiences, an alternative option was provided for those who did not have or wish to share an item from home. In these cases, students were asked to select beads that “spoke to them”, choosing based on color, shape, or symbolic

meaning. The beads became powerful tools for self-expression, with some students choosing to describe why certain beads resonated with them, while others supplemented their stories with personal items they had brought. These artifacts, whether tangible belongings or chosen objects, served as narrative prompts and were integrated into classroom discussions and reflections to support deeper identity exploration. Other artifacts that were used include students' journal entries and drawings.

Photographs were used to document the physical settings and learning environment across the sessions, rather than the students themselves. Each session involved intentional spatial arrangements—such as seat arrangements, table groupings, materials displays, and seating circles—designed to support the pedagogical aims of that day. For example, during the final session, chairs were arranged in a circle to create a more intimate and open space for story sharing. Photographs captured these arrangements as part of the contextual data, offering insight into how the environment supported engagement and interaction. Also, images were taken of group-generated materials, such as the final display of participants' Trees of Life arranged together to form a collective "Forest of Life." These visual artifacts were accompanied by students' written comments, some of which were documented to highlight their emotional or reflective responses to the activity. The photographs provided a supplementary layer of interpretation, helping to convey the atmosphere, group dynamics, and evolving nature of the learning experience.

Together, these data collection methods offered a layered and multifaceted view of the learning experience, supporting the study's narrative and practitioner inquiry foundations. Each method contributed uniquely to capturing the relational, reflective, and contextually grounded dimensions of identity construction among participants.

Data Analysis Process

In this study, I employed a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that allowed me to manage, organize, and interpret the diverse data sources collected during the research process. The materials analyzed included participants' journal entries, drawings, field notes, artifacts (such as beads), and transcripts from group discussions. Analyzing these varied sources helped identify recurring themes and patterns, offering insights into participants' lived experiences and identity development. The integration of visual data, particularly drawings and artifacts, added richness to the analysis, allowing me to explore how participants expressed their identities through multiple modalities.

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), served as the primary analytical framework for this study. I engaged in a process of close reading, coding significant excerpts and visual elements that reflected how participants constructed meaning in relation to their experiences. This process was iterative and dynamic; I continually revisited and refined my codes as deeper insights emerged, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' voices (Saldaña, 2016). Thematic analysis enabled me to immerse myself in the data and identify both predetermined and emergent categories (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

Initially, I adopted a deductive lens by applying predetermined categories informed by five identity metaphors drawn from the theoretical framework established in prior literature (Moje & Luke, 2009). These categories helped me organize the data in ways that were theoretically informed and relevant to the study's guiding questions (further discussed in Chapter Seven). At the same time, I remained open to inductive insights, listening carefully to the stories emerging from the data. This inductive process led to a narrative re-

telling of experiences (presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six), where participants' reflections were situated chronologically and contextually. The findings were then synthesized into broader themes that illustrated how participants developed critical literacy through their engagement with personal and collective storytelling (See Table 1 below).

Themes	Subthemes	
1. Preparing a Leveling Ground	a. Facilitator as a Learner	• The Sequence • Initial Plans • Refined Plans
	b. Mentors as Learners	• Mentors' Profile • Mentors' Interest • Mentors' Learning Strategies
	c. Students as Learners	• Amy • Juliet • Sarah • Grace
2. Creating a Relational Home	a. Expectations versus Reality	• My Expectations versus reality • Mentors' Expectations versus reality • Students' Expectations versus Reality
	b. Roles of Building Relationships	• The Classroom Settings • The Co-creation of Rules • Imitation and Familiarization • The Use of Icebreakers
	c. Talking about Prior Experiences	• Program Trajectory • Tree Prompts • Critical Analogy • Collaborative Activity

3. Discussing Matters of Significance	a. Engaging Multiliteracies in	• Multimodal Intricacies • Textual Mode – Creative Writing • Aural Mode – Music • Visual Mode - Artifacts
	b. (De)storytization	• Resistance • Power and Agency • (Un)finished Trees
	c. Witnessing	• My Tree • Stories of Self • Validation and Acknowledgment

Table 1: Emerging Categories – Themes and Subthemes

Ethical Considerations

While this study has emphasized the importance of relational ethics (Clandinin et al., 2018; Clandinin, 2023)—grounded in care, reciprocity, and attentiveness to participants’ lived experience (Noddings, 2013; Ellis, 2007; Gergen, 2009)—it is equally necessary to outline the formal ethical protocols that guided the research. As Clandinin et al. (2018) note, relational ethics in narrative inquiry are embedded in the ongoing negotiation of relationships and the co-composition of stories. Ellis (2007) similarly emphasizes that relational ethics demand attentiveness to the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of research, especially when working closely with participants. Building on this, Ellis et al. (2011) frame relational ethics as a moral practice of care, mutual respect, and accountability to those whose stories we tell, requiring the researcher to engage ethically not just before and after, but during the storytelling process. These perspectives shaped how I engaged with participants, viewing ethics not as a static checklist but as a continuous, dialogic process. These relational practices were further supported by institutional guidelines

designed to protect human dignity. Therefore, this section details the ethical considerations and procedures followed in alignment with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2018), including issues of confidentiality, data storage, potential risks, participants' rights, and potential benefits of the research on participants.

The issue of anonymity was discussed with the participants, including the mentors, at the beginning of the study when the consent forms were distributed. Pseudonyms were used during the final compilation of the research findings. However, during the data collection process, participants' names were recorded in my fieldnotes and were used among one another in the classroom, as the study aimed to explore how individuals with different identities develop critical consciousness. At the beginning of the research, the participants were made aware of how the data collected would be used and stored. In the case of audio recordings and digital files, data was saved on a password-protected personal computer, and paper documents were kept in a private lockable cabinet, with only me having access to this information outside the research context. Participants were further informed that digital files would be permanently deleted and paper files would be shredded upon completion of the study. Participants were also informed that my research supervisor and committee at the University of Manitoba were entitled to the data so that I could be guided appropriately during the research process.

To show respect for people, participants were given a comprehensive overview of the research project, including its benefits and prospective risks (as seen in the consent forms). In examining how the different identity metaphors intersect for students to be critically literate, participants were made aware, at the beginning of the research, of the

tendency that some negative experiences might emerge. Talking about their personal lives, including the good and the bad, may bring up some emotional and psychological pains for them. Participants were informed that they had the autonomy to withhold certain information they may feel emotional about. Additionally, if any abuse was disclosed during sharing, participants were informed that I would follow the normal protocol of reporting the incident to Child and Family Services for additional assistance.

In summary, the first benefit of this research to participants was for everyone to be celebrated, irrespective of their differences. Also, there are times when sharing what hurts you the most makes things better, as was the case in the *Tell Your Story Academy*. Finally, the participants were informed that the major benefit of the research was to create a more transformational education for students of diverse identities. Creating a transformational education for students of diverse identities empowers them to develop their voice and agency, fostering a sense of ownership over their learning. It enhances critical thinking skills by encouraging engagement with varied perspectives, allowing students to analyze issues from multiple angles. This study's participants signed a voluntary, informed consent form after reviewing the potential risks and advantages of participating in the research and receiving full disclosure of all the information needed to make an informed decision about participation. Additionally, the parents of the students that participated in the study also signed consent forms, since the grade-level students were under 18 years old. Lastly, participants were reassured that if they no longer wanted to participate, they could inform my advisor or me (our contact information was included in the consent/assent forms).

Methods to Application

This chapter has outlined the methodological foundations of the study, including the research design, pedagogical approach, ethical considerations, data collection methods, and analytical processes. Grounded in teacher practitioner inquiry and narrative inquiry, the study was intentionally designed to center participant voice, relational ethics, and identity exploration through storytelling. By drawing on multiple forms of data and engaging in iterative, reflexive analysis, this research seeks to honor the complexity of participants' lived experiences. The next chapter presents a story titled "Preparing a Leveling Ground," which marks the beginning of my research findings. It explores the relational dynamics and role negotiation that shaped the Tell Your Story Academy, detailing how trust was cultivated, hierarchical roles were intentionally blurred, and a participatory learning space was co-constructed with students and mentors. This chapter sets the stage for understanding how identities began to take shape through storytelling in a shared, non-hierarchical space.

Chapter Four: Preparing a Leveling Ground

The art of sharing one's experiences with a group includes gaining the listeners' trust to aid expression. The Tell Your Story Academy was designed considering the academic levels and the roles of the participants involved. As much as these positions and roles are important in understanding participants' viewpoints from varying degrees, they can also serve as a barrier that can hinder students from expressing themselves the way they would in comparison to their everyday lives. Also, because the community winter program spans five weeks, it seemed like a limited time to build trust among a group of people. However, I knew it was doable because teachers and researchers employed the Tree of Life as a narrative therapy in one session. Therefore, I believed so much in flowing with the tides of the research and observing how the participants responded to some prompts in structuring subsequent sessions.

The strategy I employed to build trust aligns with the critical pedagogy that seeks to eradicate an absolute position on the part of facilitators as someone who instructs students on the best ways to behave or accomplish tasks when, in reality, they also learn from students (Freire, 2005; hooks, 1994). This necessitated the negotiation of the various roles I performed before and during the data collection process. My position as a researcher guided me toward my role as a facilitator, and my role as the facilitator guided me to see myself as a participant in my research. This cyclical shift reflects the core of Affective Liberation Literacy, where the educator is not a distant authority but a relational participant—one who is critically aware, emotionally attuned, and open to co-construction (Freire, 2005; Lyiscott, 2017; Anwaruddin, 2016). Also, the mentors were assigned to guide the students and serve as go-to persons when they could not ask the facilitator specific

questions. The first thing I thought about was abolishing these roles and creating a space where everyone would be viewed as equals, irrespective of their academic heights or backgrounds. This aligns with critical pedagogy's challenge to hierarchical schooling systems (Freire, 2005) and with the ethical imperative in relational education to create emotionally safe, egalitarian spaces for identity expression (Zembylas, 2024; Noddings, 2013). Even though our defined roles within the academy were important in running the sessions, it was helpful to understand where each participant was from and how we converged at the same point to agree to participate in the study.

Facilitator as a Learner

Understanding my experiences as a learner is necessary in following up on the stories of self, told by the other participants in this study. To explore the power of personal narratives, I believe it might be best to be reflexive in the sense that not only are the students expected to share, but also the facilitator's recounting of their stories can motivate the students to dig deep into their personhood (Cartun & Dutro, 2020; Slingerland et al., 2021). This pedagogical move echoes the core of narrative inquiry and critical affect theory, where embodied experiences, vulnerability, and storytelling converge to foster deeper relationality and trust (Clandinin et al., 2018; Massumi, 2015; Ahmed, 2004). Discussing my learning experiences in this analysis also helps create a bond with my readers and not limit the research's effect to just the time I gathered data. Therefore, this study serves as a continuous reflection for anyone who picks it up, which is one of the beauties of storytelling.

The Sequence

My journey as a learner is not easy, dating back to when I was four till date. These early schooling memories reflect what Ahmed (2004) describes as affective encounters that shape our orientations toward learning spaces. My initial resistance and eventual transformation illustrate the foundational role of affect in shaping identity, aligning with the critical affective literacy lens that understands emotion as central to epistemology and classroom practice (Anwaruddin, 2016; Jiang, 2023).

As a child, I enjoyed being at my mother's side; that was the safest place I could ever imagine. My mother's aura and strength made me feel like nothing could ever go wrong in life. As a four-year-old, my home was my world until one morning; my mum dressed me up to follow her somewhere like it was one of the normal places we visited, like the store or to see some friends. I cannot fully remember how we journeyed to our destination, but I remember vividly seeing a huge wall painted white and sky blue with some adults around wearing long-sleeved shirts and suits. My mother moved closer to them to have a discussion that never bothered me because all I could think of was how I would return home as quickly as possible to have some sweet snacks. After my mother's brief discussion, she called me to her side, patted me on the shoulder, and prep-talked me to be a good girl. I wondered if I had done anything wrong, and she was just trying to correct me at that moment. Little did I know that she would leave me with the stern-looking individuals wearing suits for the whole day.

As my mother turned her back to leave, I cried and attempted to follow her, but one of the teachers had a strong grip on my wrist. I wailed and wondered what I had done so wrong that I was getting abandoned and left with some people I was meeting for the first

time in my life. This experience was the earliest memory I had about being in a formal school setting, and it was unpleasant for me as a child, and it affected my view of school in general. Such emotionally charged memories reveal how early schooling experiences are shaped not only by structure but by affect—emotions that linger and shape future relationships with learning (Glapka, 2019; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). I wondered why I was being forced to learn things like the alphabet and numbers compared to being at my mother's side. Whenever I thought about it, I would choose my mum over again, making me lose interest in learning.

My family moved a few times in search of a conducive environment that can aid a child's successful upbringing in a communal way. Nigeria is a communal society where parents and the whole community are involved in raising a child (Ramsey-Soroghay, 2022). This necessitated the change of schools, with new and unfamiliar faces to deal with each time. I did not view going to school as a place to learn or socialize but as a place away from my family. In the 1990s to early 2000s, the Nigerian educational system, the 6-3-3-4 system (Egugbo & Salami, 2021), used grading/ranking methods to classify students, where students will be ranked first, second, third, etc. The 6-3-3-4 system meant six years in primary school, three years in junior secondary school, three years in senior secondary school, and four years in tertiary institutions. Throughout my primary education, I never got good grades because I did not understand why I should care about learning.

Not until I was in my fourth year of primary school did my father realize that I could not read. It happened when he asked me to get him one particular newspaper and described it using some words written on it. I could not identify the one he wanted by those words because I did not know how to read. The next thing my father did was enforce it on

me to always look at the newspaper and try to pronounce the words written on it every day. Gradually, I started reading and would get excited when I came across simple words like 'and,' 'the,' and 'this.' Learning to read after a while did not impact my learning, and the higher I went, the less I cared. I would almost come last in class and still be happy that I was better than the person who came last.

Then, I moved on to the Junior Secondary School (JSS) with my mates. In my second year in JSS, my class teacher randomly assigned seats to us, and unfortunately, I was paired with the most brilliant girl in the class. It felt unfortunate because I thought my new seatmate was pompous and proud of her academic achievements. My view of her made me want to run or sit beside someone I perform better than. However, I did not have much of a choice than to accept my fate. I managed to get through the first term, and I started to form a bond with her. During one of our major examinations, a teacher had provided us with some questions, and deep down, I felt I was lucky because my seatmate/new brilliant friend would hand the answers over to me on a platter. We brought out our answer booklets, and the next thing that happened changed my life forever. As she started putting down her answers, she used her left arm to shield the paper from me so I would not get answers from her. At this point, I was hit with a double-edged sword. The first edge that hit me was that she knew I was unprepared for the exam and did not consider me a friend enough to teach me the answers. The second hit was because I felt she thought so low of me that I would be desperate enough to stretch my neck to steal her answers without asking. Immediately, shame washed over me as I tried to figure out how I would at least not submit an empty answer booklet.

The affective dimension of shame here, as an embodied response to exclusion and expectation, exemplifies what critical affect scholars describe as the pedagogical significance of discomfort in identity construction (Elwell, 2022; Anwaruddin, 2016; Zembylas, 2016). As expected, I failed the exam but prepared well for the subsequent exams. I did not start reading schoolbooks because I felt like there was something I could learn from them but because I did not want to feel the same shame I felt during the first exam for the term. Lo and behold, out of thirty students in my class after the term, I came 12th in class. I got my report sheet for the term and could not believe that I could perform better than eighteen people at a time. This was a big deal for me, and I liked the fact that when I got home, I was treated like a princess with brains. Now that I have tasted the pride that comes with success, I vouched that there was no going back.

Throughout my secondary school, I was always among the top six students in a class of forty-five students. Even though I was still not as brilliant as my elder sister, who always came second in her class, I still felt like I had achieved a lot for someone who was already used to failing. On getting to the university after being admitted for a B.Ed. in English, I realized that I needed to put more effort into learning course materials than I did in secondary school. My first semester as an undergraduate was rough because nothing prepared me for the hardship of reading independently. The pride that came with my past academic glory became my downfall. I thought simply looking at course notes and listening attentively in class was enough to excel. I silently laughed at some of my friends who visited the library so often and wondered why they would go the extra mile to study what was not totally talked about in class. I never knew that my lecturers only gave 'a' in class

and expected us to discover 'b, c, and d' on our own. After seeing my first semester grades, no one told me to be friends with the library before I knew that it was the right thing to do.

Gradually, I started to get the hang of academic writing according to the Nigerian standard (for exams, I made sure to finish my answer booklets and ask for extra sheets). At this point, I realized that passing a course was dependent on how much you could prove to the lecturer that you had read extensively for the course. For instance, if a question asks for the definition of colors, I would first discuss the history of colors and talk about the types before giving the definition. With the technique of extensive answering, I started to do well, even though I did not see any direct connection between my personal life and schoolwork. What kept me going was that I knew that getting a good grade would position me well in getting a good job in the future. I can say that I became really focused and serious about learning to pass. This zeal to pass aided me during my master's degree, which I completed as the best graduating student in my department, and it always felt good to make my parents proud.

On getting to Canada for my PhD program, I was enthusiastic about the whole academic experience. I could not wait to plunge into learning and getting my courses done. I thought I would be able to finish most of my courses within the first two terms of my program. To be honest, I came to Canada with the aim that it might be possible to finish my program within the minimum number of years as I did for my B.Ed. and M.Ed. so that I can think about the next thing in life. At first, I thought that I might be able to take at least four courses per term since I took eight courses and more per term in Nigeria. I did not realize that one course in Canada was really weighty and in-depth, with many readings to be completed. I remember my first meeting with my advisor regarding taking courses in

my first term. I was advised to take the courses one step at a time because I was not used to the Canadian system. This was one of the best decisions I made with my advisor, considering I was also pregnant with my first child at that time.

During the Faculty of Education graduate students orientation, when it was time for question and answer, I asked the presenter where I could get sample exam questions so I could see the structure of how exams are set in Canada and prepare better. When I asked the question, the presenter did not understand what I meant, and I had to repeat myself a number of times using different words. Ultimately, I was informed I would not write exams for my courses. I was surprised and glad that at least, the level of my knowledge of courses would not be based on the scale of a timed exam like I was used to since I was a child. I became eager to see how my courses would be, and knowing that there were no exams pumped me up for the classes to come. Hence, instead of thinking of how to position myself to be one of the best students, I was thinking of how I could be better as an individual. The lack of an examination made me reflect deeply on what I have learned and how this knowledge can be transferred to my everyday life.

Conducting research in an environment one is not used to can be interesting and challenging at the same time. My undergraduate and master's theses were quantitative studies and did not require subjective data analysis. I did not consider myself a good writer who could write a descriptive study. I had many friends in literature and enjoyed reading their creative works with sophisticated words. The more I saw their writings, the less I thought I could write that way, and every time I wrote one sentence or a line, I would delete it because I felt it was nothing close to what I had read. After my undergraduate degree, I summoned the courage on one cold night to write and not think about the faults in my

writing. My first creative writing was a poem I wrote in 2015, and it is titled "The First Time."

It happened all of a sudden
Like cold water touching the skin during the harmattan season
The thought of bathing crossed my mind
But it was difficult for me to pick up a pen
Must I be clean?
Why can't I just be a reader?

I summoned all I had
I must bathe
Not for people to see how clean I am
But for me
I picked up my quill
But there was no soap
I was discouraged again

How could I sleep perfectly well with my heart overburdened,
I mean, with a dirty body
I rushed out once again to bathe
I must confess, it was so cold it left my heart racing for minutes but I had
my bath

I dropped my pen, feeling fulfilled,
Now I can sleep on my white sheet with a clean body.

After writing this piece, I felt like an interesting part of me that had been locked away for a long time was let loose. I started to write more short poems at intervals but with simple words. At this point, I was still not confident enough with my creative writing skills but was no longer appalled by my own writing. I wrote as much as I could and stored my writing in a file for my eyes and the views of some family members and friends. Although I have written a few pieces, I still used the quantitative method for my master's research. This may be largely because most educational research in some Nigerian institutions uses the quantitative method. Hence, deciding to be descriptive for my PhD thesis is like an academic adventure.

Initial Plans

When I thought about gathering data for this research, I considered the path straightforward, like I had previously done. This path involves meeting students in their natural learning environment and observing how the teaching and learning process unfolds. I felt I might need to collaborate with a classroom teacher who would allow me to study their class and maybe prepare or restructure their curriculum to include critical pedagogies. The only challenge I saw upfront was getting a classroom, which would not have been a problem if I were in Nigeria because I was a certified teacher working with the Teaching Service Commission, Lagos State, Nigeria, as an English teacher in a government-owned school. For my previous research studies, getting the school's consent was of utmost importance, and there was no need to get the consent of each student who participated in the study. I discovered the huge differences between conducting research in Nigeria and in Canada. There are lots of steps to be completed before conducting research in Canada, especially when the research involves human subjects (TCPS, 2018). I realized that if I

were to conduct research in a school, I would need to write separate letters to not just the principal but to the school division and to the parents of children who are not yet of age to give their consent for their children/wards to participate in any research. Even at that, there is a need to respect minors and seek their permission by asking them to sign an assent form after their parents consented to participate in a study. However, I found out that going through all these processes does not actually guarantee participants' consent to participate in any research, and this might spell out more work for the researcher because they would have to go over the process again. This was a major reason I considered an out-of-school program after much deliberation.

Initially, I planned on joining the Summer Book Club, where I could observe an experienced middle school teacher go through assigned readings with students to understand what they learned from the books. So as to get valuable information that would be necessary for my study, I felt it would be necessary to contribute extensively to the implementation of the book club. Having previously done quantitative studies, I was used to being in total control of how my study should go, considering my research variables. This is because quantitative research enables the researcher to control extraneous variables, thereby allowing a more precise examination of the relationship between variables (Wong, 2014; Mohajan, 2020). Hence, I observed the class with the instructor to get an understanding of how things were done to know where I could come in. At this stage, I had not totally shifted away from my previous research experience. I was still trying to bring in elements of my past research knowledge to carry out this study, even though they are two cases requiring different approaches and methods. I planned three semi-structured interviews with the instructor before, during, and after the summer book club. For the book

club, we were to meet students eight times in four weeks, that is, twice a week. I believed it would be appropriate to have a plan first before meeting with the instructor to find a common ground on the activities she had already planned out for the sessions. I used the book "Doing Critical Literacy: Text and Activities for Students and Teachers" to structure my plan (see Figure 2). However, I realized that my plan was over-saturated with activities to be completed within a short period of time. My sense of quantity over quality was still overpowering. I thought it would be so straightforward to simply gather the data and start writing the rest of my analysis chapters.

First Week's Activities Language and Position

July 3 - Part 1 (1 hour)

- Introducing ourselves to create a community of readers (10 mins)
- Generating ground rules as a group (10 mins)
- Activity 1: Perspective matters (6 mins)
- PowerPoint presentation on language and position (7 mins)
- Activity 2: Select a topic and debate your ideas in groups (for and against) (10 mins)
- Activity 3: Are you for or against the text? (5 mins)
- Activity 4: Roleplaying - refusing a date (7 mins)
- Highlights of the next day's events (5 mins)

July 6 - Part 2 (45 mins)

- Icebreaker: Rapid-fire questions (10 mins)
 - When did you start reading?
 - What was the first book you remember reading?
 - Where do you read?
- Revision of the previous day's activities (5 mins)
- Guided discussions with the following prompts (25 min):
 - What position do you think the writer is constructing?
 - What does the author want us to think? Why do you think so?
 - What is the ideal reading position?
 - Who benefits from this position and who does not?

(NB: As students read, they can make bookmarks on the ideas they wish to follow through)

- Highlights of the next events (5 mins)

Figure 2: My initial first-week plan

Maybe this is a cultural thing, or it is just me; I figured I was direct in some of my questions and activities for students. The reason I must have felt it is cultural is because Nigeria, as a communal society, is expressive and believes that it takes a community to raise a child. Therefore, once anyone in the community notices something in a child, either positive or negative, it is discussed as a group. For example, in my initial plan for the

second week, activities three and four focused on discussing top and underdog and for students to write about when they were bullied or witnessed unfair treatment (see Figure 3). My thoughts were for students to share their experiences on these specific topics because we would have created a small community of sharing experiences amongst ourselves. However, I did not specifically consider the issue of trauma with regard to sensitive topics such as bullying. Trauma and mental health are two topics that rang lots of bells since I arrived in Canada. It is rare for me to encounter someone who has not gone through some traumatic experience. It might be a negative experience caused by the people close to you, those that you are not related to, or even the death of a loved one. However, different people deal with this stress differently, which might be based on the person's personality or the values of the society. Hence, in Canadian society, the issue of trauma is treated with care and is not something that might be brought up casually.

Second Week's Activities Identity and Diversity

July 10 - Part 1 (1 hour)

- Revision of the previous week's activities (4 mins)
- Icebreaker: where does your identity lie? In your body or your memory? (5 mins)
- Short film: <https://youtu.be/oocunV4jX4w> (8 min)
- Activity 1: who am I and what makes me me? (8 mins)
- PowerPoint presentation on identity and diversity (6 mins)
- Activity 2: creating a sense of belonging (6 mins)
- Activity 3: top-dogs and underdogs (6 mins)
- Activity 4: Write your story about being bullied or excluded or witnessing someone else being singled out for unfair treatment. (12 mins)
- Highlights of the next day's events (5 mins)

July 13 - Part 2 (45 mins)

- Icebreaker: Language and inclusion (10 mins)
 - Compile a list of your teenage slang.
 - Does everyone in your class share the same slang or not? Why?
- Revision of the previous day's activities (5 mins)
- Guided discussions with the following prompts (25 mins):
 - Choose two characters from the book you are reading and outline the characteristics that classify them as topdogs in some instances and others that classify them as underdogs.
 - What action would you take to support the underdogs in the book?
- Highlights of the next events (5 mins)

Figure 3: My initial second-week plan

Refined Plans

The initial plan was revised numerous times. Therefore, there were many revisions before finally settling on a refined plan. The first set of revisions was done with my advisory committee, where we met to discuss the implementation of the academy. Following this meeting, I realized that it was time to unlearn everything I used to know about research, especially when the context was different, to fit into the Canadian research system. Structuring the refined plan was not a one-time process. There was lots of back and forth to ensure that no gaps were left open regarding the participants' mental health and also to ensure I was not squeezing in numerous activities to be completed within a short period. The time needed to plan a quality study was more important than trying to meet up with the Summer Book Club.

Hence, I forfeited the summer program and decided to meticulously plan, together with my committee, for the Winter 2024 program, where I would be leading my own academy on my own terms. Deep down in my heart, I was glad that I might be able to plan for major events and steer the ship in the favour of what I felt would be an appropriate outcome. I had no idea that the outcome of the research would be totally out of my hands during the data collection process, as the role of the researcher in a qualitative study is “not to test a predetermined hypothesis, but to explore and understand the phenomenon under study” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 15). This shift aligns with the tenets of *Affective Liberation Literacy*, which calls for openness, reflexivity, and emotional presence in research encounters. By embracing fluidity over fixity, I became attuned to the affective and relational dimensions of storytelling, critical pedagogy, and identity work (Anwaruddin, 2016; Freire, 2005; Jiang, 2023).

Together with my advisory committee, I decided to settle for just one subtle but engaging activity that would serve as a scaffold to get students to talk about their experiences in a less traumatic way. This was when the Tree of Life (Ncube & Denborough, 2006) came to mind, and it was incorporated into the activities for the winter program. The Tree of Life also offered a method aligned with critical affective literacy, blending emotional expression, critical reflection, and identity exploration. It became a medium through which students could navigate their lived experiences using both linguistic and non-verbal literacies, fostering relational engagement and critical insight (Cartun & Dutro, 2020; Ahmed, 2004). The academy title I designed was Tell Your Story to encourage participants from the onset of choosing the academy that there would be much sharing of personal experiences.

Even though the Tree of Life activity was carried out in one session by the developers of the narrative therapy approach, I decided to spread the activity into various parts that would be completed each week (as outlined in Appendix 2). This gives students enough opportunity and time to trust the process since we would encounter each other for the first time in the winter program. My hope was to get students to write and draw various parts of their trees on separate days while we tell stories of self in between. I was expecting a relational community where everyone would be willing to talk, in the form of chats, about their experiences. As a former teacher in Nigeria, I have heard that my classes are usually fun, and I thought to myself, how hard could it be to teach a group of students who are culturally different from me? I believed my ability to carry everyone along should prevail despite these differences. Also, positive attempts were made to link the Tree of Life activity to the concept of literacy. Therefore, it was not only about getting students to talk about

their experiences but also having them engage in various literacy activities that can enhance their knowledge of what is happening around them. Despite literacy not being limited to reading and writing (New London Group, 1996; Daley, 2003), these skills are still very important in the learning process (Krashen, 2004; Graham & Hebert, 2011). The plan was to introduce two texts about trees to the students and see how students could relate to the information or main ideas in the books. The two picture books I used are poems. They are “My Heart Was a Tree” by Michael Morpurgo (2023) and “What Do You See When You Look at a Tree” by Emma Carlisle (2022). This plan seemed good as we would engage in reading, writing, listening, drawing, and speaking activities.

Despite the plan sounding good enough, there is always a difference between theory and practice. I was glad when I was told that the first week of the community winter program was the orientation week, where all the facilitators, including old and new facilitators, would meet to discuss from previous experience what worked and what to expect with the kids. The other revisions that were made to the Tell Your Story were based on this orientation, as experienced facilitators talked about what they intended to do with the kids. Since it was my first time at the community program, I was mostly quiet, absorbing what people had to say. Most of the facilitators looked excited, in my opinion, like they could not wait to start to showcase what they had to offer. Despite the fact that the facilitators were undergraduate students, some of them looked like they had been teaching children for a long period of time.

There were a lot of valuable reminders of how we can better prepare for our first day. We were reminded to always have extra activities in our pockets in case things do not go as initially planned. For instance, I had previously planned that students would bring

any artefacts of their choice that can serve as text and speak to them. However, with such a reminder, I had to plan for eventualities if the kids decided against or forgot to bring their artifacts. There were suggestions on what to do, including bringing something that could be an artifact for kids. My thoughts on this were how possible or easy it might be for me to know what the students might collectively have knowledge about. I found a way for students to get involved in bead-making by selecting a number of beads that they like and/or speaking to them. This is a technique that I find beautiful. Bead-making is a skill that is totally different from what a typical literacy class might be engaging students in; however, it can serve as another fun way to get students to talk about their ~~bad~~ choices and experiences.

Another thing I learned was to have enough icebreakers to keep the students engaged. I have learned over time that icebreakers are necessary to bridge gaps. However, I thought my academy had a lot of fun activities that there might not be enough time for lots of icebreakers. I felt it might be good to start each session with icebreakers to keep the room lively from the start, while the positive vibe would be transferred to the rest of the activities for the day. At least, that was my thought. At the orientation, we were given a link to get icebreakers, and we were all encouraged to add more to the list on the community program's website. I took notes on some of the icebreakers I thought would be interesting because it is almost common knowledge that qualitative research is not one where the research outcome might be predetermined. At least, now I practically know. All these constant changes in plans really prepared me for what might feel like the worst. As much as I felt ready to plunge into the field, I knew I should still be ready to move to the research

rhythm as it plays out. Therefore, a more refined plan that was used for the Tell Your Story Academy will be discussed in the next chapter.

Mentors as Learners

Shelly and Chang were the two mentors who were assigned to my academy. They are undergraduate students at the university where the after-school took place. Shelly is a final-year Art History student, while Chang studies Microbiology and is in his third year. Shelly volunteered to be a mentor for the experience so she could help middle school children. This was her first experience as a mentor for the community winter program. On the other hand, Chang volunteered to be a mentor at the community program a number of times. This is due to his love of helping others and because he was also a benefactor of the community program in grade school. Of course, he also views the experience as a plus to his career development. This section provides a profile of the mentors and discusses their interests in learning. Since this study seeks to understand how students' identities at different levels are evident in their learning, it is appropriate to delve into the mentors' personal academic lives.

Mentors' Profile

Shelly is a Nigerian from Rivers State. She was born in Benin Republic, a French-speaking country, and has been in Canada since she was six. Hence, she is multilingual; she speaks her Nigerian native language, the language of the Ogoni people. She also speaks different variants of the English language; Canadian English and Nigerian English. Depending on whom she is speaking with, she code-switches when necessary. She learned Canadian English after a year of staying in the country. As an arts student, she dislikes

maths and runs away from it whenever it shows up during her studies. She has served as a student advisor and enjoys volunteering in various roles whenever possible. Shelly is a dynamic learner who loves to explore various aspects of learning. She believes that to make her learning wholesome, she needs to know different things. She has taken a lot of electives, including courses in physical education and the sciences, so she can tap into any benefits these courses offer. She likes gospel music and is religious. She also enjoys sleeping, reading, and eating sweets. However, she dislikes fake people and horror movies.

Chang is a first-generation Chinese immigrant and the oldest of three sons. He stayed in the southern part of China and grew up with his grandma till he was eight years old when he traveled to Canada. He was the only male present at the Tell Your Story Academy. He is the first person to attend the university in his family. Chang enjoys seeing good movies and refers to them during discussions whenever he can. He has been interested in science since high school, and that passion developed during other volunteering opportunities he engaged in before becoming an undergraduate student. Because of his outgoing nature, he does not hesitate to help anyone who needs it. As much as he seems extroverted, his course type is not giving him enough opportunities to interact with people as much as he would like. He thinks only about school and believes he needs to be extremely focused on achieving his goals. Unlike Shelly, Chang loves horror movies. In addition to that, he loves mixed martial arts and different sports like skateboarding, volleyball, badminton, and K-pop. On the other hand, there are a number of things he dislikes, which include exams, science labs, negative and selfish people, and people being loud in the library.

Mentors' Interests

Reading someone's profile might open a window into knowing that person. However, digging deep into what a person is interested in will open a door to understanding some of an individual's experiences that make up who they are. From my interview with the mentors, they are interested in different things. It seems like they are both at the end of a continuum as their fields of study have set or positioned them in a particular way that is particular to these fields. It has been established that the scientific methods of doing things usually follow a straight and objective approach (Gach & Wallace, 2010; Daston & Galison, 2010; Stefanidou & Skordoulis, 2014), while arts seem more fluid and leaves room for subjectivity (Efland, 2002; Leder, et al. 2004; Boden, 2005). This made it easy for me to explore the mentors' interests using the straight path and the stumbled path to describe who they currently are.

Straight and Stumbled Paths. Chang's interest seems linear, as what he wanted to study at the university had never changed since high school. Not only was it his choice to study science, but his parents' likeness for the field also encouraged him to go along that path. Getting support from loved ones in one's interest can also serve as a form of motivation to keep going, even when the road gets rough (Wigfield & Ecclestone, 2000; Gonzales-DeHass & Willems, 2003). Hence, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are key in developing students' interests in education (Filgona et al., 2020). These forms of motivation drew a line for Chang so the thought of crossing it might not be favorable. Discussing with Chang, he said,

I really liked science when I was in high school. So I thought I might as well go into the field, I guess, because that is all I have known for the majority of my life,

studying science. Yeah, that is about it. That is literally it. And then also my parents kind of want me to go into the science field. So, I was like, if I like science a little bit, and my parents also support me in science, why don't I go on this path? Because I really did not explore that much in high school and just took a science course.

However, each educational level has different things that can keep one committed to a field of study because of the different structures laid down in schools. On the one hand, high school, as a springboard to being a university student, comes with many choices for students. At that stage, students must try different things to see what works for them. On the other hand, being in the university means you must have made a choice with regard to where you are headed in terms of your career goals, even though this choice does not have to be absolute. Once in the university, there is no turning back, except if an individual decides to start all over again. Chang felt his choice of science might have been due to how much he had enjoyed it in high school, but when he got to the university, reality set in as numerous books stared him in the face to be completed for success to be attained in the field. To him, the University seemed like a playing field where not only intelligence is a determinant for success. In his words,

I took all three sciences physics, chemistry and biology. I did all three of them. So then in university, I was like, Oh, well I already started this like a long journey of science, why not continue? Because I found it interesting in high school at least. But in uni, it is a different beast because you need to read. If you don't like something in high school, you might make a change, but in university, I guess I persevered. I feel like in terms of smartness, in my opinion, there's nothing like "Oh, you're really smart". I think perseverance, hard work, and dedication....

Dedication is definitely a bigger factor than just smartness because it can only get you so far until you hit a ceiling, and then hard work gets you over that ceiling.

As Shelly listened to Chang talk about how easy it was to choose a path, she explained that her experiences were different because it seemed like her high school did not really offer her enough chances to select from an array of courses that she might be interested in. Due to this limited option, she decided to explore various courses to see the one that spoke to her more. As she moved from one course to the other, she picked interests in some aspects of the courses, but not all. Her love for “little things of everything” is reflected in some of the choices she has made so far as a university student, as she took courses from both science and arts-related courses. During her course of study, her interests changed when a course to which she was not inclined appeared.

The school I went to was a bit limited in the kind of courses I would love to explore. But I think that allows me to narrow down what I really wanted, in a way versus when there are so many options, you get a bit confused on what you really want to do. So just like I’m doing this year, I was able to balance, like my love for music, my love for..., my like or arts. I wouldn’t say I love it, but my like for art. And then I do love sciences. So a bit of everything is what I was doing throughout my entire high school year. So when I got to university, and I decided that I wanted to pursue architecture, that was nice in the first year, like my grades were great.... And then math came in, I was like, Ah, dammit. And that changed everything for me in the sense that it made me, I will say it, forced me to do the default route. I never really wanted to do that. But it was just there. So my default route was art history. So I started taking other courses like this semester, I’m taking a lot of different courses

not in my faculty. And it's exciting in the sense that it just complements me as a person. And I'm able to learn from each of those faculties. So, I took a bit of science, a bit of Kinesiology, I was crazy (laughs), took a bit of linguistics and then I still maintain the base, which is art history. So I took a bit of that and then religion so it just combined everything. And yeah.

As Chang struggled with being unable to switch from a choice he had made for a very long time, Shelly finds it quite easy to sway from one field to another, depending on how she feels about a course at each point in time. These two scenarios make it seem like there are times when having enough choices can be limiting. This is because it is possible that for an individual to select from a number of choices, they might feel like they have selected the best of them all when in actuality, they might have thought differently when given the chance to taste the other choices. Also, one might think having limited choices would make it easy to select any option. However, Shelly brought another perspective to that with the thought that "less might actually be more." Having limited or unlimited choices is one thing, and comprehending these choices and how they benefit us is another, which might be based on who we are. Therefore, personality is a great thing to consider in decision-making (Bayram & Aydemir, 2021), as both Chang's and Shelly's personalities have affected their academic interests.

Looking at Shelly from a distance, she looks introverted; however, when conversing with her, one might be convinced she is extroverted. In my discussion, she confirms that she is just between the introverted and extroverted traits depending on the situation. Due to her dynamism, she has tried various things, which include taking up various part-time jobs as she studied for the first three years of her degree. Also, Chang

seems outgoing, but only talks about school. Schoolwork has taken a larger part of Chang's daily life, so he feels there is nothing fun happening to him, except on some days when he volunteers in some organizations where he meets new people and sees another perspective on life. Although Chang mentioned his love for entertainment, like movies, songs, and games, the main activity he has with his friends other than talking about school is playing video games, where everyone plays in silence till someone wins. When I asked him why he feels he can not engage in personal discussions with friends, he mentioned that it is not as straightforward for guys to discuss personal things as it is for ladies.

Mentors' Learning Strategies

Various strategies emerged in my discussion with the mentors about how they learn and what they think they can do better to be great at learning. These strategies are dependent on context with regards to what the course needs, and their general personalities and experiences. This emphasis on personal context and adaptive learning aligns with the principles of liberation literacy, where identity, agency, and lived experience are central to educational practice (Lyiscott, 2017). When enriched by relational and affective awareness, such strategies embody the values of Affective Liberation Literacy, reinforcing the idea that learning is both political and deeply personal. They both agreed that, unlike in high school, students need to devise additional plans for how they intend to succeed in the university. For Shelly, her learning strategies changed over time as she progressed in her learning. Since she took on various courses from different departments, her deployment of strategies was based on how she felt she was doing academically and what needed to be done to be better. Shelly does not believe in exerting so much effort in memorizing course content, which may be attributed to the subjectivity in art. However, despite her major in

art, Shelly's dynamism and venturing into other fields did not totally change her outlook on how she approached learning. Hence, instead of the field of study determining how she learns, her personality and experiences during a period of time influence how she learns. Therefore, her approach to learning changed each year. She said, "There are no specific learning strategies because the strategies I use change every year."

Shelly started her university journey in the summer, and the heavy courses she took prepared her for university life because she believed that structure could not be ruled out, even for subjective courses. Her writing-based courses equipped her with the necessary tools for academic writing, including appropriately referencing sources using the Chicago style. Luckily for her, the second course she took in the summer taught her about learning strategies. These courses served as preparatory courses because, without them, she might not have understood what was expected of her as a university student having freshly graduated high school. Shelly expressed these thoughts by saying

So the first thing I ever learned was Chicago style. And that's the foundation of this faculty, unfortunately, but once you've mastered Chicago style, every other citation style is just an add-on. So that's what I focused that summer on learning and it was a good setup, because come fall, that was what all of my five courses or four courses were talking about. Chicago style this and Chicago style this. So he taught me about formatting in the summer. The second course I took in the summer taught me about learning strategy. What strategy works for me because I'm obviously just starting.

The takings from her first-year courses helped her scale through the first three years at the university while she took on part-time jobs alongside her studies. Since the foundation was great, she did not view taking on part-time jobs as stressful. However, after

her third year, she thought about how she combined work with studies and felt that if she did not work, she might not have enough time and strength for her academics, which would make her grades better. She said,

If you choose to add work to your university plan, that work is your fifth course. And you have to treat it as a fifth course because you're giving effort, your time and energy to that. So that mentality helped me to like restructure my way, in my third year.

As a student, Shelly believes in attending classes no matter the situation because paying attention to the professor during lectures is more important than reading the course materials. I understand her sentiment because of the art course's subjectivities. Since the professor of a course will also mark an assignment based on their perspective, it might actually be helpful to listen attentively to the professor to understand what they want or are looking to achieve through the course. This might prove helpful to a student in appropriately structuring assignments and tests based on what the professor wants. Shelly rates attending classes and listening to the professor higher than viewing the course content, even though she attested that it might not work for others. She mentioned that,

I know that if I sit down in a class, actually pay attention to the professor and just make sure I pay attention to whatever it is, whether visual or audio and understand it, the only thing I need to do is the remaining percentage. At least we sit in classes 75%. The remaining percent that's me just reviewing the content. That percentage, I don't usually do. Until when it's exam period where it's like a week before the exam, and then I just crash course study. And for me, that works. But it's not an advisable thing.

Not everyone had a great first year at the University like Shelly did. My first year was not all rosy because I did not receive the appropriate information about how to survive as an undergraduate. Chang also commented about his first year, saying, "So first, it was really bad for me. I think everybody's first year is pretty bad in the uni, I guess". Chang said this before Shelly outlined how she was fortunate to take some courses that helped in her first semester. However, the generalization in his statement was evident, maybe because he knows some other people who did not have it well in their first years. Unlike in my case of the lack of orientation, Chang's reason for having it rough might be due to some other reasons like being a first-generation university attendee in his family. As the first son of his family, there are lots of expectations of him that he might have put on himself. When Chang talked about his parents, he said, "... I know how hard they work to put something on the table. So I guess I gotta like to repay them in a way, you know. They didn't say to repay them. It's just my interest too". Chang sees success as compulsory to give his family a better life. This force he has created within him can put much pressure on him, making his first year not as spectacular as he would have wanted it to be.

Additionally, the zeal to take up part-time jobs as a youth might affect students' motivation to study, as students may experience conflicts between work and study schedules and struggle to balance their responsibilities (Fernandha & Grasiawaty, 2021; Waylan et al., 2013). When Chang was sixteen years old, in eleventh grade, he took on his first part-time job at McDonald's, where he received minimum wage. That really affected his grades, which became lower than what they usually were. Also, having to take on various roles at a time might affect the general performance of a student in either of those roles. Getting back from work, Chang felt stressed and did not have enough time to go over

his schoolwork like he used to. Luckily, he started taking studies seriously again in grade 12, however, the space between grade 12 and being an undergraduate is not a wide one. As he was still trying to grapple with his identity as a student and how he could be a better one, he got into the university. Therefore, the struggle to be better continued, which leaves him stressed most times. When I asked Chang about his greatest challenge as a student, his first response was "dealing with burnout." The burnout he feels makes him depend on coffee; he mentioned at the beginning of my interview with him that he would get iced coffee after the interview. He said, "I'm really caffeine-dependent. Jittery kind of."

Unlike Shelly, Chang exerts much more effort in memorizing important information to attain passing marks during examinations. He confirms that most of the courses he took used multiple choice as a form of test, which is different from what is done in arts, where students can express themselves and their ideas. He believes in the rigor of reading every course material handed to him page by page, starting from the course syllabus to get every fact there is to the course. He said, "All our tests are more like quizzes.... I hate the fact that in science, there is only one right answer". Although Shelly and Chang had different views on how they studied to pass examinations, there was a general agreement on some techniques that could be used to learn. In different ways, using different words, they aligned three strategies for effective learning, which are scheduling, having social support, and collaborating with others.

Scheduling. Chang mentioned the first form of scheduling when he talked about how easily he experiences burnout. To him, scheduling generally means taking some time to rest amidst studying to reduce the likelihood of burnout (Ginns et al., 2023). Carpenter et al., (2012) refer to this as "the spacing effect" (p. 2). Hence, Chang proposed having

study days and rest days for positive mental health. Also, he specified that planning is not only about having a general schedule but also about scheduling specific things like how one goes about reading. He commented that majorly, he enjoys starting his reading process with the easier things to build his interest in the material first, before moving to the more technical aspects of the content, which is a key principle of reading instruction (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). He likened this method to the act of driving when he said, "You need to start the motor before you actually start driving." He believes using these two scheduling forms can help balance students out so they would not get exhausted easily. He referenced the Pomodoro method, which is a time management method that involves breaking down work into intervals separated by short breaks (Wong et al., 2010). and said he reads for forty-five minutes, rests for ten minutes, and continues reading for another forty-five minutes.

Shelly's form of scheduling is more in line with taking the courses a student can cope with, including interesting electives that would balance out the course load. Various studies agree that taking electives can develop students' interest, increase their level of engagement, and provide students with a break from the intensity of core subjects (Movchan & Zarishniak, 2017). Shelly stated that she took six courses in the summer of her fourth year, which were spaced out. In the first two months, she could focus on four of those courses, while she took the remaining two courses in the last two months. Not thinking about the eight courses at a time helped her plan one step at a time for those courses. Also, she included electives in the course load, which she called the "sandwich method." The elective she took was a random course that motivated her to continue attending school. This course had little to do with reading and more with physical activity.

Also, she creates a schedule for how she wants her semester to be, including tiny details that she feels do not count at the moment of planning. She explained this further by saying,

I started putting everything in my schedule because I am like, those things that I say do not count; they are the things that slip away at least 10% or 1% of my energy. And I do not know until I put it out. So, I started mapping that all out. And it made life easier.

Furthermore, Shelly agreed that there is a need for a work-life balance because she had been working and studying full-time for the first three years of her academic life without taking any breaks. She stated that when she quit her job, she had more time for herself in that when she was not reading, she had more time to rest her head and sleep, which is very important in the study process. She also mentioned that when she was working, "the only time I had to study or sleep was in between the job or weekends". Experiencing a life without having to work, she feels content and is thinking more about engaging in activities that are useful to her development as an individual now and her career in the long run, which includes volunteering or joining the choir. She said, "What I decided to do is that instead of doing something that I can get money in return for, I would rather do something that is more fulfilling towards my future." Having realized how stressed she was in the past, combining both school and work, she expressed that schoolwork is so tedious that she would need one month to herself after graduation to feel alive again before thinking of what would come next.

Social support. Chang believes that there is a need for social support as one journeys through academic life. Studies conducted by Perry et al., (2018) and Huang et al. (2023) support the argument that social support is crucial to enhancing motivation and

fostering self-regulated learning, as it provides learners with a sense of belonging. Chang stated, "...studying alone sometimes can be very lonely and depressing, and it would be like it is you against the world." He posits that to keep sane, one needs the support of friends and family to understand that there is a world outside academics occasionally, as it is quite easy to get drowned in the well of school without a social life. His parents' support of his course of study motivates him to keep on rolling the academic ball. Also, most of Chang's friends are not in his department, so they cannot really help him with his schoolwork. Also, he mentioned not even discussing his work directly with friends because of his cautiousness of academic dishonesty. However, he said having great friends who will encourage you in your lowest times is what has worked well for him. He also mentioned that he learned some learning strategies he uses from some of his friends from other faculties because "learning to learn" is necessary to learn course contents. He believes that having friends who take courses that are different from yours makes you see the world outside your domain. Shelly also reiterated this idea when she stated that all of her friends were not in her department. She said,

None of my friends are in my faculty, none of them. I feel like it complements you. If you are hanging out with people who are not in your faculty, it gives you a fresh perspective on looking at things because like, for assignments, for instance, there are some things that you can brainstorm with them. They give you a different perspective than someone in Art History and brainstorm with you. It is not the same thing. Oh, yes. I think they are complementary.

Engagement with Others. As much as having friends outside his faculty is a great strategy for Chang, he believes having friends within can also be helpful because those are

the ones who actually understand your course content. This would create a room for you to rub minds with like-minded people. At this point, he mentioned the imperativeness of engaging in academic discourses with others (Gomoll et al., 2017), which necessitates teaching what you know to people. He believes that teaching whatever he has read would make him better at the subject, as opposed to not teaching it to anyone. He called this a "reward system", where you are being rewarded for teaching others what you know by knowing it better. He also referred to this strategy as learning by doing, which was proposed by Dewey (1938, as cited in Williams, 2017) who posits that learning is not the product of teaching, but the product of the activity of the learners. Chang attested that some of his friends called him in his first year to have a discussion on one of his chemistry courses. At that time, they all met in his house, and he explained most of the theories he had already read to them, which they were thankful for. Knowing that someone at the corner depends on your teaching to understand something might motivate you to understand so you can simplify it for the next person. He said,

I feel like I'm acting because if you can teach your course to someone in the fifth-grade level or something like that, making a complex topic simple and explaining it in a way that's easy for a fifth-grader to understand, then you really know your stuff.

Shelly's engagement with others in her class is arranged during class discussions, rather than Chang's self-gathered group. She mentioned that her high school biology and social studies teachers were the first to model "pure teaching" to her. What she meant by "pure teaching" is when teachers realize that using the lecture method in delivering class content might not help the students to learn (Cerbin, 2018) and for this reason, group the

students to teach one another in a language they would understand among themselves (Knight & Brame, 2018; Tavares, 2019). She explains that,

I learned more in that setting because they were speaking my language versus him speaking whatever he knew. Pure teaching was something we started as little children. And it got us to be in leadership roles because each person had to take turns teaching whatever subjects. And then, coming to university, there were a lot of orientation-type things where you are a leader.

Teaching what she knew to others in her group not only assisted Shelly in understanding the subject but also prepared her for leadership roles. Also, there are a number of self-directed learning requirements at the University level that when an individual is not appropriately grounded on how to go about learning on their own, it might be difficult to get through course materials.

Students as Learners

The middle school students in the community program are from different cultural backgrounds and grade levels with varying abilities and interests. One thing these students have in common is that they have been through some forms of oppression among peers for various reasons, including physical features, ability to speak appropriate English, and cultural backgrounds. However, these students have been assigned to the Tell Your Story Academy to meet others like them and listen to one another's stories. I will be focusing on four distinct students with unique characteristics and behaviors.

Amy

Amy is an active eighth grader who loves school and everything that comes with it. Her interest in academic activities was evident since the first day at the Tell Your Story Academy when she started volunteering to start out most of the activities I proposed. She listens with rapt attention and takes her time to document most of her thoughts to the provided writing prompts. She is mixed-race with roots in Portugal, Scotland and England. From my perspective, she seems like an ideal student, every teacher's dream student who participates actively in class and turns in assignments even before the deadlines. Amy is a tall girl with long dark hair. Her eyes are deep, and she looks like she has enough experience in any subject that might come up. She loves her family, friends, and pets. She loves books and enjoys hot chocolate. However, there are a number of things she dislikes, like TV advertisements. She does not understand why they take so long to pass on a very simple message without including unpleasant songs. She dislikes the word "congruent" and wonders what the person who thought of the word first was thinking about when they said the word first. She also does not like the school speaker system and feels something should be done about the sound that makes words unclear to the listeners. As much as she enjoys reading, another thing she dislikes most is a badly written book. She expressed her displeasure in her journal by taking on the role of a writer of a book series (see Figure 4).

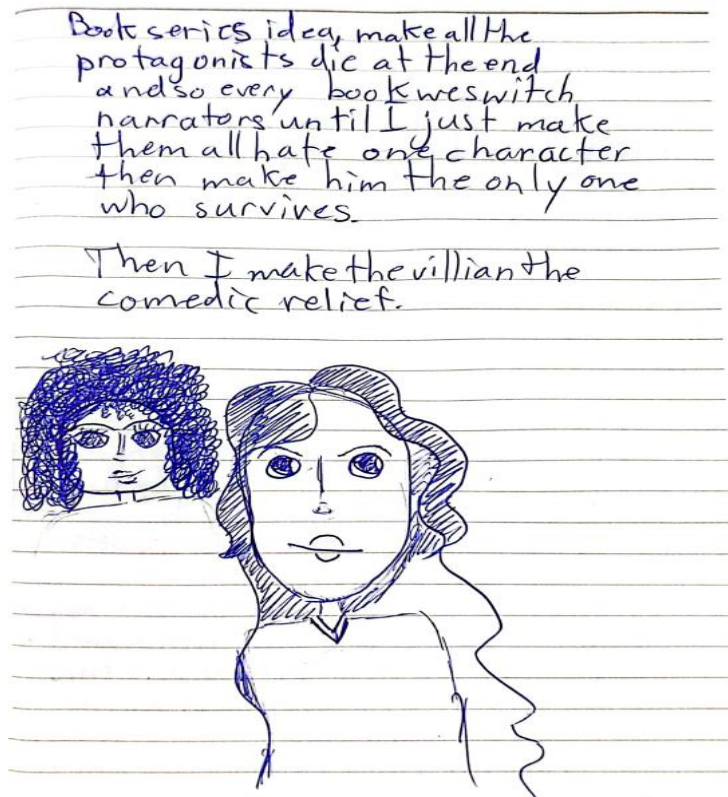


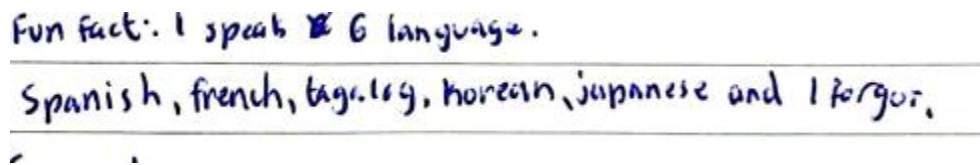
Figure 4: Amy's creative ideas (dislikes) expressed in her journal

She wrote about this in first person, putting herself in the shoes of such writers to understand why they would last minute decide to kill all the protagonists in their series, switch narrators in some instances, and make readers hate a character so much that when they become the villain, the writer turns them to be the comic relief. At the bottom of the page, she had a drawing of herself, trying to think like the authors who write such books, the second image being the thought of an author.

Juliet

Juliet is an interesting seventh grader with a lot of promising ideas. She looks quite shy from a distance, and she avoids discussions when called to talk about ideas she is not interested in. She is a girl with a petite stature and short dark hair. She always wears a smile

on her face, no matter the situation. She smiles when she is happy, tired, or confused. She is a Filipino and a multilingual. In her journal, she wrote that she speaks six different languages: "Spanish, French, Tagalog, Korean, Japanese, and I forgot" (see Figure 5). My guess is that she might be fluent in some of these languages and picked up others from her favorite television dramas. However, it would have been lovely to hear her speak some of these languages in a normal circumstance (the situation was an unusual one because I was in the process of building trust with the students).



Fun fact: I speak 6 languages.
Spanish, french, tagalog, korean, japanese and I forgot.

Figure 5: Juliet's affirmation of the languages she spoke

Mostly, Juliet loves to sit by herself and enjoys being in her world. She only talks when spoken to, more like an introvert. She is usually reluctant to participate in the Tell Your Story Academy activities and unlike others, she takes her time to complete the writing prompts. She loves listening to music a lot. She also enjoys eating, doodling, traveling, watching K-pop, laughing, and telling people horror stories. On the other hand, she dislikes it when the Wi-Fi does not work, when there are crumbs on her bed, when her ears do not pop on the plane, glitching devices, and when people interrupt when others are speaking, among other things.

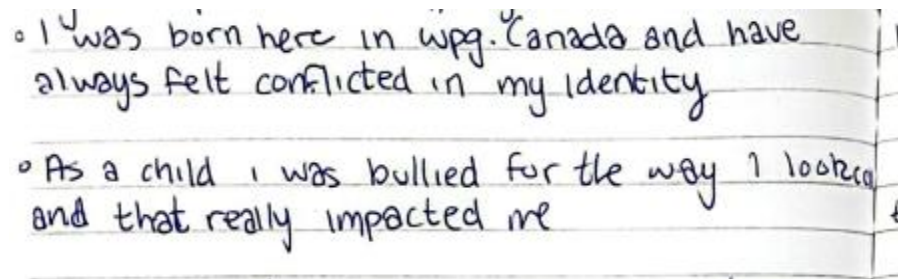
Sarah

Sarah is a quiet seventh grader who enjoys the company of her friends. In her group, she seems like the quietest. She is from the Philippines and, from my perspective, a great observer. She is like a sponge that absorbs the on-goings around her. Even though she

seems like she does not talk much, her observation of events and people makes her rich in knowledge. She loves music, her family and friends. She enjoys sleeping, music classes, and watching K-dramas. At the top of her list, she dislikes school and most things that are associated with it, including maths, ELA, and homework. Also, she does not like pickles, the gym, rats, and spiders.

Grace

Grace is a graceful ninth grader and mixed-race. Her mother is Filipino, from the Benget and Kalinga tribes, while her father, Jamaican, grew up in England. She is a tall, slim, brown girl who was born in Winnipeg, Canada. She had questioned her identity because of the way she looked. In her journal, she said she was bullied as a child because of her looks (see Figure 6).

A photograph of a handwritten journal entry on lined paper. The text is written in blue ink and consists of two bullet points. The first bullet point reads: "I was born here in Wpg. Canada and have always felt conflicted in my identity". The second bullet point reads: "As a child I was bullied for the way I looked and that really impacted me". The handwriting is cursive and somewhat informal. The paper has horizontal lines and a vertical margin line on the right side.

• I was born here in Wpg. Canada and have always felt conflicted in my identity

• As a child I was bullied for the way I looked and that really impacted me

Figure 6: Grace's expression of her conflicted identity

Grace was absent on the Tell Your Story Academy's first and last days. However, she participated actively in most of the activities we were engaged in. She is the oldest of the girls, and she acts more mature than the others. Although she was reserved the first time she came, she loosened up after some minutes of hearing me talk about myself on the second day of the academy. She loves to read, write, sketch, and paint. She enjoys eating her favorite foods, dancing, spending time with loved ones, sleeping, and getting good

grades. She dislikes bullying, the pressure to be better, feeling sad, entitled people, getting made fun of, not feeling good enough, and when her clothes get ruined.

Toward Relational Understanding

Learning is often a process of growth and self-improvement, as individuals aim to become better versions of themselves. Irrespective of the level or stage we find ourselves academically, we never leave the learning process. I might be right to say that there is no graduating from learning. I can only imagine how the students at the community program will look up to the mentors as accomplished, being able to study what they want at the University. This is why the mentors were assigned their roles in the first instance, to model what middle-grade students should be aspiring to become. I remember the first personal discussion with the mentors, where I had to introduce myself and seek their consent for this study. I told them how important this study is to me professionally and the likely impact it might have in the education sector. I remember how their eyes lit up, excited at how they would be involved in something great. Also, they looked at me with such aspiring gazes as if to say that I might have reached the peak of learning. Of course, most people know of a post-doctorate degree; however, the mentors viewed me as a higher learner. I, on the other hand, look at my professors aspiringly too. I badly want to be like them. They seem finished and like they are in their own space, controlling their own time. Not that I am not aware that learning does not end, but there is always a sense of "maybe when I get to this phase, I will take a rest from learning", and as you climb the ladder of knowledge, you realize that there is no end to it.

To contextualize the experiences and responses of the Tell Your Story Academy students, it is essential to provide an overview of their demographic profiles. By sharing their preferences and interests, the students aimed to establish common ground and foster connections within the group, creating a safer space for sharing personal narratives. Analysis of their profiles revealed convergences in musical preferences, academic enthusiasm, and diversities in personality traits, spanning extroversion, introversion, and ambiversion. This strategic sharing of profiles established a foundation for empathy and understanding, facilitating a supportive environment for the subsequent sharing of personal stories.

Also, the mentors, despite their divergent backgrounds and interests, exemplified a harmonious collaboration. A versatile and dynamic learner, Shelly has explored various subjects, including arts, sciences, and physical health, demonstrating a curiosity-driven approach. In contrast, Chang has consistently pursued a science-focused trajectory since grade school, supported by his family. Despite their differing academic paths, they shared common strategies for effective learning, emphasizing the importance of scheduling, social support from family and friends, and engaging in academic discussions with peers to foster a deeper understanding of their studies. Their testimonies highlight the value of diverse perspectives and approaches in achieving academic success.

Despite our varied roles, we shared a common identity as students, navigating the complexities of our world with unique experiences and perspectives. As I facilitated the Tell Your Story Academy, I drew upon my accumulated experiences, acknowledging the influence of my cultural background and beliefs, which differ from the Canadian context. Recognizing the diversity of cultural backgrounds among the community program

participants, I understood that our shared societal context unites us. Therefore, I considered the societal dynamics of storytelling, including the potential of spilling traumatic experiences, and refined my approach accordingly. Initially, my plan was culturally grounded, but through engagement with experts, it evolved into a theoretically informed approach. However, I remained open to refinement through practical application, acknowledging the intricate factors and complexities inherent in the research field. This adaptability is evident throughout the subsequent chapters as I navigated the tension between my initial plans and the emergent needs and responses of the students at the Tell Your Story Academy.

Having explored how roles were negotiated and trust was nurtured in the Tell Your Story Academy, the groundwork for authentic storytelling began to take shape. These early interactions, shaped by both structure and spontaneity, allowed participants to gradually lower their guard and relate to one another in more personal, human ways. The next chapter, titled “Creating a Relational Home,” delves deeper into how this shared space evolved into a setting where participants felt safe enough to express their experiences. It examines expectations versus realities, relational encounters with people and objects in the space, and the conditions that made storytelling possible for mentors and students.

Chapter Five: Creating a Relational Home

Sharing one's experiences in a particular space with a group of people while relating with objects is a complex event. The need or urge to talk about personal issues depends on an individual's relationship with a space's human and non-human entities (Herman & Tondeur, 2021; Low, 2018; Fenwick, 2015; Meyer et al., 2021). Having explored some of the participants' individual stories in the previous chapter, it is necessary to discuss why and how a relational home was created for everyone in the Tell Your Story Academy to feel safe enough to share their stories. A “relational home” is a context in which painful emotional experiences can be shared, understood, and “held” by others and integrated into one's experience (Finlay & Hewitt, 2022). Firstly, this chapter elaborates on participants' expectations about the academy versus what transpired. This part is necessary because understanding and managing expectations can help shape reality. Our reality of the academy was what transpired in the sessions, and juxtaposing this reality with the expectation might clarify some assumptions about whether the space created was relational enough for me, the mentors, and the students. Also, expanding on how everyone in the academy built a physical relationship with objects and people in the space is necessary. Lastly, this chapter will provide snippets on how participants could present some of their past experiences in the learning process, including mentors' experiences as undergraduate students and students' experiences as community program participants.

Expectation versus Reality

In most cases, expectations and reality are two different things. Expectations are our thoughts of how an event should play out, based on our prior experiences with some part or the whole of a phenomenon (Minsky, 2018; Deliza & MacFie, 1996). However,

because change is always constant, humans might not be able to accurately predict events in advance due to natural or humanmade factors that may not be in the control of the thinker. Hence, the reality is what actually happens with different factors at play (Berger & Thomas, 1966). Sometimes, the variations or discrepancies between what we expect and what actually happens may be disappointing or even better than we had planned. Irrespective of such disparities, it is always important to have a plan, to think about an audience's needs beforehand, and to leave enough room for modification to suit the change that happens in reality.

A part of my explanation as the facilitator of the Tell Your Story Academy has been discussed in the previous chapter, showing my initial plan regarding how I first thought of the academy. Then, the refined plan came along due to the discussions I had with experts in the field. However, it is common knowledge that what happens in the field during the data collection process is usually not in the hands of the researcher. Hence, every day with the participants brought new perspectives and direction. Hence, a more refined plan of the Tell Your Story Academy was not even a plan because the "plan" only became complete right after the sessions with the participants. The mentors and students also had a preconceived notion of the program until they witnessed and co-created it.

My Expectations vs Reality

When I planned the Academy, I was told to write an overview of what the academy was about to entice the students in selecting it over others. I have been a lover of oral literature since I was a child. I remember my father telling my elder sibling African folklore and folktales at night immediately after dinner. It was always a time we looked forward to, even though there were times when some stories were repeated. I particularly enjoyed the

stories of how some animals are depicted as wise, like the tortoise, and others as arrogant, like the elephant. We learned how to live through these stories because my father always asked us questions about the lessons from the stories. Gradually, we moved from enjoying simple stories to competing for the one that answers the questions correctly. As we grew older, it seemed my father started to run out of new stories to tell, and the repetition of stories was more that we repeated some of the words alongside him as he spoke.

My father decided to improvise because he shifted from animal stories to real-life experiences. This was a smart move because the animal stories he knew were limited; however, life always brings up new things to talk about. We started to rotate the storytelling based on what happened during the day. There were even times that we reacted in certain ways in reality because we knew we would discuss it as a family through storytelling, and we would want to receive commendations from my father for acting in a good way. These were my first encounters with chatting casually about experiences with the aim of amusing my audience, which in a way, shaped my behavior and outlook on life.

As I wrote the overview for the academy, exciting flashes from my past-self crossed my mind as I thought to transfer a fragment of that excitement on the page (See APPENDIX 2 for the overview). I thought I could capture the right audience with what I had written down. I was hopeful and excited at the same time. I thought an appreciable number of students would feel the excitement when they went through the overview because the thought of stories seemed exciting to me. I had previously verified the number of students assigned to each academy and was told between 15-20 students. Deep down in my mind, I was kind of confident that my academy would break the record of 20 kids to 25 or 30. On the day of the orientation, I met with other facilitators from other academies, and I was

kind of in the background with my hands folded under the table in a relaxed manner. I looked at the facilitators and thought that my academy was the gold and that people would be surprised to see how my class would be full. That night, I was told seven people had already signed up for my academy, and I was like, "Not too bad, 18 more to go". I was hopeful. During the first week, I got supplies for 20 kids in preparation for the first session. I would have bought it for 30 students but wanted to act modestly. At least, if worst comes to worst, twenty students should do.

On the first day, I got to the venue one hour before the start. I felt enthusiastic and could not wait to meet the students who chose to tell their stories. After I had arranged the space to my liking, I sat down at each corner of the class to make sure it felt just right for anyone sitting in those seats. When I heard the door fling open, I was excited to see the students and the mentors march in. However, it seemed like the queue was cut short. Only six students came in alongside the two mentors. As I welcomed the students with a smile, my eyes still looked at the entrance in expectation of the rest of the students. After a few seconds, I met with Chang and asked if we were still expecting others. He responded with a negative. He said only six of the students were present. Even though it sounds funny now, I did not have a good feeling then. At that point, I only expected the last student since I was told seven people had been assigned to my academy. I did not care about the remaining eighteen imaginary people I was expecting. All I could think about was why the seventh student had a change of mind. The piercing gazes of the students jerked me from my thoughts as they looked at me in expectation of what I had to offer. I quickly put my thoughts aside and decided to work with what I had. Maybe the number is a blessing in disguise. Who knows? Grace joined in for the second session, but at this point, I had already

accepted my fate of having a close circle of participants. In the third week, another student joined in but was absent in the fourth week. Hence, I had the highest number of students in the third week, with eight students and two mentors.

Another major discrepancy between my expectations and what happened was in the activities. On the day of the community program orientation, I watched the other facilitators talk about their experiences with the students in the previous years. For most of the time spent at the orientation, we talked about using icebreakers to get the students interested in the sessions. In my refined plan, I included some icebreakers for the first session because I felt the first session was a critical moment that could either make or mar students' views on the academy. I did not include icebreakers in the rest of the sessions because I felt there were many other fun activities the students could be engaged in, which would contribute towards the storytelling goal of the academy. However, I included one icebreaker on the last day to get students to talk about how they generally feel about the academy. As the other facilitators brainstormed some icebreaker ideas, I took notes on some easy ones I felt students would enjoy. However, my plan was not to use them because we had limited time to spend, and my researcher-mind would rather think about how we could utilize those times to actually tell stories about experiences. I did not think that students' relationships with others and even objects were another form of storytelling until I met with my advisory committee. This aspect will be elaborated on in the next section of this chapter.

Having extra icebreakers in my back pocket, which I did not think I would need, was reassuring. I smiled at the students as they marched into the space for the first time, but the smile was not reciprocated. I started out the academy as I had planned with some fun activities. However, I noticed that the students' moods changed easily to boredom. This

cannot happen under my watch, I thought. Without wasting much time, I flipped to my back pocket book where I had written the last-minute extra icebreakers, some unrelated to storytelling. We engaged in up to five icebreakers on average at the end of each day. Gradually, I started to incorporate icebreakers as part of the planned activities rather than a last-minute event, as I viewed it previously.

Mentors' Expectations vs Realities

The mentors were assigned their academies, unlike the students who were given the opportunity to choose and go through the overview. Therefore, the mentors' expectations of what the academy would look like were based on their personal experiences and the academy's name. It was Shelly's first-time volunteering as a mentor for the community program. Due to this, she did not have any expectations of how the academy should be. When I asked her about her initial thoughts, she said, "Um... Oh my! Well, I don't know. I think I came in with an open mind. I wasn't really expecting anything in general. I was just like, Oh, I'm here to help, volunteer, whatnot." Her plan was just to come in and perform her mentor role of being there for the students whenever needed and monitoring their transition from the dining room to their academy and vice versa. She did not expect to learn anything from the sessions or have fun while performing her duties. However, because my aim was to get the mentors to participate in the study, they became active learners while mentoring the middle-school students. After each day, she still did not know what to expect subsequently and was surprised as to how all the activities we were engaged in were pulled together as a collective whole on the last day of the program. She expressed her thoughts as,

From the very first day, I started learning something and taking a new intake on how to tell whatever story we were trying to tell, and that was a hook for me to keep coming each week. Because each week, we tried something different. And I actually enjoyed how each week was something new, but it was still connected to the beginning. So it was like an add-on, almost like creating a train. The train is the beginning and the carts would be the stuff we learned throughout the weeks, the activities. And that was how it was for me. And then this... was it yesterday? I think just like completed the entire process. It was fun.

In all honesty, I was wondering if I would have considered including the mentors if I had not been thinking of getting their thoughts for this study. Well, I am glad I invited them because Shelly's first expectation of not getting involved in the activities reflects how she must have been used to simply minding her business in her previous volunteer roles. Chang also changed his mind about what his role as a mentor meant during the sessions. He explained that,

I feel like in this session, you had like a particular impact on me to be honest. Because I felt like I finally found... like I was talking to Shelly yesterday about what it means to be a mentor. I felt like, after the session, I really knew what it was like to be a mentor....

Since it was not Chang's first-time volunteering to mentor, he expected to be "looking after the kids." He could not easily find the appropriate term for his role when Shelly provided him with the word "babysitting". Chang confessed that he felt like he was also one of the kids discovering himself. Also, they were glad they were included in the core activities and the fun icebreakers we took part in between serious work. In Chang's

previous mentoring roles, he reported that his opinions, thoughts, or ideas did not matter because he always thought the focus was only on the students. However, he added that,

But I guess to include us made the kids kind of closer to us because they actually got to know us. I didn't feel like we were just mentors, but I felt like we were their big brother and big sister in a way.

Experientially and culturally, seeing the title, Shelly thought about people sitting in a circle and one person telling their story. She commented that,

Because when we thought of telling the story, I thought of, you know, campfire. That's the idea that came to mind, you know, like sitting in a circle, whatever it is, and just sharing stories. That's what I thought it was about. But what it turned out to be was much better than what I was expecting.

Shelly's notion of people sitting in a circle is understandable because the traditional way of storytelling, especially in Africa, where oral literature is given more precedence, is for people to sit around a burning fire or in the market square while an orator narrates their stories (see Figure 7). An example of these can be seen in contemporary Nollywood movies on Netflix like *The Griot* (Owu, 2021), where an orator tells his audience folktales in the marketplace while they take palm wine. If I had not been the facilitator, I bet I would have had the same views on the academy. Because of my ingrained culture of oral literature, the first slide I used for the first day depicted people sitting in a circle around the fire.



Figure 7: Storytelling sketch of people sitting in a circle around a fire (Source: Galloway, 2023).

However, since all the activities we participated in served as the “storyscape” for the final sharing, I could not enact this circular sitting until the last day, when we just had to sit, chill with some bags of chips, and listen as we all shared our stories. By storyscape, I mean an emotional and mental terrain by which students create meaning and define worldview by the stories we hear and tell. This is in line with Cense and Ganzenvoort’s (2019) conception of storyscape, as they refer to it as the comprehensive landscape of interconnected stories that surround us and shape our interactions and perceptions. This term encompasses the totality of resources through which we engage with and make sense of the world around us.

Students' Expectations vs Reality

Ideas on student expectations are based on my interaction with a few students and what the mentors said about it during my discussion. The mentors' opinions are counted as relevant because they spent more time with the students outside the academy. They had the

opportunity to chat with the students, and because a certain level of trust developed between the students and the mentors, the students expressed some of their feelings and thoughts to the mentors. Therefore, this section is a combination of my and the mentors' reflection of how the students reacted to the activities.

On the first day of the academy, the students wore gloomy faces, and I was worried about what they were thinking of being at the Tell Your Story Academy. Because of the low number of students that turned up, I knew most students did not choose to be in the academy. I wondered if it was because the academy was new. Most of the academies have been part of the program for a while, and most students are already used to specific academies. During the time of application, some returning students to the program would most likely have chosen the academies they were already used to and comfortable with. It is sometimes scary to try something new, especially when you are not sure what can transpire in the event of a change in plan. Also, at the orientation, we, the facilitators, were informed that the number of students that start out at an academy might change over time due to peer pressure. Some children are in a group because their friends chose to be there, and they would rather be in their friends' company than others they are unfamiliar with.

During a conversation with the mentors, Chang said the students "... actually want to do hands-on like cooking food, which is fun and interactive". This would have been the prior thought of anyone who saw all the options available at the academies. Of course, students tend to enjoy activities that involve doing more than those that involve thinking (Prince, 2004; Armbruster et al., 2009; Cavanagh, 2011; Hyun et al., 2017). This is because the psychomotor domain enables students to showcase their skills and be involved in practical skills that can be useful in their everyday lives (Bloom et al., 1956). Having just

left school, where the cognitive domain is the focus most of the time, students must have felt like they do not need to get involved in any activity that looks like schoolwork anymore.

Chang stated that,

Like kids have already been in a really tough school before this right now. I mean, like, they probably do not want to do this again. Like something academic-related rather than something hands-on, like nutrition or like bake-off related. So yeah...

Hence, it can be said that students' expectations are not just those of who participated in the Tell Your Story Academy, but all of the community program participants who had the opportunity to select the academy they would have loved to get involved in. As Chang tried to capture how the students must have felt, he said, "At first glance, I felt like we were probably going to be in just like a reading circle, reading books or something like that". Therefore, the mentors commented that none of the students chose to be in the Tell Your Story Academy; rather, they were put there due to the overflow of some of the other academies. In my discussion with one of the participants, she confirmed that she was not given the opportunity to select the academy she wanted. This is quite understandable because I also have not encountered an out-of-school program where all you have to do is talk about yourself. I am guessing the students might have felt like they would be reading some books, then coming forward to explain what they had read, or better still, share it with a group of readers who have read that book. Thinking back on how the summer book Club I wanted to participate in was structured, I see why students might have felt like the Tell Your Story Academy would not be different from what they already know.

While I had a personal discussion with Amy regarding which academy she preferred to be in, she stated that she chose to be in the Tell Your Story Academy and was

not just put there. At first, I was shocked because my expectation, having seen the students, was that no one chose to be there. When I probed further about what she thought we would be doing in the academy, she said she thought of reading and speaking activities when she went through the overview and decided to try the academy out because of her love of books. Also, she said she chose the academy because she had been in book clubs and was already used to the activities they engage in. This corroborated what Chang said about thinking of reading circles when he first encountered the Tell Your Story Academy.

However, in reality, the academy did not turn out to be the way the students must have thought of it. I can say it is a combination of everything, as Shelly said, "but the way you made it, it was a combination of all the things they wanted." Chang also supported this statement and said, "Yeah, like I said, even though it was their third choice, it felt like it was their first choice at the end of the day." This is most likely the case because the academy combined the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning (Bloom et al., 1956). It included the cognitive in the sense that it tested their knowledge of what they know; affective in that they spoke about themselves and their experiences; and psychomotor as we used various motor skills during the sessions.

The Role of Building Relationships

The role of relationships in the learning process cannot be overemphasized (Hammond, 2015; McKay & Macomber, 2023) because it is essential for everyone within a space to feel heard, safe, and valued. This emphasis on safety and relationality echoes the principles of affective theory, where emotions circulate within and between bodies, shaping the atmosphere and participation in learning environments (Zembylas, 2024; Ahmed, 2004). Affective Liberation Literacy builds on this by positioning emotional resonance and

relational trust as foundational to critical and liberatory pedagogy. For the Tell Your Story Academy, various aspects of the human and non-human connections were aligned to achieve a positive atmosphere that impacted how the sessions went throughout the academy. Although there was resistance at some points, which will be discussed in the next chapter, different activities, phenomena, and events saved the day at various points, and how the participants related to the space, people, and objects reflected their identities. This is because to understand people's likes and dislikes or reactions to certain things, their actions must be observed in certain situations. This is not to say that the way the students behaved during the five-week session was their true selves because there was not enough time to understand certain aspects of their lives.

From a critical affect perspective, identity is not a fixed state but an unfolding relational process shaped by spatial, emotional, and social contexts (Massumi, 2015; Honeyford et al., 2025). The Tree of Life sessions allowed participants to momentarily inhabit roles and reveal fragments of self, however those expressions may have seemed unfinished. In one of my discussions with Chang, I asked him about some students' behavior and if he noticed any positive changes since he mentored them some years back. He said, "I cannot really comment on that because I do not know about their school life in particular. I feel like maybe their school or home life is a more contributing factor than the community program". It might be accurate to say that people's behavior in some situations cannot be generalized. However, what is certain is that those situations are now parts of their experiences and identities, and whether one likes it or not, such experiences cannot be removed from one's past. Therefore, this section will discuss the entities that aided in creating a community of storytellers and how the participants used and/or interacted with

them. Specifically, these entities are the classroom settings, the formation of rules, imitation, and familiarization, and the use of icebreakers.

The Classroom Settings

Various research describes the relationship between classroom arrangement and student engagement (Lombardi & Wall, 2006; Sanders, 2013; Brewe et al., 2012; Rands & Gansemer-Topf, 2017). An ample description of the space is imperative to grasp how the students got engaged during some activities. The use of the word "classroom" here is not to depict any form of formality in the out-of-school program. This deliberate distancing from formal schooling reflects critical literacy's emphasis on disrupting hierarchical spaces and embracing student agency (Luke, 2012). The layout and atmosphere of the learning space also mirror what affect theory describes as the "affective atmosphere" (Anderson, 2009; Zembylas, 2024), where spatial arrangements, sensory cues, and bodily presence shape students' comfort, openness, and identity performance. However, the word 'classroom' is used because the space where the sessions took place is an actual classroom in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. The second floor of the building has a huge hallway with many tables and chairs where university students sit to get some academic work done or interact with friends. The hallway is usually quiet in the evenings when the grade-school students come in for the community winter program. The silence is always deafening, and I often hear the squish-squash of my shoes like I am just coming in from the rain. It is not my fault; the one and only beautiful boots I got from Nigeria on my way to Canada did not know the gravity of Winnipeg's snow. Whenever I get to the hallway, I try to walk as slowly as possible so my loud boots will not disturb the students viewing their materials peacefully. Luckily for me, the classroom I chose to have my sessions in is

the first class on the left, labeled Room 226. It gives me the advantage of a smooth glide inside the room before anyone sitting in the hallway can get the opportunity to look back at me.

The class is a mini-amphitheater classroom with many single multicolored chairs with right-handed flip-up table arms attached (see Figure 8). The inner me silently wonders how a left-handed person would be comfortable using the chairs, but I hoped it would not be a cause for concern. The class has two doors; one not far from the stairs and the other up to, I think, 15 feet from the first door. The class has no natural light; hence, numerous LED lights were installed to make the class bright enough, which was suitable since our sessions were held in the evenings. From the front of the class, there are five huge steps to get to the back of the class. Also, three big tables are placed randomly at the front, near the projector stand and a wooden pulpit.



Figure 8: The class before arrangement with chairs randomly placed (Photo: S. A. Quadri)

The classroom arrangement changed every time based on some of the activities we would be engaging in. Nevertheless, majorly, I set eight chairs in the middle of the class (see Figure 9), while two chairs were placed behind the eight for the mentors. Those eight chairs in the middle were constant because the students would need a moment or two in their personal chairs first. In that position, viewing the projected slides to answer writing prompts when necessary was easy for them. Discussions among the students barely occurred when they were sitting here. Anything anyone said was mostly directed to me as the facilitator standing before them. There was an instance when a student read directly from a picture book. While some of the students turned their heads to look at what she read, some did not bulge in their seats. I tried encouraging everyone to look at the reader, but it did not work out well. Also, it would have been easy to have the reader stand at the front, but that would mean putting them in the spotlight, which might not be easy, considering that the students must have been tired just coming from school.

The setting changed slightly on the third day when there was a need to make the participants work in groups. For this, three chairs each were placed at different corners of the room: a set to the right, another to the left, and the last one at the back of the class. Additionally, the group activity titled "3 pictures 1 story" required the students to select three pictures from various printed images that have been neatly arranged on a table. The other tables were used to arrange art supplies the students used in drawing their Trees of Life (see Figure 10). This activity also requires a form of presentation, where students share their stories as a group at the front of the class. This was not as hard on the part of the students since they did not stand alone but as a group. To share their stories, each group

member held the pictures they had chosen chronologically while one person read their story from a journal.



Figure 9: The eight constant chairs arranged in the middle of the room and three chairs visible at the back for a group's 3 pictures 1 story activity (Photo: S. A. Quadri)



Figure 10: How supplies and pictures were arranged for easy access. (Photo: S. A. Quadri)

The day students started to draw their trees, I created enough space at the front of the class to accommodate two large tables. I arranged chairs around it for students to have enough space to scatter drawing supplies on the tables, aiding accessibility for everyone to use them. On the last day, ten chairs were placed in a circular formation at the front of the class because it was the day we all had to share our stories. Unlike in previous days, when sharing personal stories seemed difficult, it became easy on the last day. Sitting in a circle aided the students in seeing everyone's faces simultaneously, rather than when they sat on their personal eight constant chairs where they only looked at the projected slides. Shelly, who worked with the participants for more of the time, provided more contextual information that helped me re-think the interaction and see more nuance. She said, “When you put them in a different formation, everyone else is looking at them. Moreover, they can choose to be more personal with whom they are telling their story.” Chang also corroborates this point by saying, “I could tell who they are more comfortable sharing with because you can see their body language. I noticed that some kids lean towards the person they feel closer to and share that story”.

The Co-creation of Rules

Creating a safe zone where people can freely express themselves is not only about how the environment is arranged. This can be likened to building trust in people, as trust is a major factor that affects an individual's interaction or relationship with others. Giving students the autonomy to create rules that govern the class's conduct will create a sense of safety and compliance since they will state what they expect of others in the group. Also, being a part of something makes it easy to express one's feelings and points of view on it. Hence, co-creating a storytelling circle/community can help participants feel a sense of

belonging, aiding participation in learning activities (Evertson & Poole, 2003). Collaborating with students to set classroom expectations will also make them include rules based on what they need to create a more inclusive space (McIntosh et al., 2023). Hospel and Galand (2016) argue that allowing students to take ownership of their environment like this shows them that their thoughts are valued. Co-constructing expectations with participants is aligned with Freirean notions of dialogic pedagogy and critical literacy, but it also takes on affective significance when viewed through the lens of Affective Liberation Literacy. Here, emotional safety is not just a backdrop to learning but a co-created condition for relational agency and critical identity exploration .

On the first day, one of our first activities was creating some storytelling rules that would regulate any personal information heard and foster good relationships among students. I explained to the students the essence of having the rules and nudged them into giving some ideas as to what could serve as a rule for the class. Chang volunteered to write out the rules as we formulated them. He came to the front of the class with a notepad and a pen. I started off by giving the first rule that "we should all understand that anything said within the confines of the circle stays in the circle". I asked who would go next, and Amy raised her hand. I nodded for her to go ahead, and she said, "Respect for each other is important." Without me asking subsequently, the students started to add their own rules. The next students added that "we should use respectful language". When it was Julie's turn, she said, "It would be nice not to bump into each other's words." Juliet gave her contribution in a rush and I did not quite hear her at first. It was like she could not wait for the next person to say something. I quickly called her attention to the fact that I did not hear her clearly and that it would be nice if she could provide more clarification on what she said.

She clarified and said, "I mean, we should all listen attentively when someone is talking and not interrupt".

Next, Sarah added that it was necessary that we respect property and not damage anything within the classroom. Apart from the four girls that had added their thoughts to the pit of rules, two other girls were simply observing as others spoke. I noticed that Sarah had a close relationship with them and they were sitting beside each other. However, since it was our first meeting, there was still much room to observe how the students participated in the activities. When it seemed like there was nothing else to add, Amy added another important rule. She said, "Let's not cross people's boundaries. When people are not ready to talk about something, let us not force them to". This was a very necessary rule for the students and everyone, including me and the mentors. Although the essence of using the Tree of Life approach was to get people to talk about their experiences in a subtle way, I have also learned that how the research proceeds is also a part of respecting people's boundaries. As we ended the rule formulation session, I reminded everyone that there would always be room to add anything to the list of rules whenever someone remembers anything. However, till the end of the program, nothing else was added.

Imitation and Familiarization

Two major factors that helped create a space of belonging were the power of imitation (Chiou & Yang, 2006; Salisu & Ransom, 2014; Osterman, 2023) and the usefulness of having small talks (Luk, 2004; Lambert & Mitrani, 2013) that might seem not totally relevant to the topic but help in forming a sense of familiarity among everyone in the Tell Your Story Academy. At first, I did not think about the imitation as a theme because it seemed subtle. It was not until I was recounting everything that happened in the

academy from week one to five that I saw the trend of how powerful imitation is to storytelling and how it affects students' views.

On the first day, as students settled in their chairs, they leaned their backs against their chairs and looked directly at me with curiosity, although tiredly too. I could see their eagerness to find out if the time spent at this Academy would be enjoyable or if they should fight to go to another one. Their piercing gazes jerked me from my thoughts of trying to analyze their body language. It was the perfect cue for me to start talking. I started off by sharing a part of my story, a narrative I titled “My unfinished story”. This story is also how I started the analysis of this study, a story of how I became a student for the first time. Now, this came to mind in the first place because during the community program orientation week, I was randomly envisioning how I wanted to structure my slides that would suit the taste of middle-school students. As I was ruminating on that, the television was tuned in to a Netflix show titled "Instant Dream Home". Sometimes, I enjoy having some background noise for me to think straight and this was one of those times. After picking up my infant and thinking about the actual implementation of the Tell Your Story Academy, I saw a family talk about their home needs with regard to the available space and what they truly want. Listening to them speak, the idea of me including my own story struck. What is storytelling when the facilitator is a mere facilitator and not a storyteller?

Storytelling, which involves sharing a story in front of an audience in the form of a presentation but sometimes in a less formal way, has various techniques to it. Liebich (2018) outlines some core presentation skills, of which imitation is a bigger part. Presenting or sharing a personal story can make it easy to find a form of connection with the students. This act of sharing aligns with critical affective literacy, which values vulnerability and

emotional expression as pedagogical tools that invite relational engagement (Anwaruddin, 2016; Ahmed, 2004). The embodied storytelling approach also echoes affect theory's recognition that identity is shaped through felt and situated experiences (Massumi, 2015).

The point was to reveal my vulnerability as a human and for it to be clear that I was not born to neither be a facilitator nor did I plan since childhood that I would be taking on a PhD program later in life. At this point, I thought of humanizing myself so the students would see me as one of them and as a human with vulnerabilities (Bullough, 2005), as a student in the process of learning. I imitated the idea I got from the Netflix show with the hope that it would be easier for the students also to follow suit. As I spoke at the top of my voice, I mixed in some form of dramatic movements so students could visualize the story. I observed some students leaning forward, placing their palms under their chin and their elbows on the desk, urging me to capture them in time. The students laughed as I narrated my first encounter as a student when I was 3, and I could see that some of them were eager to hear where the story was headed. However, the one thing I have learned is to leave my listeners hanging and wanting more to increase engagement (Wirz et al. 2023; Schibler et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2023). I stopped my narration at how I was disappointed and sad that my mum left me with some serious looking group of people wearing boring suits. Immediately, I transitioned to discussing the overview of the Tell Your Story Academy for students to have a glimpse of what the academy would look like. To an extent, the students' mood when they listened to my story transferred to the next activity before they became silent again.

After some general activities, I continued with my unfinished story on the second day. I could feel the tension students felt as they entered the classroom. This was the day

Grace joined the group for the first time. She seemed calm and quiet as she observed the people around her. I wondered if she could follow my story, but I decided to forge ahead, although I referred back to some points from the previous day so she could catch up to a large extent. However, I felt like repeating points could make my story boring to those who listened to me the previous day. When I mentioned that I did not know how to read until I was ten years old, I could see the disbelief on Amy and Grace's faces, being that they lived in school. I was glad that statement caught Grace's attention for the first time that night. As I concluded my story for the day, I moved to recapitulating the rules and asked if anyone wanted to add anything else. The energy that day was positive, and students talked extensively about themselves. I felt I had done a fair job of getting them to open up. To me, this was a good sign to move ahead with other pressing matters that involved the students sharing rather than me talking about my story in subsequent weeks.

On the third day, I did not share any of my stories because I was being careful not to overtake the discussion. My thought on this was that the sessions were meant for the students and not me. I felt like it would be a waste of time to continue with my unfinished story when I had not gotten "good" data I could use for my research. Students started drawing their trees of life, and the mood seemed neutral. I thought it was because they focused on individual tasks that I could not see their bubbly sides. The fourth day was pretty much the same, but students were asked to bring any artifacts they loved. Of the seven girls, Amy and Grace complied, while the remaining five used beads as their artifacts. My attempts to get them to share their experiences did not work. On second thought, I can say this might be attributed to the vibe students got from me. Not sharing my story on the third day might have opened a room full of doubt for the students. Also, not bringing an

artifact myself might mean they did not have someone to model how it should have been to them. Speaking with Chang, he said,

I feel like our energy was kind of also reflective of the kids' energy. Because when [one of the students] said she was tired, I was like, Yeah, tell me about it rather than trying to encourage her to get started on a great note and be low-key tired.

Having the roles of the facilitator and the mentors has automatically positioned us in a certain way with roles and duties to be performed. No matter how much I would have loved to be seen as equal in the sight of everyone in the group, the truth was simply that I had more tasks to complete, and students could not totally see either me or the mentors as part of them. Our roles and positions depicted strength and showing otherwise rubbed off on the strength students exerted during activities on the fourth day. Hence, they simply imitated what they perceived and saw.

Before the second meeting, I made sure to memorize the student's names so I would call them out when needed. Knowing their names would help make our discussions more personal (Cooper et al., 2017; Turrill, 2008). When the students entered the class on the second day, I greeted them individually, calling out their names. I could feel the happiness in them as they walked in. Can I say this contributed to a successful second meeting? Maybe! However, I realized I was not the only one trying to familiarize myself with the students. Some of the students, especially Amy, brought up some random discussions with me and others in the group. As I gave the students an overview of what the academy was about on the first day, I used an image of a piece of cake to represent us (see Figure 11), while the ingredients used in making the cake represented our experiences. The students

viewed the image on the slide; however, Amy raised her hand to ask a question. I nudged her to go ahead. Her question was, "Why is there a flower placed on the cake"?



Figure 11: A piece of cake. (Source: Kirbie's Cravings, 2022)

I answered by saying that some flowers are edible; however, they must have been placed on the cake for the beauty of it. At first, I wondered why she must have asked what seemed like an obvious question. Then, it occurred to me that she must have been trying to make a conversation with me. Since I was the one doing the talking at this point, I felt it was nice to hear someone else's voice. At least, it made me know I was not alone just rambling on. However, having known Amy for four more days, I bet she was expecting a profound response, something not most likely obvious since I represented us and our experiences as the cake and its ingredients. Nevertheless, I guess my answer would have been the same because I actually chose the picture for the aesthetic of it.

The Use of Icebreakers

The use of icebreakers cannot be overemphasized in the Tell Your Story Academy, as it aided the building of relationships among participants (Dressel, 2022). Even though I thought that a number of the icebreakers would not be necessary, it turned out that the icebreakers were the saving grace all day, every day. As the students walked into the space

for the first time, they all chose random seats far away from one another, even though I had specifically arranged eight seats in the middle of the class for them. I pleaded with them to all move to the arranged seats, which they eventually did, but reluctantly. From the start, it was obvious that they were strangers to one another, aside from the three friends from the same school (Sarah and her two other friends). With Chang's help, we could coordinate the students in sitting closely. Tiredness, along with not knowing most of the people in the group, contributed to the class being really quiet at first. I was glad I had planned the icebreaker "my name is" for students to share why they were named their names. I started by sharing mine because my parents love the letter 's', which is also the initial letter of my older sister's name. I got a series of responses from them. Amy's name was passed down from generation to generation. It is her grandmother's name, and one of her aunts' names is Amy. Sarah's case is also like mine; everyone in her family had names starting with 's.' Other responses included that their names were from a religious book because of their parents' love of God, while most said they were just randomly named. As students shared their short responses, I observed their excitement as they spoke about themselves.

We created the group's rules after the "My name is" icebreaker, and I noticed that the students' tempo was already decreasing. I immediately cushioned the effect with another "Once Upon a Time" icebreaker. I explained the game's rules: students would add a sentence to continue a story from where the last person stopped. I asked the students who would go first, but they seemed reluctant. Again, Amy saved the day and decided to go first. She started, "Once upon a time, there was a witch". Juliet continued, saying, "The witch was so hungry that she decided to go out to find what to eat". A student added that "on her way, she found a castle". Another said, "She opened the castle door and found a lot of

children gathered in a room.” At this point, I noticed that the mentors were laid back in terms of contributing to the game. Then I realized that I had not formally told them that they could join in. I urged them to add their sentences because they were also a part of the team. Shelly then added that "the witch carried all the children on her magic broom and flew away with them". I could see the smile on Amy's face, which meant she liked where the story was headed. Immediately, she volunteered to add another sentence, which I allowed. It seemed like she did not want the story to get into the wrong hands and be destroyed into something she could not be able to control. She tried her best to stir the story toward her desired ending. Amy added that “she took the children home and ate all of them”. Chang was terrified of having a sad ending; he screamed at Amy’s suggestion and was eager to turn the table around. He said, “She had a stomach upset and vomited all the kids out.” Chang’s love for a peaceful ending and Amy’s desire for horror clashed and created a beautiful comic moment where everyone burst out laughing as the two struggled for “their own perfect ending”. We tried the icebreaker a couple of times, with different people starting up new storylines, and each time, the students were excited to have their own twists and turns with the power vested in them. This illustrates the principle of agency in liberation literacy, where students become meaning-makers and narrative agents in shared storytelling practices (Lyiscott, 2017). The affective liveliness of these moments aligns with CAL’s emphasis on seizing emotional energy as critical pedagogical openings (Cartun & Dutro, 2020).

After the "once upon a time", we started with other serious business, which involved reading and writing activities. Not too long into these activities, I could feel the students' exhaustion again. I had used up the planned icebreaker but opened up the book I

had written a few icebreaker suggestions that I felt might be useful. I explained to the students that they would each call out chronological numbers randomly without two people calling a number at the same time. As students started the game, the mood began to lighten up. I put my researcher's mind aside and decided to have fun with the students instead. We started the game over and over again till Chang came to the front of the class; we had a few minutes more before the students would head out to the dining room for dinner. On the second day, even before I could tell "my unfinished story", the students were engaged in a physically demanding icebreaker requiring them to jump from one end of the classroom to the other. As they entered the class, I greeted them and told them to form a line at the front of the class, where they began the jumping game. I felt that starting the academy like this was helpful as the students went all the way to provide extra information to the prompts I gave. I can say that their brains were actively stimulated, and they were energized throughout the session. The next icebreaker was titled "love/hate," where students were urged to write ten things they love and ten things they hate. Because I knew they might be exhausted, I allowed them to write any amount they felt comfortable with, even though it would not be up to ten each. However, I was surprised when Juliet gave more than a page list of what she loves and hates (see Figure 12).

10 Things I...	
Love	Hate
* Music (A lot) - Food (Yup) - Doodling (A lot) - Traveling (Yup) - Watching K-pop episodes especially Txt to do) (Makes me feel safe & happy) - To laugh (A lot & I start laughing) - My family (Yup) - Playing the "Marshmallow Game" (Then we mess up) - Editing Videos (A lot) - Telling people stories about horror things/ related to my life (Yup its true!) - Ci love my bias (Ci love dancing) - Bonus: I love saying "Oohing hai" "Chueing hai" from Txt) I love screaming and being loud. I love Gorillaz (I'm wearing Gorillaz sweater right now. Not just K-pop and other music Artists) - I love communicating with Dugs. (especially nuns friends dogs)	- Wifi not working - crumbs on my bed (Really) - Phone falling off my face. (Happens EVERYTIME) - People Bothing me while working (annoying) - My ears not popping on airplane. (BRUH) - My devices glitching - People stealing my stuff. (ANNOYING) ~~People hating me~~ - People mourning at my ear. (Shut up) - People bumping words when I'm paying attention to the teacher. (Really annoys) - People slapping my butt/bum. (I'm really uncomfortable...) - Bonus: People cutting me on LINE? People making fun of my music taste (SHUT UP. I DON'T CARE)

Figure 12: Juliet's list of her likes and dislikes. (Photo: S. A. Quadri)

I realized that Juliet enjoys talking about the things she loves to do most. She apologized beforehand that she had over twenty things to say and did not want to take up most of the time while she shared. I reassured her that hearing her talk about her list would be great. I also urged the students to show emotions when sharing their lists. For instance, I told them to say "hmm, yummy" when discussing their favorite delicacies. I encouraged the drama because I hoped they would not just read their list out and move on to the next person. Most of the students dramatically expressed their love and hate, and everyone

enjoyed listening to the next person as we laughed together throughout the sharing process. Also, the students could notice who had the same points or differing opinions as them and nodded in dis/agreement. When Amy talked about how she dislikes people speaking out of turn, she elaborated by saying,

My class is like three-quarters idiots and one-quarter smart people. So you have all these people who have common sense and like know what they're doing and just do what they're told, and there are all these idiots who speak out of turn and who like to harass the teachers.

As Amy expressed her thoughts, Grace nodded in agreement with the point of the "idiots making life difficult for others" in the classroom. Although Grace is the oldest among the girls, she still finds some connections in what they say. Grace also agreed when Amy mentioned that she does not like basketball, most likely because of the attitude of those who play it. Almost half of the class resonated with this point too. When it was Grace's turn to share, she said, "I do not like people who pressure you". At this statement, Chang was glad someone felt the way he feels about pressure, as he experiences burnout quickly. Lastly, Grace mentioned that she does not like her ex-boyfriend, and almost all the girls nodded in agreement. However, when a student shared, she mentioned that she did not like comedy. Amy was amused at this statement and asked out loud why anyone would hate comedy. I explained to the class that it is possible to dislike comedy as I was previously like that. I could not find people who set out to make me laugh funny. I usually enjoyed natural funny things, but it was not until I made friends with someone during my undergraduate days who loved Kevin Hart. Then, I realized that some of the planned

comedies were derived from natural, real-life scenarios. At the end of the love/hate activity, we all discovered who was like us and who was not.

I started the third session with an icebreaker, which required students to trust members of their group to guide them toward some items placed at different angles of the room while they were blindfolded. I had the students stay in two groups; one group to the right and the other to the left. I told them to bring a volunteer who would be blindfolded to play the blind search game. In the first group, Amy and another student volunteered and wished to go first. However, only one person can go at a time from a group. They both did “rock paper scissors” to see who would go first. The other student won the round and got the blindfold. A student was chosen by the second team to represent them. I kept two small items at opposite ends of the class and told the two students to cover their eyes. With the help and direction of those in their teams, the blindfolded students should find the items. I noticed that the student from the second team did not cover her eyes immediately, as she was mapping the class in her head like she did not want to rely totally on directions when she could not see.

On the other hand, the student in the first group that contested with Amy covered her eyes almost immediately. I gave the instruction and she trusted her teammates totally to lead her to the item. As they moved, I noticed that the girl from the second group was swift. She only followed instructions when she heard an obstruction might be before her. Within a few seconds, she had gotten to the item. The student from team one was taking her steps one after another, waiting for her team members to tell her when to move and when to stop. Each team had one mentor; Chang was in the first team, while Shelly was in the second team. Shelly's team directed their representative while staying still because they

trusted that she would safely grab the item after carefully mapping the class, while Chang's team strategy was to follow their representative as he gave her instructions on where to go. It was almost as if she was following Chang's voice to take a step. I informed Chang that it might not be helpful if he moves along with her. I could see Chang's competitive side as he watched the second team complete the challenge without breaking a sweat.

My intention was to do just a single round of the blind search game because there were still lots of activities that must be completed. However, I realized that some other students were interested in being blindfolded. For Chang's team, Amy went next, while Grace went from Shelly's team. This time, I kept the items in different locations from the first. The girls found the items quite quickly this time around, and I felt I should make the stakes higher on a third round. Additionally, I wanted the new girl who had just joined the academy to go next to make her ease into the environment with her team as they directed her to find their group's item. I chose Sarah from Chang's team because she did not volunteer to do some activities. When I called out Sarah's name, she screamed in disbelief but yielded. I gave the new girl the first item to keep in a suitable place so Sarah could find it, while I gave the second item to Sarah to place in any part of the class for the new girl to find. I realized that Chang's team felt like Shelly's team had been finding the game too easy. So, they decided to keep the item in a very enclosed area to increase the stakes. However, Shelly was concerned about safety and asked if she could move some of the chairs so the students would not bump into them. Shelly and I rearranged the space to make it safe for students to move, even though we still left some chairs in their positions to make the game a little more challenging. The teams changed the positions of the items numerous times to make it harder for the opposing team to find in time. However, Chang's team members got

the hang of the game this time and were much better at directing. Within a minute or two, both teams found their items, and I noticed that the students' facial expressions were much better than when they came in.

In summary, some of the icebreakers helped students get to know one another better and also lightened the mood in the room. Even though not all the icebreakers involved students sharing personal things, they helped create a home students could relate to as we all struggled to build a sense of belonging within the space.

Talking About Prior Experiences

The Tell Your Story Academy aimed for students to share their experiences, not limiting them to specific themes or topics. However, there were instances where students told random stories that were not planned, or semi-planned. Talking about these experiences aided in the creation of a relational home as participants listened to others as they spoke. Aside from students' experiences, during my interviews with the mentors, they spoke about how much they do (do not) talk about personal experiences during their usual classes at the university. This aspect is relevant to understanding how university students are invited to share their experiences while they learn.

Program Trajectory

I was curious about how the mentors talked about their experiences during classes and if it helped them retain information from those classes. When I posed the question to the mentors, both of them paused for a minute. Then, Shelly asked Chang if he wanted to answer the question first, but he responded that he needed to consider such an instance. Shelly decided to respond first, as it might stir up some experiences for Chang. She

affirmed that her program (art history) always connects her to the past and awards her the opportunity to link her own experiences to classroom sceneries or in tackling an assignment. She said, "A lot of the things we end up doing are linked to our achievements and past that bring to the present, leading us to the future achievement". As she spoke, I was eager to hear more about how it happened during those classes, and she gave an example of a course she took in the summer. She recounts,

For that course, the first assignment was to do some type of portrait of ourselves using our faces. You take a picture of yourself, and then you'll link everything that is connected to you. That really made me start thinking like, all the way back when, a long time ago..... I did something similar a while ago but instead of linking, I had to draw the image. I did that in my last year in high school, where I had to draw a self-portrait of myself. That was a hard picture.... I took that image and combined it with this assignment, where I blew up the image, dimmed the light for some Photoshop, and then sort of linked a bunch of things that connected to it. I was like, grade 12 to now. I used the experience I had back then to help me in this project.

As Shelly tried to explain her experience, other experiences started to flood in, which made her sentences not flow together at first, but this is evidence of how much she tries to link her past experiences to the present. In her statement, she asserts that the assignment was about her linking some factors discussed in the class to a portrait of herself that she drew. The first link to the personal was to draw herself, which might have been an exciting experience for her. When people are asked to do things for themselves, they try as much as possible to take their time to get the best out of it since they understand that the gains would be theirs. Although the general gain of having an education benefits the learner,

it is still a positive thing to remind learners about these benefits at intervals, which is linked to how the knowledge learned can be used in their everyday lives, leading to the second point of connection. Linking classroom content with the image of self, served as a form of reflection for students to see how what was taught is evident in their lives. This can make it easier for students to learn the content because they would have experienced the practicality of it (Kolb, 2014) rather than if they were taught only the theoretical sides of the course. The third form of contact with the personnel was the use of previous experience to get the assignment done. This last one links the skills she acquired in high school to her present situation, which made her see the relevance of what she was previously taught. This relevance would give her the zeal to put more effort into her current learning because she had observed the continuity in learning classroom content.

Listening to Shelly excitedly talking of and about her experiences, I noticed Chang's eyes moving left to right, as if he was trying to fit what Shelly said into what he had experienced, too. When Shelly was done sharing her layers of experiences, Chang busted out saying,

Hmn... the thing is, I feel like I've personally taken courses that are very opposite from what you're taking, I guess. Because arts and science are two different things. I guess ours is more objective in a way because there's only one correct answer, right? So we can't really tell our experience, no matter how much I want to, like, what am I going to tell about my experience? Can I go like... I know how my cells work. Like, what?

Chang's statement about knowing how his cells work cracked us up. However, it showed how hard he must have thought about how his courses were structured only to get

objective answers. Even though he would have loved to find a good example like Shelly, his program of study had already programmed him to think that there are no direct and tangible connections between course content and students' lives. This is because his courses dealt with abstract concepts that cannot be physically noticed immediately without careful scrutiny or systematic experiments. As Chang spoke, he expressed his innermost desire to be able to talk about his experiences. He said, "The thing is, sometimes I really actually want to do an English class because a lot of English topics... I'd really like to talk about something like film studies and some of that". Chang is an outgoing person who enjoys making new friends. Being trapped in the hole of science seemed too much for him, but he felt like he did not have much of a choice but to see his courses through. Seeing how Chang expressed his innermost desires, Shelly advised that he take some courses in film studies since she is a dynamic learner. In between the discussion, Chang remembered a movie he had seen and decided to share it with me and Shelly.

Yeah. There was a movie I watched in grade 10 I think, I think it was called Dead Poets Society. It was about... I don't know if you guys know who Robin Williams is, but this movie is about a group of high school kids. They have all ambitions, but their school has restricted what they're learning and then they don't have the freedom of thinking. So, poetry and the like were restricted. They do mostly like mathematics and science. But, but this teacher came in, and he taught them poetry and songs. They were like beauties of life. And then I guess the kids started liking those concepts and started to live life more beautifully. But then something happened and that teacher got expelled because he was not supposed to teach that curriculum to the kids, I guess. But he left an impact on the kids at the end, even

those who did not like the way that he taught. And then I had a lot of discussion with my peers about that film even years after, because I feel like that film was really good. But yeah, I felt like that was the last discussion, probably, I had about sharing my experiences in class. I'll be like, whenever they all talk about films, I'm like, Oh, I've watched this film. Did you watch it? I feel like I learned a lot from this movie, so I suggest you watch it too and have a different point of view.

The storyline of the movie Chang shared is a description of how he felt at the moment. Talking about restricting students to specific fields made him think of the movie he saw in grade 10. This shows that Chang, as a person, might want to be dynamic, but this kind of dynamism is not needed in his field. This made me ask him if they usually have classroom discussions and what they can talk about. He responded by saying,

...it's very strict, you have to talk about a specific topic in class. You can't really just talk about like, whatever. You know what I mean? Like you don't really talk unless it's a discussion for marks. I don't think people take it that seriously.

Conversely, Shelly commented that she took a course in physiology but did not experience what Chang experienced. She said, "It wasn't that different when I took physiology. I was constantly connecting it to real-world experiences. Yeah, unintentionally, because that's just how I learned". Shelly's statement opened a new door to the possibility that the issue of connecting course content with experiences might have something to do with the identity of the student. Hence, even though the science field seems objective, how the students learn depends on who they are. However, there is no denying that who they are is a collection of what they have been, and that Chang has been on the straight path for as long as he can remember. Shelly agreed with this when she said,

Yeah, I'd always do that. So, when I was studying with my friend, I was constantly connecting it to something. I was like, Oh, this film or this thing... And that's just because that's how I remember stuff. I have to connect it to the real world because that's how they taught me from when I was younger. And it's the best way I remember any content. If I can't connect it to something, it is just there, circling.

This is because even though Chang does not experience the first two levels Shelly experienced in her summer course, it is always possible to experience the third level of connection, which relates to linking current content to past learning. As Chang gave the cell example, the first thing that crossed my mind was linking his current experience of how a cell works with what he had previously learned, not necessarily having tangible experiences he could draw from. In Chang's defense, he mentioned that he was not always like he is now. He said that when he was in high school, there were many opportunities to link experiences with class content, which was reduced drastically when he got to the university. This made me think that the level of education has so much to do with the teaching and learning methods used. This is because grade school is meant to build students' interests before they move to the more complex aspects of education. Also, the classes in grade school accommodate only a small number of students per class, which makes it easier for the teacher to manage. Chang stated, "... I feel like it's more that teachers care for you more because you are in a smaller classroom compared to like 250 students in a room." Shelly mentioned that how a course is taught and how it is learned is dependent on how it is planned, and she wished that science courses could be structured in interactive ways to aid learning.

And that's the only thing I wish they could change for science where they can make the courses... like they would still teach the content but make the courses more interactive. I see some professors try asking students questions. It's just passive, where it's only the teacher or professor talking to the students. The students can't do much, but I've seen so many other courses same program, but it's more interactive.

In support of this, Chang states that,

You know what I wanted to say is that all the courses like, for example, in biochemistry, one I took last fall, I felt like whenever I went to that classroom, it was just a tense feeling or air because nobody was talking. Everybody does a study like a robot. I feel like a robot in there. It was just so like, there was no sound. When the teacher started, everybody became silent. Like, you're supposed to do that. But no questions asked. And then when we were doing like, iClickers, you have to get a correct answer right. And the teacher would be like, oh, you can share amongst yourselves. And nobody was talking just like, everybody just knew what was going on. And then when we got up, it was just like this for repeat Tuesday and Thursday and our 15 classes. By the way, nobody talks to each other literally, unless you are friends and you want to know each other's weekend.

Therefore, aside from students' identities that can impact how they relate to classroom content, other factors like the level of education, class structure, and teaching methods are evident. These factors are interwoven, as one affects the other. The level of education provides the class structure, including student-teacher ratios. Consequently,

these ratios determine how the teachers or instructors plan for their classes, affecting how students learn.

Tree Prompts

Since the first session of the academy was to build relationships and prepare participants for what was to come, we got involved in some planned activities that would lead our minds toward using a tree as a metaphor for expression. Therefore, I projected a slide that showed some prompts on students' experiences with trees in general. The questions were "What does a tree mean to you? What are your experiences with trees? Is there a particular tree that has stood out to you, and why?" Students were given some minutes to document their thoughts in their journals before sharing their answers with the group. I called students randomly for them to tell the class what they had written. Most of them had beautiful ideas of what trees have to offer, and they gave a series of responses. The student I called first expressed that a tree means experience, resource, and family. She sits under the shade of trees with her friends and she loves the looks of trees in fall. The next girl I called out said trees mean life. Her experiences with trees include going on picnics with friends and family. For her, the trees during summer stand out because of how green they look. These two girls were friends, and I am not surprised their responses were somewhat similar. Hence, I called on the third friend of the group (Sarah) to talk about her answers.

Actually, I targeted the three girls first because they prefer to listen rather than speak. Sarah said, "Trees are important because they give us oxygen. They also give us chairs and tables". This was the first unconventional response I got about what a tree means. It felt like the two girls before Sarah wanted to give deeper meanings to trees and I thought Sarah

would move in that direction too. However, I was glad when she mentioned the immediate things trees are used for. This shows that her quietness means she observes her environment quite well. Since the other two girls mentioned that they love trees in fall and summer, as the third girl, I thought Sarah would say she loves the dryness of trees in winter. This is because the three friends collaborate and seek each other's opinions regarding their answers. However, I was surprised when Sarah mentioned that she loves cherry blossom trees. I wanted her to explore her answers more and asked where she came across the tree for the first time. Her simple response was, "In Winnipeg." Since it was the first session, it was understandable that they were unwilling to go all the way with their responses to provide explanations. Or maybe I was being time conscious because I wanted everyone to share their responses.

I called on Juliet, and she said, "Trees mean oxygen". For the next question about her experiences with trees, I guess she misunderstood as she recounted her experiences of how trees grow from being seedlings to huge trees. Moreover, for the last question, she could not talk about any trees that stood out for her. She said, "Sorry, my brain stopped working". I was wondering if this happened because this aspect was planned. I thought maybe it would have been a different case if they chose what they wanted to talk about, not specifically trees, like when she was asked to talk about what she loved and hated. She was at her best because she had the choice of talking about anything. I encouraged Juliet by saying people usually have moments like that, which is not bad. For Amy, instead of giving specific responses to specific questions, she said that her answers were jumbled together. Therefore, she responded with a short story about her neighbor's apple tree. She said, "When I was young, my sister and I would get shopping bags and pick apples from my

neighbor's tree." She reminisced on those moments and smiled as she spoke. She concluded by saying, "Trees give people lifelines." This is another unconventional response. She answered in a narrative form of a beginning, a middle, and an end. The last student in the group sees trees as life, as she compares them to a nurturing mother looking out for her children.

Summarily, these tree prompts I shared with the students are specific because it was the first planned activity students were engaged in regarding talking about their experiences in relation to the overall objective of the academy, which is drawing up Trees of Life in telling their stories. From this experience, it is evident that students reacted differently to talking about their experiences with trees. Due to limited time, the mentors could not talk about their own experiences.

Critical Analogy

This section explains one student's way of connecting what was going on in the group to what she had previously experienced or known. Having read about Amy in the previous chapter, it is obvious how much she loves school and tries to get her work done without unnecessary interference from other students who might not take their work seriously. Amy is a vibrant student who loves volunteering to start an activity when others are reluctant to do so. She was also the first student to have a random talk with me about why a flower was placed on a cake I used as an analogy during the first session. I noticed that Amy often had a lot to say about issues as they arose in class, and she brought up external knowledge she had previously garnered. Such situations arose in the second session I had with the participants.

At the time, I gave students some minutes to write about the things they loved and hated; some students showed me signs that they were done writing, while others were still thinking deeply about what they could add to their lists. Amy was one of the students who had finished her list promptly. Because I did not want to waste any time while also giving the others to finish up, I decided to engage the students who were done writing by asking if they loved listening to stories. Some of them nodded their heads in response. I went further to ask if they had ever been in a situation where they told stories before. Amy affirmed that she had. I prompted her to tell the class one of the stories. At first, I thought the story would be like a non-fiction since she enjoys reading novels and book series a lot. To my surprise, it was not. She started,

So, back in the 1960s, there was malaria in Borneo....spraying was illegal, which killed out much of the cats and so there was a massive increase in the rodent population. So there was more malaria. So instead of simply driving the cats into Borneo or like transporting them on a ship, they parachuted 14,000 cats into Borneo to eat up the rats because they had few cats in the area. They ate up all the rodents and malaria was down.

When she was done talking, I realized that she had shared a true-life story based on history. I cannot remember where I heard it from, but I remember not thinking much about it until Amy mentioned it. I wondered how it was that Amy would be interested in such old news. That made me think of how critical she might be with regard to the happenings of the world. In between my thoughts, she continued by giving a dramatic monologue, where a kid named Billy told his mum that it was raining cats, and the mother said it was not true. Only for her to check outside the window and see that cats are falling from the sky. Amy's

analogy explains how ridiculous she felt the situation was and how she wondered why the government could not proffer a more reasonable solution to the pest infestation in Borneo. I was curious about how she came about the news because, to me, it is uncommon to find young children of this generation curious about the news, especially such old news. Amy said,

I heard that from this channel that I like to watch where a lady tells you weird historical facts that no one really talks about. And I Googled this afterwards to make sure it was actually real, and it is.

Amy showed her critical side when she decided to verify the information she got from her favorite facts channel. Her analytical skills helped her get to the roots of the story, which became a story she shared with her friends to keep them aware of what had happened in the past. When all the students were done writing, they shared their lists with the group. Afterward, I asked if anyone had any other thing to say or add before we moved on to the next task. All of them responded with a negative, but Amy did not respond. I could see she was negotiating in her head if she should say what she had in mind or not. I nudged her to go ahead if she had anything else to share. She said she wanted to share a story from a movie, "The Maze Runner". When Chang heard the title, he screamed and asked Amy to stop. I wondered what the problem was, and he said he had just started watching the trilogy and did not want any "spoiler alert". However, because Amy wanted to get her thoughts about the movie out, she pleaded with Chang that she wanted to say some parts of it. Both of them looked at me, as if they wanted me to pick a side of whether Amy's thoughts should be out or not, for Chang's sake. I was dumbfounded for the first time during the session. I shrugged my shoulders, almost asking for both of them to find a balance. The rest of the

group watched the scene interestingly to know what would happen next. Then, Amy came to the rescue and promised she would not say too much about the movie. Amy confirmed she read the novel the film was based on when the film trilogy was not yet completed. Hence, instead of talking about the movie, she only spoke about how she felt when she read the book series. She said, "The number of deaths in the book made me burst into tears because it is the saddest thing I have ever read. Because of that, I now hate sad books, especially one where good people die".

The expression of how she felt got Chang interested in knowing more about what would actually happen in the movie. He started calling out the names of the good people he liked in the movie to verify if they died, but Amy said that the people he mentioned did not eventually die. It sounded a bit like a "spoiler alert", but Chang was still willing to see the trilogy to the end. This discussion of authors killing their protagonists sparked the interest of some other students in the group, and they spoke about some books they had read that ended sadly like that. One of the girls also mentioned that in the book series she was reading, the author published another part where there was heaven after they previously killed all the good people in other parts. Hence, the students concluded that the new part was just to make up for the failed parts and that there was a switch in how the author wrote, possibly due to critics and public satisfaction. This heated discussion made Amy say that,

I know one author, she would have a protagonist, right? And she would make this amazing, awesome character. You'd love them and then she'll kill them. Every book she would do that. Her plan was she was just going to have this protagonist that everyone hated, and right in the end, he would get to be happy. But none of the

other actually good protagonists would be. Just to make fun of just I don't know life, people, and anyone reading the book.

In her statement, Amy expressed her displeasure with authors who devise storylines to make fun of their readers and life in general. Throughout, Amy's discussions were not planned. However, they created a space for the other participants to express their thoughts about a movie they had seen or a book they had read. This shows that Amy engages in any form of educational media and thinks deeply about what she hears, views, or reads.

Collaborative Activity

For the "3 pictures 1 story" activity students engaged in during the third session, I planned on grouping the students for the task using a random selection technique. I crumpled some pieces of paper containing group numbers 1-3. Since I had seven students show up for the second session, I thought it would be wise to have three groups with three participants each, including the mentors. I put the crumpled papers in a bowl, which participants would randomly select from. I was hoping the three friends in the group would be placed in different groups each so I could see how they would be without each other's company. As I arranged the room before the students showed up, I heard the door fling open. I wondered who it was, as I thought it would have been early for the students to come in. It was one of the community program organizers. She came in with a new grade eight student and wanted the girl to join our academy. I welcomed the new girl and conversed with her so she would be at ease during the session. Not too long after that, the students and the mentors came in. After the blindfolding icebreaker that was previously described, it was time for the students to decide their fate of which group they would fall under. Now that the participants are ten, with the new girl, it only means that one of the groups will

have four participants. I informed Shelly that she could select any group of her choice after the students and Chang had chosen their papers.

I explained the activity to the participants: they would move together to select three pictures from the table and create a story based on the pictures. I carried the bowl and shook it vigorously. Then, I moved around the class for the participants to pick a paper from the bowl. I could see the anxiousness in the students as they were eager to know who would be in their group. Sarah, Juliet, and one other student chose group one. Luckily for them, two of the friends chose group three, alongside Grace, while Amy, Chang, and the new girl were in group two. Shelly chose to be in group one. I was glad the new girl was paired with Amy; I was hoping Amy's positive energy would rub off on the new student. All the students moved to the front of the class to select their pictures as a group. They moved around the table and negotiated the best pictures they could write a story on among themselves. As the students shopped, I informed them that the images contained some prompts that could stir their imaginations. I also explained that the prompts are just options and that they may decide to write a story that is entirely different from the suggestions in the prompts. This is a semi-planned way of getting students to discuss and interact with one another. Hence, I provided some basic materials and allowed students to discuss whatever they wanted to form a story. At the table, they seemed like they had a rough idea of what their story should be, which aided their selection of pictures.

The groups moved to their designated seats that I had previously arranged at different corners of the class so that they would not interrupt one another while they discussed. As they discussed, I realized that each group used different techniques to develop their stories. Group one decided to give each of their members one picture to flesh

out, while Shelly served as a go-to person whenever they had questions as they wrote. The aim was to have different ideas flowing and for the students to contribute equally to the overall story. I would say that this technique would make each group member feel valued as their little contribution would be a part of the group's overall performance. As the students asked Shelly questions regarding their ideas, I realized she did not give them any clear-cut response. She primarily asked the question back in return so that they would evaluate their ideas by themselves. Initially, my thoughts regarding group one were that they would end up doing well because they had more numbers than the remaining group and that Shelly would do most of the work for them. However, I am glad my thoughts were wrong, as Shelly stimulated their interests and moved them towards doing the work themselves. At intervals, I could hear her say phrases like "that sounds good" or "that would work" to reinforce students' ideas and ensure there is coherence in their story. I would say that the system used in this group mirrors who Shelly is as an individual and as a student. Due to her dynamic nature, she loves to have various options she can choose from, which was why she suggested that each of the students do individual work to achieve the group's work. This approach aimed to look at the individual works afterward to see what worked and what needed to be removed.

Most group one members were introverts who love to be in the background during activities. I believe making them work individually first is also a great strategy to get the most out of the individual students, looking at their personality traits. During my interview with Shelly, she mentioned that she noticed Sarah's abilities. She said,

And she has her trait, although she's usually quiet. She's very observant of the three very, very observant. In her time of silence, that's when she's able to summarize an

individual or a situation in a few minutes. She did that very well when we were doing that three-picture story. She listened to everything everyone was saying and summarized it. We wrote a very brief paragraph based on that, and that's what we submitted. And I was like, wow!

From Shelly's statement, it was evident that even though the group seemed to have a very good strategy, they had issues synchronizing their thoughts to form a full story, and that was when Sarah's summarizing skills came in handy.

Group two, on the other hand, seemed like they clearly understood their storyline since they selected their pictures. They spent some amount of time discussing how the pictures were connected, looking closely at the images. After the discussion, they nominated Amy to write up the story based on their plan. Chang and the new girl were assured that Amy would finish the job perfectly. As Amy wrote, Chang left the class to attend to some pressing issues while the new girl, I am guessing, went to the bathroom. When they returned to the class, they asked Amy to read out what she had written to see if it aligned with the plan. They made general adjustments to the paper and declared they were ready to share their story. For this group, the situation in which the new girl found herself and the other members' personalities was evident in their chosen strategy for story writing. Firstly, because it was the new girl's first session, she was not interested in the activities because she must have felt like the other girls had formed a bond before she came. Hence, not participating fully in the 3 pictures 1 story activity was understandable. Secondly, Amy did not mind volunteering to write the story for the group because she always wanted to get involved in the activities. Her personality to always get things done was perfect for the group. Lastly, Chang's scientific way of doing things was evident in

how they planned together for a short while and then had someone experiment with the plan before gathering as a group to hear the final results.

Group three was a very special one as the members were mostly quiet. Instead of discussing as a group, I noticed that they were majorly writing in their journals while one person dictated to the group. As one person dictates, whenever anyone had anything to add, they would pick up the story and change the storyline in between. As I observed how much they wrote, I met with them a number of times to verify if they needed help with coming up with their story, but they said they were good. Grace, being the oldest in the group and also a quiet person, did not try to enforce her opinions on her group members. They wrote their story until I told them the time was up and it was time for sharing. The stories each of the groups wrote will be elaborated on in the next chapter. However, observing how each class member behaved to achieve their goals was amazing, as their personalities were evident in how they related to one another.

Home to Meaning

In an effort to cultivate a sense of belonging among participants in an academic setting, I employed a multifaceted approach that extended beyond the role of the facilitator or instructor. By deliberately designing a dynamic physical space and encouraging collective contributions, I aimed to foster an inclusive environment conducive to connection and engagement. A designated central space was maintained throughout the initial four sessions to facilitate the gradual development of participants' stories and experiences, ultimately forming a shared storyscape. This strategic design choice enabled participants to establish a sense of comfort and familiarity, laying the groundwork for the subsequent storytelling circle. In the final session, the circular configuration of the

storytelling circle promoted direct eye contact, enabling participants to attune to their audience's body language and adjust their narrative accordingly. This intentional spatial arrangement encouraged active listening, empathy, and reciprocal respect among participants. Furthermore, co-creating guiding rules for the sessions with participants empowered them to take ownership of the environment, fostering a sense of agency and respect for one another's contributions. This collective responsibility for the space and its norms contributed significantly to participants' willingness to engage fully in the activities, culminating in a positive and inclusive learning experience.

I incorporated various strategies into the program design to foster a sense of community and connection among students. Beyond the planned activities, students engaged in informal discussions to establish a sense of familiarity and rapport. To humanize myself and demonstrate vulnerability, I shared my personal story, "My Unfinished Story," which resonated with students and encouraged them to share their own experiences. However, fatigue posed a significant challenge, given the students' long and busy school days. To counter this, I incorporated physically engaging activities that promoted movement and collaboration. Team-building exercises, such as the blindfold activity, required students to trust and rely on their peers, fostering a sense of unity and understanding. While individual storytelling was a central focus, the collective approach emphasized that struggles and challenges are shared experiences, promoting empathy and support among participants. By intentionally designing the program to balance structured activities with informal interactions and collective exercises, I created a dynamic learning environment that encouraged connection, trust, and a sense of belonging among students.

Examining expectations versus reality revealed a significant disconnect between students' initial perceptions and their ultimate experiences in the academy. Initially, students anticipated a fun, leisurely program without reading and writing activities. However, upon completion, they expressed relief and surprise that the academy exceeded their expectations, with mentors corroborating this sentiment. Observing students' facial expressions and body language, I noted a visible sense of relief and accomplishment after sharing their stories, suggesting a cathartic release of emotions. The mentors, too, underwent a transformation in their role perception, evolving from mere support figures to integral members of the learning community. By actively participating in activities and learning alongside students, mentors forged meaningful connections and earned students' trust, creating a safe space for sharing experiences. This leveling of the playing field made students feel comfortable sharing their stories with their peers and mentors, fostering a sense of community and understanding. The academy's design, which integrated mentors into the learning process, proved instrumental in breaking down barriers and promoting a collaborative, supportive environment.

My expectations for the Tell Your Story Academy were continually redefined as the program unfolded. Each day brought new revelations, with participants' emotions, engagement, and activity responses fluctuating significantly. This unpredictability underscored the importance of flexibility in lesson planning, highlighting the need to balance structured plans with adaptability and responsiveness to students' emergent needs and interests. While deviations from the plan may have seemed unrelated to the session's objectives at first glance, they ultimately validated students' knowledge and experiences, fostering a sense of ownership and agency. By acknowledging and incorporating students'

contributions, we co-created a learning environment that was both dynamic and inclusive. This approach not only deepened students' investment in the program but also illuminated the value of flexible pedagogy in harnessing students' interests and promoting meaningful learning outcomes.

With a relational foundation established and participants feeling increasingly comfortable in the learning space, the academy began to witness richer and more nuanced expressions of identity. As students and mentors shared space, stories, and responsibilities, their interactions revealed not just connection, but meaning-making. The next chapter, titled “*Discussing Matters of Significance*,” explores how participants responded to the Tree of Life activities, and how their varied engagements—whether spoken, visual, hesitant, or bold—offered insight into the evolving nature of identity. This chapter examines these moments not simply as classroom events, but as reflections of deeper personal, cultural, and social significance.

Chapter Six: Discussing Matters of Significance

Participants in this study reacted differently to the Tell Your Story Academy activities, resulting in an epiphany of unique identities. Students' diverse skills and abilities were evident in their negotiation between space, objects, and people. Participants communicated their experiences using a variety of modes, including visual, auditory, and textual modes. This diverse expression aligns with the principles of critical literacy and affect theory, where identity is not fixed but emerges through multiple literacies and relational encounters (Moje & Luke, 2009; Ahmed, 2004; Massumi, 2015). These affective and critical engagements reflect key tenets of Affective Liberation Literacy, emphasizing the interconnection between emotion, text, and identity. Using the Tree of Life approach, students were expected to be able to talk about their past, present, and future aspirations without feeling any pressure to do so. However, factors like resistance towards participation and the agency given to students to direct their involvement in the activities led to the production of different forms of trees, ranging from finished to "unfinished". I use the term "unfinished" in the sense that it might not look finished compared to the ideal way a Tree of Life should be, but finished to the participants because that is the best they could have done at that time. Even the so-called "ideal finished" Tree of Life is not totally finished because we are all unfinished beings in an unfinished world. The repertoire of our past experiences keeps growing, and we keep weaving new things into the present. The future is certainly not certain, as change is always constant. Ultimately, what matters is that our present self is valued by the people who witness our stories however they are told (Dutro, 2019). Therefore, this chapter draws from the two previous chapters, as it explores some concepts that emerged after the land had been prepared and the storyscape had been

built to an extent. Therefore, this section discusses my observation and analysis of participants' behaviors and reactions regarding how they expressed their stories and experiences.

Engaging in Multiliteracies

One might wonder why storytelling should involve various forms of literacies when telling typically means to convey by speech. The Tell Your Story Academy was characterized by the multimodal aspect of multiliteracies, where meaning is made through a range of modes, including language, image, sound, and gestures (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Kalantzis & Cope, 2023). Hence, knowledge was represented in multiple forms, and participants were given various choices to express themselves. The aim was not to replace the traditional form of education, which utilizes mostly the lecture method (Doherty, 2007; Van Dijk & Jochems, 2002), but to enhance it, considering that we are in a digital age. As a researcher, using the traditional forms of literacy, which include reading and writing (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Jewitt & Kress, 2010), was necessary for me to be able to gather concrete data that I could always refer to later. However, since the Tell Your Story Academy was designed for an after-school program, and students must have been exhausted from dealing with formal schoolwork, I thought of how plausible it would be to eliminate reading and writing to build participants' interests in the academy. At some points, participants engaged only when certain forms of representation were used in the space. In the previous chapter, I described the classroom environment and how student engagement was affected by it. This section will explain how participants communicated meaning using textual, aural, and visual modes. Such multimodal engagements demonstrate how meaning-making can be deeply embodied and

affective, supporting Jiang's (2023) claim that classrooms are alive with affective possibility.

Multimodal Intricacies

Categorizing activities in modes is not clear-cut, as the textual, aural, and visual modes are interconnected (New London Group, 1996; Dewi et al., 2023; Westby, 2010) and were evident throughout the Tell Your Story Academy. The textual mode of communication, which includes written and oral texts had been incorporated into the plan from the conception of the academy. Pens and notepads were provided for students to document their thoughts as they arose. This is because emotion or the reactivation of an experience occurs during social sharing when listening to others (Rime, 2007; Zech et al., 2004; Cantisano et al., 2014). Also, since it was one of the co-constructed rules not to “bump into each others’ words”, participants were advised to write ideas or points they remembered and would love to share.

To prompt participants to think deeply about their experiences, I introduced them to two picture books on trees. The first one was "What Do You See When You Look at a Tree?" by Emma Carlisle (2022) (see Figure 13). The tree metaphor employed in the academy seemed perfect because trees have been overlooked as things that do not feel. Although plants are considered living things, one might not think deeply about how they live since they are stationed in a spot and would be there until they are no longer there. Calling participants' attention to a tree might make them think about other experiences they might have pushed into their subconscious minds as irrelevant. Therefore, this text introduced the participant to reflect on how trees reach out to one another as they have brothers and sisters and rely on one another as humans do. The text was read on the first

day of the academy by a student who volunteered to read it since we only had one copy. There was silence as students listened and viewed the pictures as we turned the pages. After the first reading, I gave students some minutes to ponder on the tree prompts projected on the slides.

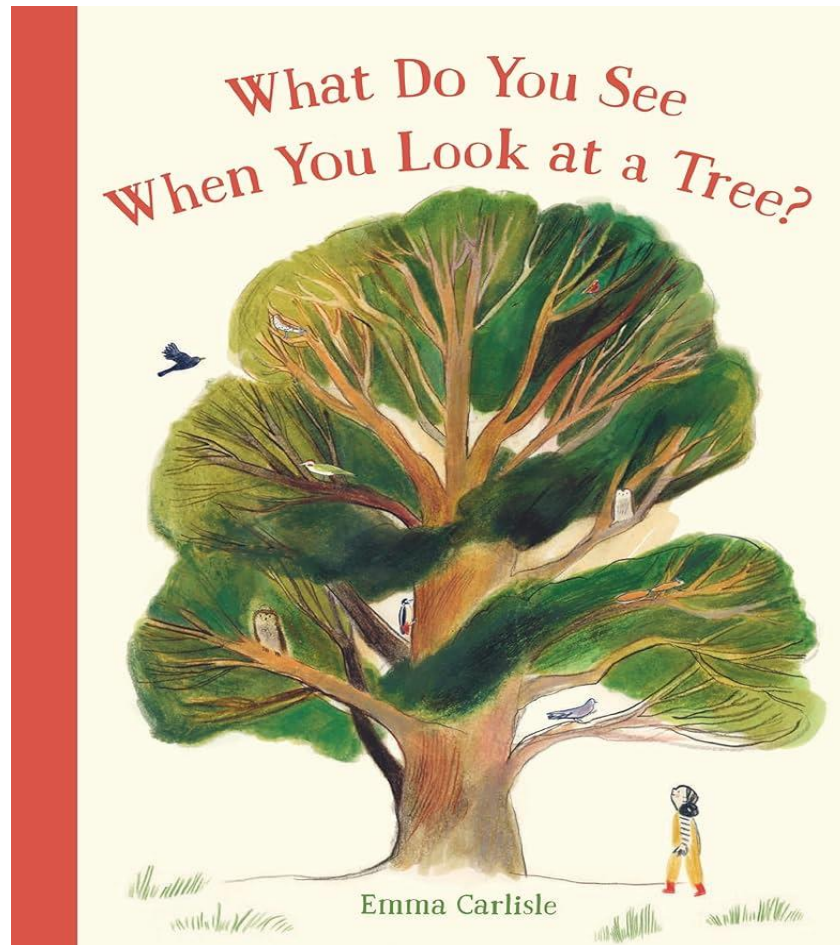


Figure 13: The first picture book we read

Next, I introduced participants to a part of the book "My Heart Was a Tree" by Michael Morpurgo (2023) (see Figure 14). We read the first poem in the book, "Driftwood," about a wood with nine lives. Having six grade school students, two mentors, and me, it was the perfect number to read each part of the Nine Lives. Amy volunteered to start by

reading *The First Life*. She read audibly as her voice echoed in the room. Finishing her part, she passed the book to the next person, who picked the second life till it got to the mentors who read the seventh and eighth lives, while I rounded up the reading with the ninth life. I noticed that some students were quite audible, while others struggled with reading out loud for others to hear. However, participants did not comment that they could not hear some parts. I think it was because everyone focused on waiting their turn to read their part of the book. I noticed that some of them might not have been totally comfortable reading out loud. But luckily, it was a small group, and we all coped. When it was my turn to read, I was worried that my Nigerian accent and ways of pronouncing some words might not be clear enough, but it seemed they heard me well, as long as I read slowly and loudly. I observed that having different readers for different lives made the tempo in the room fluctuate as some read with vigor while others mumbled through the pages. Some students reflected on these prompts and wondered what some trees have gone through in their lifetime. Some even wondered if some trees want to be where they are, as they do not get to choose where they go like humans. Using picture books as a form of visual support aided the students in conceptualizing the life of a tree.

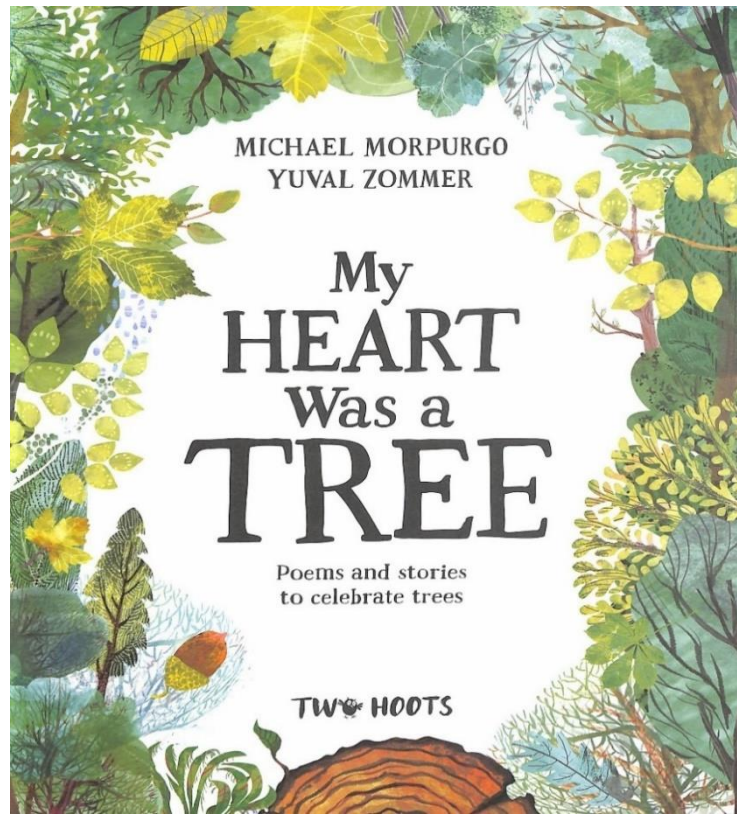


Figure 14: The second picture book we read

Regarding writing, I observed that participants approached it differently based on their interest in writing, their mood during each session, the topic they were writing on, and the roles they performed, as in the case of the mentors. When given topics participants were interested in, they wrote extensively, as explained previously using Juliet's instance of when she wrote about what she loved and hated. Amy, on the other hand, loved to write as much as she loved to participate in most of the activities fully. Her interest in school activities made it easy for her to cope with the readings and writings we implemented. She completed her writing task before the time was up and waited for others to finish. Due to this, I engaged Amy in other talks, including her discussing some of the books she read while others completed their work. Sometimes, the other students asked for additional time to complete the writing part. I thought the more time given to students, the more

information they must have included in their journals. However, I realized that students spent more time thinking about what to write than the actual writing itself. There are instances where students sketched to while away time, so that when it was time to complete the writing task, they would seek extra time to finish the work. This made me question if it would have been helpful to do away with the writing instead. In my conversation with the mentors, I asked about their thoughts on writing and if they felt it resulted in the students being bored and disinterested. Shelly said,

At first, they were reserved about it. But over time, when you bring up the notebook, they will just write something and then refer to it. Right? So, it's, yes, it's a fundamental skill. It's something to reflect on and return to. And then it's your way of knowing the student personally versus the things they share in the group because they won't share everything. Yeah, yeah, they'll just paraphrase it. So no, keep the writing.

Shelly posited that writing has a lot of benefits for teachers and students, as there are instances where students might not be able to share some things with a group of students but would trust the teacher enough to keep their secrets. This statement is supported by Jones (2010) and Boyd et al. (2023), who expressed that some students may prefer writing as a form of expression due to anxiety and the fear of embarrassment. Hence, they might write what they would not say, which can help the teacher know their students better. Even though Shelly mentioned the benefits of completing the writing part, I noticed that the mentors barely wrote in their journals during the activities. Maybe this can be attributed to their dual role as mentors and participants in the study, or maybe they do not feel inclined to write anything in general. Writing might have been viewed as a tedious task for

participants (Myhill et al., 2023; Wright et al., 2020), and it required a lot of effort from the students to get it done. To encourage writing, reading the picture books helped students to think about possible answers to the prompts. Sequentially, students got engaged in writing activities because I thought responding to the Tree of Life prompts first would be helpful before delving into the drawing part. I felt it would be helpful in that after drawing, students would easily be able to fill in their trees with most of the responses they had written down. Therefore, I divided the parts of the trees into different days, completing their roots, ground, and trunk on the second day and branches, leaves, fruits, and storms on the fourth day. Aside from the slides I projected that contained the prompts from students to fill their tree parts, I also provided additional handouts for students so the writing process could feel personal (see Figure 15).

Narrative Therapy Tree of Life Project

This project is about identifying all the different aspects of your identity; including your past, future goals, strengths and support system. For each section, draw part of your tree and write notes around it. There is a tree outline and some examples on the back of this worksheet.

 ROOTS	Where you come from and your family: • What roots do you have in your life? How important are these? • Does your past influence who you are today? • Do you have any favourite memories? • Has your perception of your roots changed over time? • Where were you born? Where did you go to school?
 GROUND	Your present life and day-to-day activities you engage in: • What is the ground like in your life? Is it fairly stable or frequently changing? (could represent with flat or bumpy ground) • What influences you on a daily basis? • Who do you live with? Where do you go to school/work? • Do you have a favourite place that you visit?
 TRUNK	Your skills and abilities: • What talents and coping skills do you have? • Can you play an instrument/draw/write? Are you helpful/kind? • How important are these abilities to you? Do you value them in others? • Do you find it easier to think of your faults compared to your skills? • Are there any skills other people think you have?
 BRANCHES	Your hopes and goals: • If you could have three wishes, what would they be? • Do you hope for health, happiness, success, money, family etc? • Do you aspire to be a nursery nurse, actor, vet, etc? • How achievable do you feel your aspirations are? • What would need to happen for you to achieve these? • Do you have hopes and wishes for other people in your life?
 LEAVES	Important people in your life: • Who plays an important role in your life? • What type of influence have they had? If they've helped, how? • Do you feel that you have played an important role in their lives? • How might your relationship change in the future? • Are there who have passed away - leaves in the wind?
 FRUIT	Gifts from important people: • Have these people provided you with a shoulder to cry on/support/compliments? • What have your parents taught you? • Have they ever given you a material gift which meant a lot to you? • How have these gifts helped you? • What have you given them in return?
 STORMS	Challenges: Include everything from family conflict, mental health problems, lack of resources, loss of important people in your life, etc. • What storms have you experienced in the past? • How did you manage with these? • What storms do you think there might be in the future?

Figure 15: The Tree of Life Project (Source: Ncube & Denborough, 2006).

Images and texts were used to encourage participants' writing, and similarly, the aural mode was incorporated as students read the picture books out loud for the class to listen to and reflect on. Hence, no one mode can stand alone as a strategy during the activities we were engaged in. However, in some instances, one mode was more evident than the rest, which is elaborated on subsequently.

Textual Mode - Creative writing

During my master's program, I investigated how effective visuals were in writing creatively, and I obtained positive results. I decided to bring the idea of using visuals as a form of text to get students to write random stories that might be connected to their experiences. In the third week, participants got busy writing creatively in groups using three images per group. During this activity, most of the students were interested in writing because they brainstormed as a group on what constitutes a good story. As they brainstormed ideas, all of them wrote them in their journals. Group 1 chose the following images (see Figure 16).



Who is this woman? Why is she upset?
Where is she sitting?



How did this fire start? Where is this
place? Who are those firefighters?



Where are these polar bears going?

What is the older polar bear saying to the young ones?

Figure 16: Random storytelling pictures (Source: Imagine Forest, 2021).

Since group one shared the images with each of its members to flesh them out separately, Juliet got the image of the worried girl, and she tried to write up her part by answering the prompts (see Figure 17). In her journal, she wrote

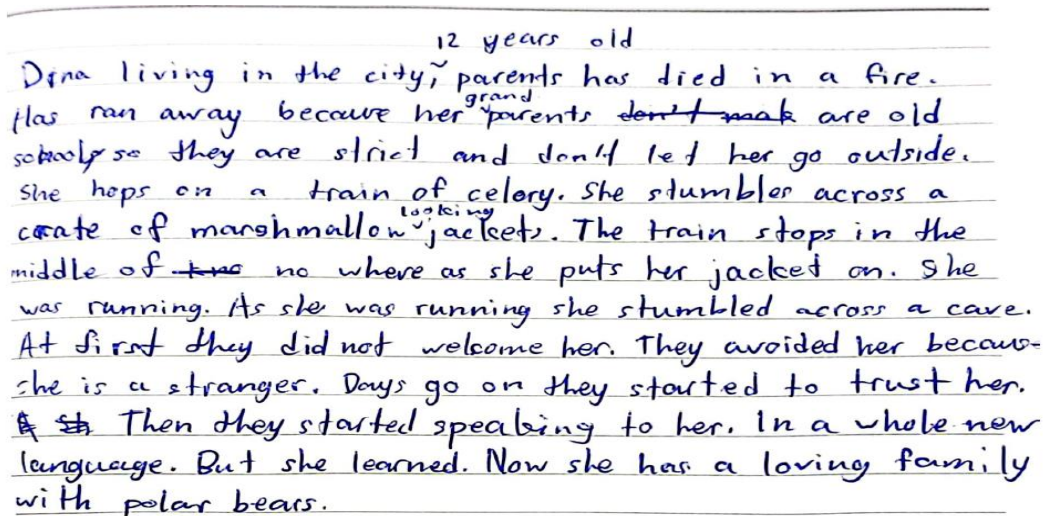
Who is this woman?
 Her name is ~~Dina~~ Dina. a fire? not in the mood to write sorry. (36) so bitter! >>>
 How did she get in a fire?
 Dina stayed in a house in the city with her grandparents cause her parents died. She got depressed and ran away because her grandparents were too strict. She entered a train where it was heading to north pole.
 Dina's last name and middle name
Dina mernandi
bertholomio
 CI made it random cause yeah I'm bored!

Figure 17: Juliet's story formation (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

She wrote the first prompt, "Who is this woman?" and named her "Dina". At the bottom right of the page, she included the character's middle and last name as "Mernande Bertholomio". Juliet did not want to leave any room for anyone looking at her journal to wonder where the name came from. She put an explanation after the name, saying, "I made it random 'cause yeah, I'm bored". Doing this part individually might have brought about boredom, although the intention was to get everyone to work separately while the group came up with a variety of ideas and options to flesh out their story. To show how much she did not enjoy working individually, she wrote at the top of the page, "Not in the mood to write, sorry." However, I wondered if she would have found the activity interesting if they had done the writing together as a group, or if working together might make her crawl into her shell more. In her attempt to answer the other questions of why the girl was oppressed

and where she was sitting, Juliet stated that she got depressed because her parents died, and she ran away, entering a train heading to the North Pole. Additionally, Juliet tried to relate her story to Sarah's fire image.

Sarah's image connection to Juliet's story was that the girl's parents died in the fire (see Figure 18). She did not engage with the prompts I had provided as answering the questions might lead them away from Juliet's original story. Another student chose the polar bear image, and their attempts to insert the polar bear images led to their conclusion that although the girl's parents died, she had the option of staying with her strict grandparents. And because she valued respect, she left home and met the polar bears at the North Pole. Their story progressed gradually as they stated that the bears did not welcome her at first as one of them but after spending enough time with them and gaining their trust by learning their language, the bears chose her as family.



12 years old
Dena living in the city, parents has died in a fire.
Has ran away because her ^{grand}parents ~~don't make~~ are old
school so they are strict and don't let her go outside.
she hops on a train of celery. she stumblers across a
crate of marshmallows ^{looking} jackets. The train stops in the
middle of ~~the~~ no where as she puts her jacket on. She
was running. As she was running she stumbled across a cave.
At first they did not welcome her. They avoided her because
she is a stranger. Days go on they started to trust her.
~~A~~ ~~sh~~ Then they started speaking to her. In a whole new
language. But she learned. Now she has a loving family
with polar bears.

Figure 18: Sarah's summary of their group's story (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

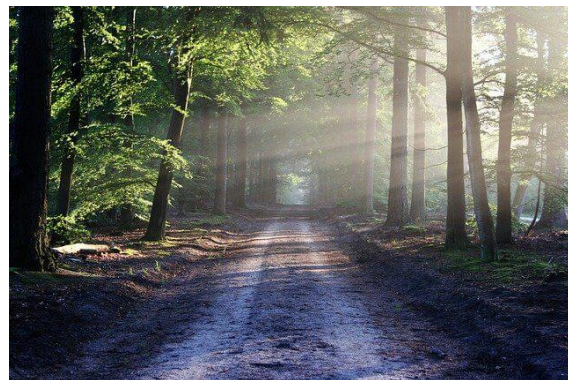
The oral presentation of the group's story is more explanatory because it contains other additions from group members, and it goes thus:

"Once upon a time, there was a 12-year-old girl named Dina. She lived in a city with her grandparents because her parents died in a fire. She decided that she wanted to run away because her grandparents didn't respect her. And they were very strict and old school. So she caught a train that was heading towards the North Pole. It was like a crate train. And all there was in there were a bunch of crates, and she was very cold and hungry. But all she found was a box of celery. So she kind of munched on some celery. When she was having slight frostbite, she found a box of jackets that were shaped like marshmallows. She put the jacket on and immediately felt warmer. A few months later, she found out that she was at her destination. And she opened up the crate and saw a research center in the middle of nowhere. But instead of going there and being sent back, she grabs a crate of celery and runs in the middle of nowhere. And then reality struck her like a bomb. And she realized that she was alone in the middle of nowhere with no one to help her. And so she starts walking by some icebergs, explores, and stumbles upon a cave. She revisits this cave every day and tries to see if there's anything in it. And then one day, she saw a polar bear, multiple polar bears. In fact, even a family. They saw her and did not trust her, they saw her as a threat. And she ran away. After a few months of her coming back and then getting to know her, she started to pick up on their language, which is kind of interesting because I don't know how to speak Polar Bear. And then, she gained their trust and became a part of their family and realized that she ran away because she wanted a family that gave her respect and cared for her, which was exactly what the polar bears gave her."

As the group presented their story, it seemed like a random narration. However, in one of my interviews with the mentors, I discovered that the students in group one used their personal experiences to translate the images into a story as one of them did not feel respected in her home and clamored for it. Shelly recounts that “she doesn't feel respected where she was by her superiors. They belittle her. They don't make her feel like her voice is heard and the environment is just off-putting”. Being with the students in this group as they came up with their stories, Shelly was able to relate their engagement in the activities to their real-life experiences. However, this is not the same for the remaining groups. Group Two chose the following pictures (see Figure 19).



Where is this bus stop? Who are these people? Where are they going?



Where does this path lead to?

What secrets would you find here?



Who lives in this building? Where is this place?

Figure 19: Random storytelling pictures (Source: Imagine Forest, 2021).

The images Grace selected with her group members led them to write a mystery story. Students wrote parts of the story in their journals (see Figure 20); however, when they presented, they told the full story. This group spent a lot of time talking about what works, twists and turns, and a mysterious end.

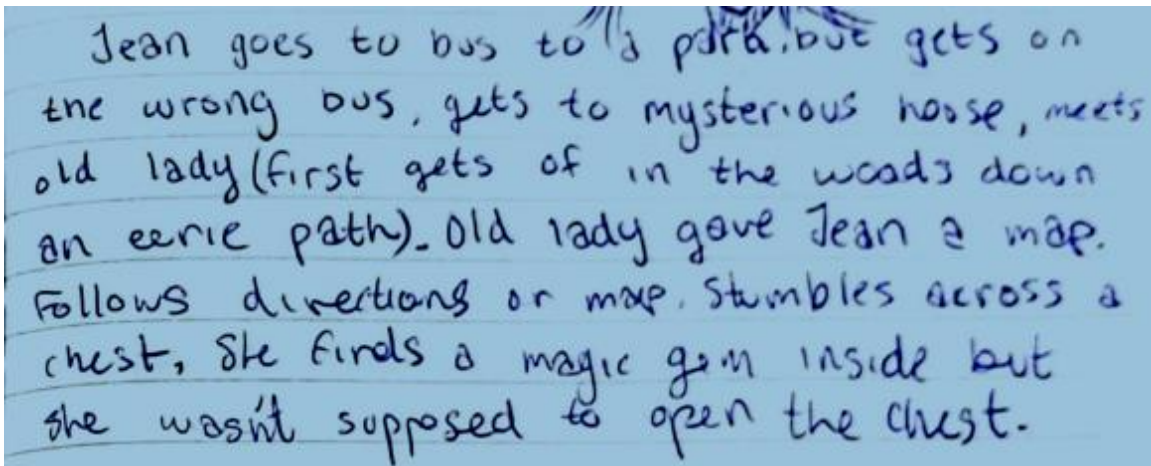


Figure 20: Grace's note on their group's story (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

One day a girl named Jean was at the bus stop to go to the park. While she was busy on her phone, she got on the wrong bus. The bus leads her to a random stop in the woods. Jean went to ask for directions and she came across an old house. She knocked on the door and an old lady opened it. Jean asked for directions and the old lady said she had a map. While she was getting the map, Jean noticed her many cats. She counted twelve. The old lady gave her the map. Jean followed it and stumbled upon a treasure chest. Jean opened it and saw a bright shiny red gem. Along with the gem, she saw a sign that said, "Don't touch." Jean took the gem because it shined like no other gem. When she took it, she felt something strange. Jean didn't mind it and kept following the directions. She found the bus stop and waited. Weeks later, another girl

came across the same bus stop and the same house. She asked the old lady for directions and noticed her cats. The old lady said, "Don't you love my thirteen cats?"

Group two's story does not have a conclusive end, leaving the listener to conclude however they wish. As a reader, I am unsure if Jean found her way home. I wonder what happened after she felt strange. The story suggests that maybe Jean turned into the old lady's thirteenth cat because she touched the forbidden gem. Also, the suspenseful end made me wonder if the next girl fell for the old lady's trick, turned into the fourteenth cat, and so on. Other questions crossed my mind with the story about whether the girls would be saved and returned to their families. This inconclusive story can be linked to the kind of images they chose, images of roads and closed doors. The students might have felt such mystery when they selected their pictures. An image of a bus stop that they are unsure where it leads, an image of a road in the woods they do not know where it goes, and an image of a closed door they are unsure what to find in the house. Also, I think they might not have been certain where the story would lead them while they brainstormed together, as the parts of "weeks later..." seemed like an afterthought, trying to come to a conclusion that interestingly ended up inconclusive. The last group chose three images (see Figure 21), although they had difficulties synchronizing the ideas in the photos.



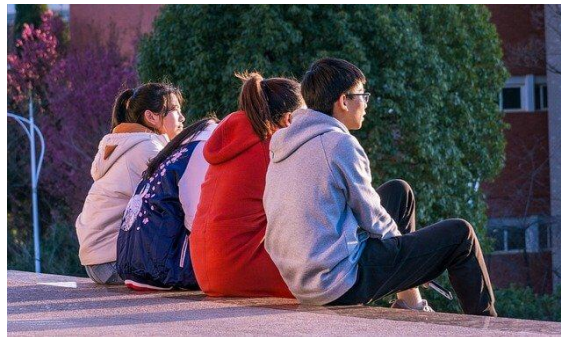
Who is this girl? Where is she going?

What is she thinking?



Where are these two children going?

What just happened to them?



Who are these people? What is their relationship?

Where are they sitting?

Figure 21: Random storytelling pictures (Source: Imagine Forest, 2021).

A popular saying goes, "If you don't know what to write, read". This means that reading inspires and informs an individual, exposing them to various ideas they can write about (Graham et al., 2018; Krashen, 1993). This is the case with the third group. Amy, being a reader, had many ideas, and it was difficult for her to fit those thoughts into a ten-minute writing activity. Her effort to squeeze lots of beautiful ideas into one story, shown in the third group's narrative, goes as follows (see Figure 22);

NOTES

Tami

"~~Tamara~~ couldn't feel her feet. She could feel the blisters, sure, all the blood and pus oozing out. ~~But~~ Not her feet. ^{the} Maybe she should worry. But that was for later. Now, she and Samma, her cousin, had to get past the border by night. The dogs were lazy in the day, and their handlers asleep. This was her only shot."

Tami "~~People~~ Survivors. That was a nice word. Rolled around the mouth. Tami wasn't sure that this really described her, but some of her friends thought that it was a good fit for her. Maybe she'd use it. Tami wasn't sure, she wasn't sure about a lot lately. Her brother's death, being moved, new friends. It was kind of working though."

"Running was strange to her. Apparently Mr. Cooper thought it was a good idea. Sometimes it made her cry, when the flashbacks came back. Other times it exhausted her. And -> <- still others made her laugh. But now she had a new reason to run, to be happy."

Figure 22: Amy's written story (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

“Tami couldn't feel her feet. She could feel the blisters, sure, all the blood and pus oozing out. Not her feet. Maybe she should worry. However, that was for later. Now, she and Samma, her cousin, had to get past the border by night. The dogs were lazy in the day, and their handlers were asleep. This was her only shot. "Survivors," was a nice word that rolled around the mouth. Tami was unsure how this described her, but some of her friends thought it was a good fit for her. Maybe she would use it. Tami was not sure. She wasn't sure about a lot lately: her brother's death, being moved, and new friends. It was working, though. Running was strange to her. Apparently, Mr. Cooper thought it was a good idea. Sometimes it made her cry, when the flashbacks came back. Other times, it exhausted her. And still, others made her laugh. But now, she had a new reason to run, to be happy.”

This short story has many things going on that it might be difficult for a reader to understand what the story is about. However, after hearing the presentation, Amy explained that it was about a girl who used to run until an injury stopped her from running. However, there is a disjoint in the story because the first part states that Tami wanted to get past the border. Enough information was not given about why and if Tami and her cousin made it across. According to the third group's narrative, the girl running in the first image is Tami, while the second image shows how she tries to escape carrying her little cousin. Although the image shows a young boy carrying a younger child, Amy says their group did not focus on gender; they prioritized getting their stories straight. Chang was not so vested in writing the story. Hence, Amy did what she could, having listened to some of the ideas others in the group might have

laid down, and tried to write up a story that might be believable. With the ideas she got and her own basket of thoughts, the activity led to some inconsistencies in the storyline. This might also be attributed to the time given to complete the task, or maybe merging the ideas in the pictures to form one story was a challenge.

Aural Mode - Music

There is no denying that the auditory learning mode was a major aspect of the Tell Your Story Academy because it involves sharing and listening to personal stories and experiences. Students processed what they heard at each point to develop their own stories. Also, it was helpful that I told participants some of my personal stories as a learner, modeling what students might be interested in sharing with the group. Aside from listening to get useful information that can aid in creating and retaining knowledge, exploring the acoustic of the class on the third and fourth days is relevant to understanding how the aural mode motivates and/or distracts the participants during some activities.

When the students had completed their presentations on their group stories from the "3 pictures 1 story activity", the next plan was for them to continue answering the prompts on the Tree of Life handout. However, I noticed that the students were exhausted from brainstorming, writing, and sharing. Also, I realized that some students needed more time than others to complete tasks generally. Therefore, I thought that it might be helpful to get students to start drawing their trees before the fourth and final sessions. I asked students if they would like to continue answering prompts on trees or start drawing their trees. All of them opted for the drawing option. Shelly also agreed with this when I asked her how she thought the students felt about

writing. She said, "The thing is that writing is hit-and-miss.... I think the duration of the writing matters.... if you are doing writing, you want to balance it out in an activity". Hence, I skipped the writing part and showed students the supplies desk, where I arranged the items students would use to get started on their drawings.

On my instruction, participants moved rapidly to the front of the class to choose their supplies except for Juliet, who sat a while for the traffic around the table to reduce before choosing her drawing items. This being the first time students would engage in drawing, I did not think about what would happen while students drew. Participants withdrew to their seats with their hands full of drawing materials, while some of them used their forearms to hold onto their cardboards and their lips to grab their pencils. The mentors also selected some paints and sat at the back of the class, facing each other to share the materials. Participants looked excited as they drew, although no word was uttered from any angle. The room was quiet as I paced around, viewing students' drawings. I felt something was amiss but could not quite grasp it. I tried to engage participants in some small talks, but everyone was in their own world without anything bringing them together except for the silence. When the time was up for students to go for dinner, the mentors gathered the drawings and placed the ones with paints separately for them to dry out. I informed the students that they would complete and fill up their trees during the next session in the fourth week. As everyone marched out, I noticed they had become used to the silence. There were no side talks or smiles, and I wondered how much the drawing activity impacted their mood and ambiance.

As I planned the week's activities at the beginning of the fourth week, I thought of what I could do differently while students drew. It clicked when I saw my three-year-old dance to some nursery rhymes that played on the television set. Everyone loves music, and I thought incorporating songs would be a great way to lighten participants' moods, even though they stayed quiet while they drew. In line with this, studies by Ahmad and Rana (2005) and Fiore (2018) showed that listening to music positively impacted students' moods and emotional states, creating a more relaxed and enjoyable environment. Most of the songs I am conversant with are Afro beats and a few global songs. Playing songs the students do not know might not work wonders like I would want. It was time for me to connect with the mentors outside the program to discuss options for incorporating songs. I chatted with the mentors on the Telegram group Shelly had created so we could seek their opinions. I remembered that some of the participants mentioned K-pop, including Chang. I was hoping he could suggest some trendy songs the students might like. As expected, Chang was swift in responding, however, instead of sending some songs my way, he gave an even better suggestion of asking the students to write a list of at least two songs they liked beforehand.

On the fourth Thursday evening, as I arranged the classroom in preparation for the day's activities, I played some Afro beats that I had downloaded to get a positive aura from the start of the session. The students came in immediately after the arrangement, and I welcomed them. Chang came closer to me with a list of the songs he had the students come up with and informed me that Juliet was having difficulty selecting two of her favorite songs. I told him to encourage her to randomly choose

any two, as the purpose was to play them for pleasure. I also told Chang to hold on to the list until it was time to draw, which would be the concluding activity for the day. At the beginning of the session, I informed the students that their songs would be played, and most of them were starting to regret their choices. Some even pleaded with me to disregard their songs and play others, but I reassured them that no one would know their song choices except for Chang and me and that there was nothing to be scared or ashamed of. When it was time to draw, the students took their drawings/paintings and sat at the front of the class to complete their Trees of Life. At this time, I had already planned for students to use the big tables so they could have enough space. As students set their supplies, I signaled Chang, who had already downloaded the songs, to play them. Once again, the room was quiet, but in a good way this time.

As the students continued to draw, I heard some humming, and I could guess they were already comfortable in the space. They knew that humming to the tune might give their cover away. Nevertheless, they started to feel proud enough to have suggested their chosen songs. Some students started singing along as the music played, while others tapped their feet and nodded to the rhythm. Participants started to ease into the environment as Chang changed songs immediately after one was over. In my conversation with the mentors about their thoughts on including music, Shelly affirmed that Juliet was excited about it. She said,

And when we did that music thing last week, she even suggested this week like ‘Oh, I have a song I want us to play’, and she was happy throughout because those are things that make her happy that make her comfortable in her environment.

Chang reiterated this by saying, "I felt like that session was really good... About playing the music and all. I definitely felt a change in terms of friendship. I noticed that...and Juliet formed a friendship." The participants flowed along because the songs played were their contribution to how the day went. Because of her music choices, Juliet developed a bond with another participant, which might not have happened on a regular day, considering that Juliet is an introvert. As good as the addition of the music sounds, it affected a few as their focus shifted from completing the task at hand to showing off their knowledge of the lyrics. Linklater et al. (2023), Perham et al. (2013), and Thompson et al. (2011) express that including songs in the formal classroom can interfere with students' focus on a task and lead to decreased performance and productivity. However, it was worth the try in an after-school program, and I would do it again if the opportunity presents itself because the students' focus on the music showed who they are and what they love. Overall, I was glad I could incorporate what they loved into the activities.

Visual Mode - Artifacts

Since the inception of the Tell Your Story Academy, I have identified the representation of knowledge through visuals, ranging from my use of slides to incorporating picture books. Also, the "3 pictures 1 story" activity was used to build students' interest in relating external materials to their knowledge. Therefore, as the facilitator, I used visuals to elaborate on major points during the sessions, and students were provided with visuals to think of possible outcomes of what they saw. Additionally, discussing how students expressed themselves using personally chosen visuals is paramount. The order in which visuals were used was meant to serve as a model for students to experience how images or text relate to our world and for them to transfer such

experiences by imitation easily. Visuals were incorporated as a form of expression for participants to think deeply about some rooted ideologies of the self that might have been buried in the subconscious (Bao, 2018; Qureshi, 2023). For the fourth session, students were asked to bring any artifacts of their choice, ranging from physical objects to intangible things like a song that spoke to them. The essence of this is for their object to serve as a text (Geisler, 2001; Siefkes, 2012; Van de Van, 2015), their text, holding meanings and stories. The object would embody some parts of their experiences (Radford, 2014), which comprise an aspect of their identities.

Because I understood that some factors might hinder students from bringing their artifacts when needed, I told them in the first session that they should consider the items over the weekend and bring them in at our second session. I aimed to secure the artifacts in my storage bin so that they would be readily available when we needed them; however, none of the students remembered to do so. After the second session, I gave another reminder and said I would appreciate them bringing the artifacts to our third meeting. Luckily for me, Shelly came to me at the beginning of the third session to inform me that some students brought their artifacts, and she thought it would be great for them to hand them over at the beginning of the session. Amy, Grace, Juliet, and another student came with their items. However, out of the four of them, Grace and Amy handed their artifacts to me, while the remaining two decided to hold on to them till the fourth week when we will use them.

Concerning using objects as text, I got an insight from a university instructor, who is also involved in the after-school program, to incorporate beads to tell stories, and I kept the idea as a plan B in case students did not show up with their artifacts. While I arranged

the class for the fourth session, I arranged the boxes of beads at a visible corner of the class. After the students had settled down and were ready for the day's activities, I asked if anyone else had brought their items, but they looked at each other, indirectly telling me no. I asked Juliet if she had come with her artifact from last week, but she responded with a negative. I assured them it was not an issue, as I had prepared some items they could choose from. I instructed them to move closer to the beads and select at least five they love or that reminded them of something or an important experience. I could see the excitement in their eyes as their fingers grazed through the beads. I handed some strings to the students for them to attach their beads to them and explained that they could view the prompt they were to write about on the slides. The prompts were:

“Why are you attracted to the artifact? How did you come across the artifact, and when? What do you love most about the artifact? What motivates you about the artifacts, or what inspires you? And how do you feel when you view the artifact? ”

While some students focused on answering the prompts quickly, others moved back and forth to the bead section to change their beads as they thought about aesthetics. I also welcomed Shelly and Chang to choose the beads that spoke to them, and Shelly was happy to join in. Chang had exams and had previously told me he would not participate in most of the activities; however, Shelly jumped at the opportunity to select some beads for him. As the students focused on answering the prompts, I informed Grace and Amy that they could talk about their artifacts or the beads. After writing, Grace also returned to the box

of beads to rearrange her selection. At the end, her configuration of beads are represented in Figure 23.



Figure 23: Grace's bead choice (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

Although her beads look like they are telling a story, she chose to talk about her artifact, which was an award she got for coming first at a competition. Grace gave one-sentence answers to the prompts and did not want to explain or say more than what she had written (see Figure 24).

A photograph of a piece of lined paper with handwritten text in blue ink. The text is written in three lines: "what i love most about it.", "- that i out of the hundreds of", and "people there won it." The handwriting is cursive and somewhat informal.

what i love most about it.
- that i out of the hundreds of
people there won it.

Figure 24: Grace's comment on her artifact (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

However, the artifact spoke loudly about who she is and what she stands for. Everyone was in awe when she mentioned that she came first in the competition out of hundreds of people. We could all see that beneath her gracefulness was a competitive side

that strives for greatness. When it was Sarah's turn, she showed everyone her chosen beads (see Figure 25).



Figure 25: Sarah's bead choice (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

I'm attracted to these beads because they look nice and they mean something to me.

- Star - How my brother likes looking at the stars
- Butterfly - I just like ~~how~~ butterflyies.
- Cross - I love God
- Flower - I just lilce flowers.

When I view the beads it reminds me of my trip to the Phillippines. Looking at the stars with my brother. Viewing the nature. ~~Being~~

Figure 26: Sarah's comments on her bead choice (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

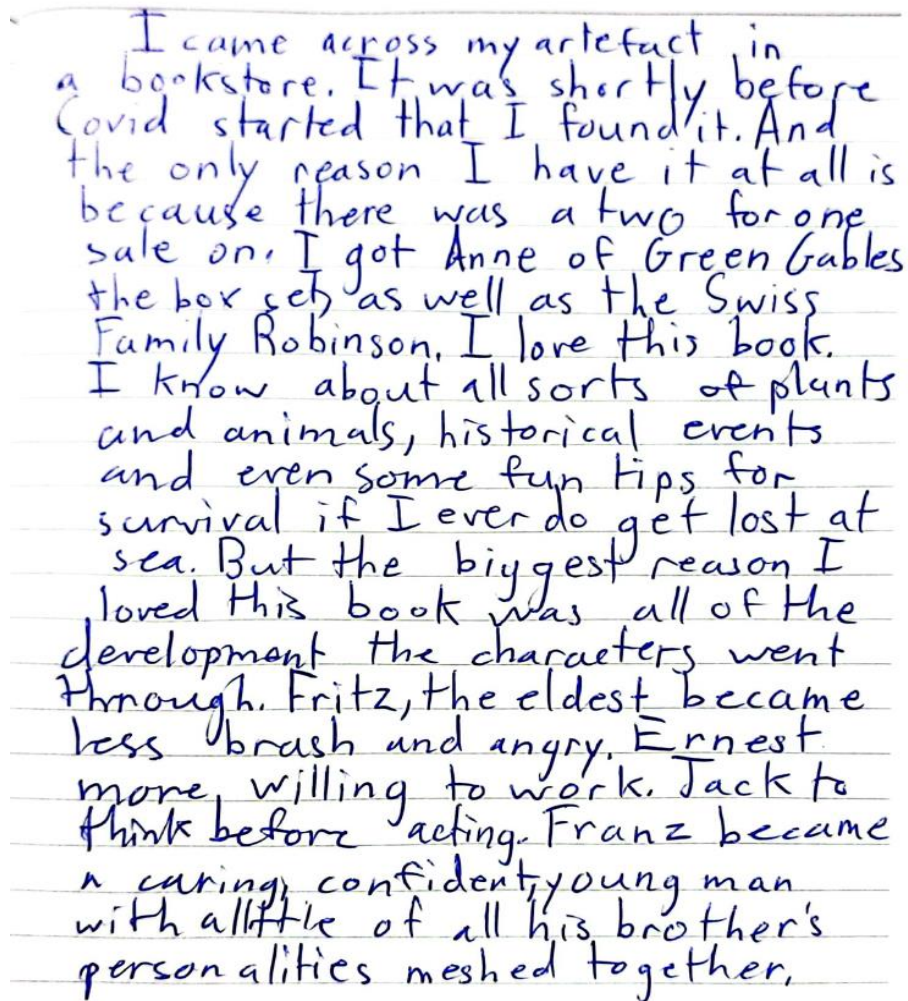
Sarah also responded shortly to the prompts, as evidenced by her note (see Figure 26). However, her selection tells me of how much in love she is with nature. Looking at

her beads reminded me of when she said she loved the cherry blossom tree. Also, the flower between the cross and the star is shaped like the cherry blossom. Although she mentioned liking flowers and butterflies, she might not have connected where the likeness comes from. However, acknowledging those feelings validates and integrates them into our conscious awareness (Siegel, 2020; Furtak, 2018; Solomon, 2007). When it was Amy's turn, she also talked about her artifact, a book titled "The Swiss Family Robinson." However, the careful alignment of colors in her string of beads shows how much she likes orderliness (see Figure 27).



Figure 27: Amy's bead choice (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

The items in her bead string were randomly selected; however, the colors and arrangement were planned. Therefore, she could not discuss why she chose the butterfly and the flowers. However, unlike the others, Amy answered the prompts in a paragraph style to show how passionate she felt about it (see Figure 28).

A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in blue ink and describes the discovery of a book artifact and the reasons for loving it. The handwriting is cursive and somewhat informal, with some corrections and underlining. The note is written on a single sheet of lined paper with horizontal lines.

I came across my artefact in a bookstore. It was shortly before Covid started that I found it. And the only reason I have it at all is because there was a two for one sale on. I got Anne of Green Gables the box set, as well as the Swiss Family Robinson. I love this book. I know about all sorts of plants and animals, historical events and even some fun tips for survival if I ever do get lost at sea. But the biggest reason I loved this book was all of the development the characters went through. Fritz, the eldest became less brash and angry. Ernest more willing to work. Jack to think before acting. Franz became a caring, confident, young man with a little of all his brother's personalities meshed together.

Figure 28: Amy's detailed note on her artifact (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

"I came across my artifact in a bookstore. It was shortly before Covid started that I found it. Moreover, the only reason I have it at all is because there was a two-for-one sale. I got Anne of Green Gables, the box set, as well as the Swiss Family Robinson. I love this book. I know about all sorts of plants and animals, historical events, and even some fun survival tips if I ever get lost at sea. However, the biggest reason I loved this book was all of the development the characters went through. Fritz, the eldest, became less brash and angry, Ernest more willing to work, and

Jack to think before acting. Franz became a caring, confident young man with a little of all his brother's personalities meshed together."

Amy did not leave much for us to guess as she expressed her thoughts about her artifact. She explained how her mum encouraged her to pick that book to add to her collection. Evidently, her mum played a huge role in her reading habits. She explained that her love for the book pushed her to see the movie version, but there was a major flaw with the film as all the family members did not grow any older for ten years. However, she excused the movie's director by pinning the blame on the year it was produced, in the 80s. She understood that maybe there was no appropriate technology or resources to produce make-believe films with real characters. When Amy was done sharing, I thanked her for her deep thoughts and gestured at Juliet to talk about her beads since she did not come with her artifact this time. Chang told me she had brought a flute the last time. I wondered if maybe she did not feel comfortable talking about it or forgot to bring it. Juliet did not have much to say about her beads, which she believed she chose randomly based on what caught her eye (see Figure 29).



Figure 29: Juliet's bead choice (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

However, she explained that the beads she chose reminded her of her music tastes. It is always difficult for her to choose one specific piece of music as her best when there

My artifact:
Different type of beads I say.
They remind me of my music tastes ^{and} ~~beats~~ my emotions
because, I don't know, They just remind me of it.
i don't know the reason, ~~please don't hate me~~
sorry...
Star = happy
Skeleton = Mad
Black circle and white
~~polka~~ dots = sad
Clear thingy I don't know = Disgusted
Green thing = Fear.

are so many.

Figure 30: Juliet's comments on her bead choice (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

Although she mostly said she did not know the reason for what she did, it seemed like it was just difficult to express how she felt in speech. In her note, she highlighted the multitude of emotions she felt while looking at the beads (see Figure 30). To her, the star means happiness; the skull signifies how mad she can get; the round black and white bead symbolizes sadness; the clear bead with a stroke of green inside means disgust; and the last green bead signifies fear. Juliet's explanation of how she feels shows how much she has to offer in writing. Throughout the activity, Chang was engrossed in his reading, while Shelly focused solely on getting her beads to work harmoniously on her string.

When it was time for the mentors to lead the students outside the class, Shelly looked at her creation proudly (see Figure 31). As she raised the beads up to tie the string, she noticed that the colors of the four beads at the bottom did not match. She wished she had more time to start over again to make her selection synchronize in color. In my conversation with Shelly, she said she did not know she had a hidden likeness for bead-making until she could pair some during the session. It was her first time making beads, and even though she did not have any specific story about why she chose them, the activity guided her toward a new hobby she believed she would continue. She also expressed her thoughts about how students felt during the activity. She said,

A lot of them, when we're doing the beading, you'll see they were very intelligent people who are artistic and people who are shy about being artistic, but they still have talents. So they were able to express themselves a bit more.



Figure 31: Shelly's bead choice (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

The participants were deeply rooted in the objects they chose to speak about. Some had planned what they would love to talk about; others spoke spontaneously as they were unprepared for the bead activity. That spontaneity made students talk casually about how they thought they felt and what they liked, which added to the expression of their personality. Even Shelly's silence throughout the session showed her engagement with the beads and her newfound interest in them. This signifies creating a new experience that can be included in her repertoire of experiences.

(De)Storytization

I sought to conceptualize how participants transform their experiences and identities into narratives. Despite exploring relevant terms like narratology, narrative design, and mythopoeics, I found that none adequately captured the agency and creative freedom inherent in individuals' storytelling processes. Narratology, as defined by Onega and Landa (2014), is the scientific examination of narratives, focusing on the structures and construction of stories and their narrative techniques. Given its association with structuralism, narratology explores fundamental elements like plot, character development, perspective, and narrative modes, as well as overall narrative structure. Moreover, narrative design is a term used in the creation of stories for gaming purposes. It involves crafting a dynamic storytelling experience that unfolds gradually, as players progress through the game and meet specific conditions, revealing pieces of the narrative within and between gameplay segments (Berger, 2020). Additionally, mythopoeics is also known as mythopoesis, mythopoetic or mythopoeia and this term describes the creation of fictional worlds, stories, and characters that draw inspiration from mythology, folklore, and fairy

tales, often featuring fantastical realms, archetypal figures, and narratives that explore the origins of the world or civilization (Jacob & Menon, 2023).

Drawing inspiration from the root word "story" and the suffix "-ize," denoting transformation or creation, I propose the term "storytization" to describe this phenomenon. Therefore, to "storitize" or the act of "storitizing" involves crafting a story from one's personal experiences, giving meaning and structure to memories and emotions in the form of a narrative. Conversely, "destorytization" refers to the omission or absence of certain experiences in the narrative construction process. It is essential to acknowledge that the act of storytelling involves social complexities, as individuals try to make sense of their world (Stein, 1982; Robin, 2016; Turner et al., 2023) which shapes the forms of expression and representation of experiences. The diverse approaches to storytelling underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of this concept that accommodates the dynamic interplay between creative agency and contextual influences. By introducing the term "storytization," I aim to contribute to the theoretical discourse on narrative construction, highlighting individuals' active role in shaping their stories and the complex factors that influence this process. These factors are grouped under two broad issues of power and agency and resistance, which were the rationale for having different kinds of trees drawn by participants.

Resistance

At the beginning of the academy, the students looked uncertain if they would want to continue to be there and I thought about how best trust could be built among us. Being a stranger to them, creating a relational home was the best way I could think of to get them talking about themselves and their experiences. Therefore, the lack of trust might have

affected how participants shared their experiences at the beginning (Wenger, 1999; Camo & Osmic, 2020; Lloyd et al., 2016). To bridge that, co-creating rules (Harmon, 2017), having intermittent icebreakers (Mepieza, 2024), and inducing small talks (McKay-Semmler & Semmler, 2013) changed participants' views about the space. This also made students comfortable enough to be in the academy that they might not have considered switching to other academies. Another important factor contributing to student disengagement is tiredness and burnout (Ozhan & Yuksel, 2021; Molinari & Grazia, 2023). Coming to the academy on Thursday evenings after school must have taken a toll on the participants, as they usually come in tired and stressed. During the interview with the mentors regarding why the students did not participate fully in some activities in the fourth session, Chang said,

Everybody was tired for some reason. Like, I felt like, for me, I was a little tired because I did an exam the next day. I told you about it. But then again, the kids' energy made me kind of participate. I feel like our energy was kind of also reflective of the kids' energy. Because when [name] said she was tired, I was like, Yeah, tell me about it rather than trying to encourage her to get started on a great note and be low-key tired.

For most of the sessions, students come in tired. However, some of them have a switch in the mood almost immediately or depending on the activities we engaged in. Out of all the activities, I felt participants were resistant during the writing activities. I asked how the mentors felt about the writing, and Chang said,

Yeah, I would say so. Because of the fact that, um, maybe they had a tough, tough day at school already and they don't want to really do any schoolwork. Like the

point of the community program I feel like for them is to have fun with the experience. Do you know what I mean? They don't want to feel like they're at school again, because they've already been at school for eight hours, which is like two hours before the community program. So, I don't think they want to do as much thinking as they want to do sharing. Sharing, I feel, is where everything just shines for this group.

However, for some reason, the fourth session was different as it seemed like students returned to the default tired mood immediately after completing some interesting activities that were not writing. At the beginning of the fourth session, I was energized and could not wait to meet the participants because it was the day I planned on playing their favorite songs. I hoped everything would work out until the students came in looking gloomy, including the mentors. Chang actively prepared for his exam, while Shelly focused solely on bead-making, as she seemed not to be in the mood to participate in the other activities. It seemed like I was the only one trying to pull everyone else from this silent and gloomy mood. At some point, I thought maybe I was doing something wrong. However, when I had a conversation with Amy in the fifth week about why she was mostly quiet, she told me she had just lost her grandfather. The feeling of losing a loved one washed through her during the session, and she could not find it in her heart to be happy at that moment. The mentors also confirmed that one of the students had a bad fall prior to coming to the fourth session.

Also, most of the Tell Your Story Academy students had their voices silenced at one point or the other when they were bullied in school (Hutchinson, 2012; Treadway et al., 2021; Hendricks & Tanga, 2019). Juliet spoke out loud in the fifth session, which was the

time for sharing. She mentioned that she was bullied, and most of the other students agreed to being bullied too. Shelly also confirmed this when she said, "Juliet was bullied, and when she said she's introverted, I'm like, I totally understand, right? Because when you're bullied, the whole point of that is to shut your voice". Some of the students' shut voices contributed to how they reacted to participation during activities. From Juliet's notes, she mostly writes "I don't know" when trying to answer prompt questions. This can also relate to how other students answer the prompt questions. When given the opportunity to write, most preferred to write in bullet points rather than paragraph forms. Possibly, this shows how silenced they must have been or they saw one person write in bulletpoints and they did the same. Because Sarah was mostly quiet during the sessions, I did not know much about her feelings and thoughts. Therefore, I asked the mentors about her during the interview, and they said,

Chang: Oh, Sarah is a special one actually because of the fact that... oh, at dinner, I usually sit beside them to talk about how their day is. Sarah out of the three girls is definitely the least maybe outgoing in her group or I don't know, least experienced, reserved in the group. But she has the most things to say.

Shelly: She does.

On hearing the mentor's comments about Sarah, I realized she might have been quiet because of her group of friends. As the youngest among the group of three friends, she might have felt the least experienced. This might have contributed to the way she participated in sessions. Her voice had been subsumed by her friends' voices, and she might have felt her opinion might not count in certain instances (Hong et al., 2018; Allen et al.,

2021). I asked the mentors why they felt she did not talk most of the time during activities.

Shelly said,

No, that's because her other two friends do most of the talking. But when we did the pick through pictures and tell your story... the paper we're using was.... she's very good. She's very good at summarizing whatever you're saying.

Being in group one alongside Sarah for the "3 pictures 1 story" activity, Shelly figured out that Sarah's best work during the academy showed when she was separated from her friends.

To buttress this point about Sarah, the mentors said

Chang: She's the least likely out of three to overshare in my opinion.

Shelly: Um, when she's comfortable, she will. Like if you take her away from her friends, she shares a lot.

Chang: Yes, friends.

Shelly: She doesn't share a lot because her two other friends are extroverted.

In my continued discussion with the mentors, they mentioned that their school environment contributes to how the students are, as some of the students confirmed that they did not like school. The students were already used to being passive in any learning environment because of how they viewed what was happening in their school. Because of this mentality, some of the students struggled to participate fully in the Tell Your Story Academy. Viewing participants' attention during activities, I tried giving them several options of what and how to participate in the session. Having the power and agency to

choose their likes and dislikes further made the Tell Your Story Academy a relational home where students confidently shared their experiences on the last day.

Power and Agency

Agency is the practice of giving children choices where possible, encouraging them to have a voice regarding what concerns them, and guiding them to think through the consequences of different actions for themselves and others (Matusov et al., 2015). Through the sessions, students were given the choice to tell their stories however they felt comfortable. Writing as a major activity helped students reflect and navigate their feelings as they wrote (Foster, 2020; Cameron et al., 2009) and crossed out some ideas before finally putting them on their trees. To get them story-ready, they chose between getting thoughts out in bullet point or paragraph forms. Shelly agreed with the structure of giving students options when she says that,

Some people do better with point forms. So, giving them the option of how they can write will help some people versus telling them paragraphs. And I liked how you didn't make it specific. Because some people don't world map. Right. That's how they write. So, the way you did it is good, because it wasn't just pure writing.

Additionally, participants were given the choice to talk about the experiences they felt comfortable enough to share with the group. Sometimes, students said, "Don't ask me why. I just don't know". This is not because they cannot explain why but because of the complexities that storytelling entails (Meretoja, 2019; Hanstra, 2017; Grishakova & Poulaki, 2019); as some experiences are layered, students might be unable to talk about one thing without discussing another. And the more they keep digging, the story might not

find an end as soon as we might have wanted because of the time constraints. Also, students might not be willing to go deep into their person right at the academy due to fear of being labeled by others (Sedova & Navratilova, 2020; Adamson, 2022; Garingan, 2021). Hence, power and agency are not only given to students by their teacher or instructor but should also be practiced among students themselves, where they would be able to understand that they need to give each other the agency to feel any way they want about issues concerning them. Therefore, understanding the power of having different perspectives makes it easy for individuals to exercise their own power their way. For instance, as passionate as Amy is toward school, she gets angry when she sees others not putting so much effort into their academics. Chang mentored Amy a year before in another academy and noticed that she had changed positively to allow others to own their views. He stated that,

When we were doing computers, I guess she couldn't understand why people have that many questions to ask, I guess. I was like, oh, maybe we could tone down on that because everybody has their different abilities. But this year, I don't see any of that.

The Tell Your Story Academy might want to take credit for her growth. However, Amy has become wiser and older than she used to be the year prior. Her overall growth and development made it easy for her to accept people's different abilities and interests. Additionally, the overall concept of the Tell Your Story Academy was for participants to be empowered by the stories of self they share among the group. Owning their stories and putting them out there for others to listen can help them navigate through life as adults (Smith & Shortt, 2003; Rhodes, 2019) as individuals lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Shelly stated,

I think telling your story is a very good thing to start from a young age because by the time you get to the adult age, adults are very reserved in what they want to share, versus kids who are more open to like tap into whatever it is. And these kids had a lot of experiences they hadn't even reached high school yet. And the things that they've experienced are basically what an adult will consider a trauma, right, and it's best for them to tap into it from a young age because then they can deal with those tough questions, those feelings, they have started walking up already at whatever age they are, versus trying to go to therapy in adulthood.

Also, the Tree of Life activity helped participants think more about their strengths and skills. There were times when participants might have been so used to displaying some skills that they no longer consider something special. Highlighting those skills during the academy revealed participants' hidden talents (Feldhusen, 1994)). A typical example of this is Juliet. She enjoyed talking about her likes and it was evident that music is her strength. Shelly commented that,

Music is her strength; editing is her strength. And she clearly expressed that throughout the entire program. And when we did that music thing last week, she even suggested this week like 'Oh, I have a song I want us to play', and she was happy throughout because those are things that make her happy that make her comfortable in her environment.

The option of having the songs during the fourth session worked well for Juliet, and she wished for it to continue throughout the academy. In the fourth session, while other students were engaged in picking beads, she spent most of her time speaking with Chang about which two songs she would love for us to play out of the numerous songs she loved.

Hitting Juliet's favorite aspects was one of the things that brought joy to my heart as I watched her face light up when I spoke about what interests her. Students' choices were evident in their drawings, which will be discussed in the next section, and until the end of the program, students exercised their power as they chose which of the materials they would love to take home. After a successful session on the final day, I asked students to take their materials. It did not occur to say they could leave it if they wished because I felt their paintings and writings were their creations, and it would be great for them to have those. However, a majority of them decided to leave their paintings behind, except for Amy. At first, I felt like maybe they were not confident enough about what they did, and that was why they chose to leave them behind; however, Shelly corrected that notion when she said, "I think they didn't want to be asked questions when they get home. Like, oh, what did you share? What was this about?". This shows that students' homes and backgrounds significantly influenced their resistance to discussing their experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2021; White, 2011; Santoro & Forghani-Arani, 2015).

(Un)finished Trees

For the Tell Your Story Academy, the "tree" symbolizes stories, where different parts of a tree stand for the past, present, and future. In a forest, no two trees can be identical (Karambiria et al., 2023). Even if two seeds are from the same parent plant, their environment would have affected each identical seed. This is also the same with humans and our experiences. Some of the factors discussed under agency and power and resistance in the sections above contributed to the diverse forms of trees participants produced, with varying stories. I have categorized the completeness of the trees in the following ways: the self-satisfactorily finished tree, where the participant felt like they had completed the task

appropriately; the willingly unfinished trees, where the participants purposely did not want to explore some areas of their experiences; and the unwillingly unfinished trees, where participants would have loved to complete the task but could not due to unplanned circumstances.

Self-satisfactorily Finished Tree. Since we started the academy, Amy dedicated her time to completing all the tasks promptly. Amy was one of the first people to finish her Tree of Life, and there was progress in the way she drew. She chose some colored pencils and green Post-it notes that she cut into the shapes of leaves to signify the people who are important in her life (see Figure 32).

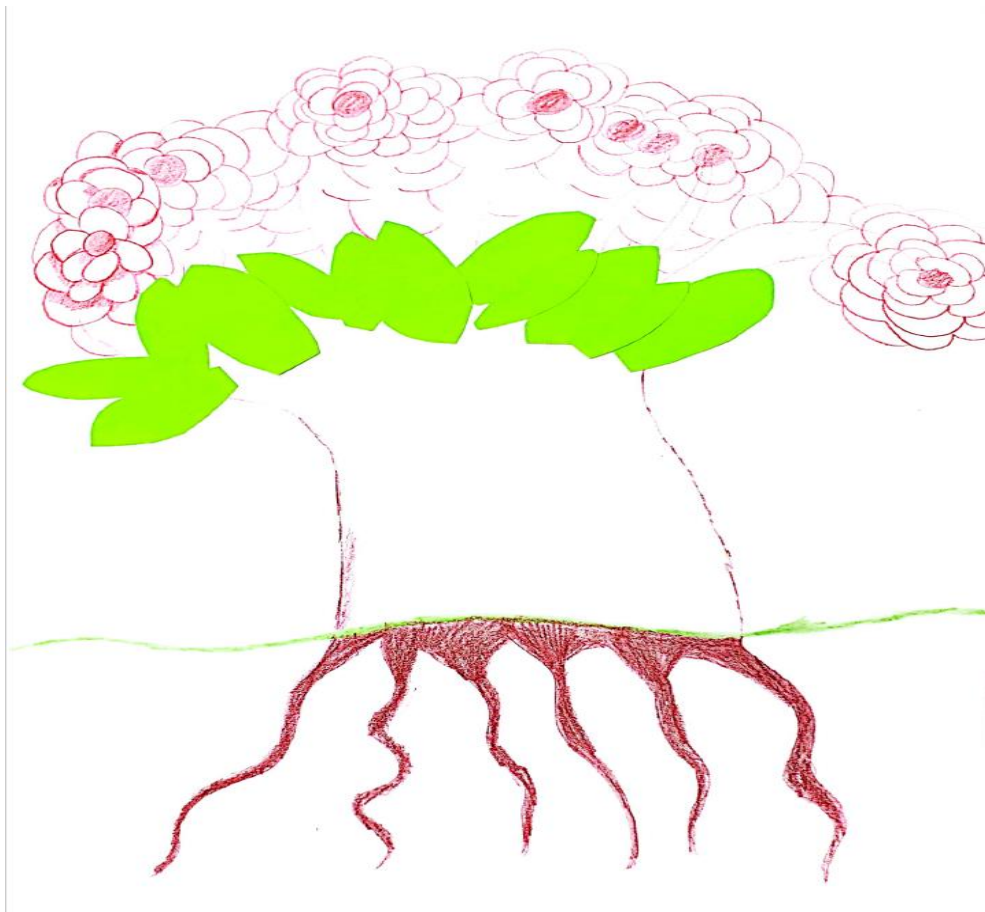


Figure 32: Amy's Tree of Life in progress (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

During the fourth session, when the music played while students drew, I noticed that Amy was quiet the most, which was unusual. At first, I thought it might have been the usual tiredness students felt. However, when I spoke with the mentors afterward, I was informed of Amy's grandfather's death. She used another sheet of Post-it notes to symbolize her loss, and she placed the leaves away from the tree with three strokes showing as the wind blew them away from the tree (see Figure 33).



Figure 33: Amy's finished Tree of Life (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

I called her separately on the program's final day to discuss how she felt. She seemed fine and almost back to her usual self. In the fourth week, she finished labeling her tree and was satisfied with its appearance. She was ready to share.

Willingly Unfinished Trees. Juliet and Sarah fall under this category of all the participants as they seemed not too invested in completing their trees of life. The first time Juliet picked up her pencil to sketch a tree, she concentrated on making it look appealing to the eyes. She became unsure of how it looked the second time she picked it up. To her, it looked bad. This is why she must have felt that no matter what she did to the tree, it would not make it look good. She said, "This looks bad. Poorly done" (see Figure 34).

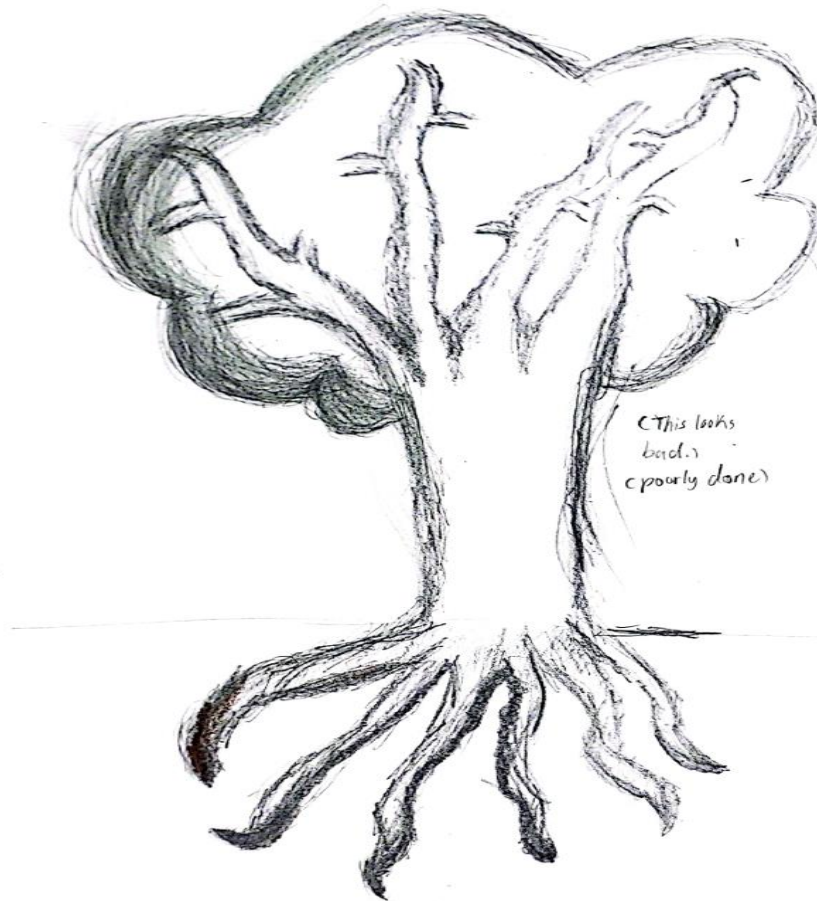


Figure 34: Juliet's Tree of Life in progress (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

On the final day, Juliet decided to fill up her tree instead of trying to make it look "better". I wonder what she would have drawn if she had thought that the drawing was perfect the way it was. Her silenced voice is quite evident in her drawing, too (see Figure 35).

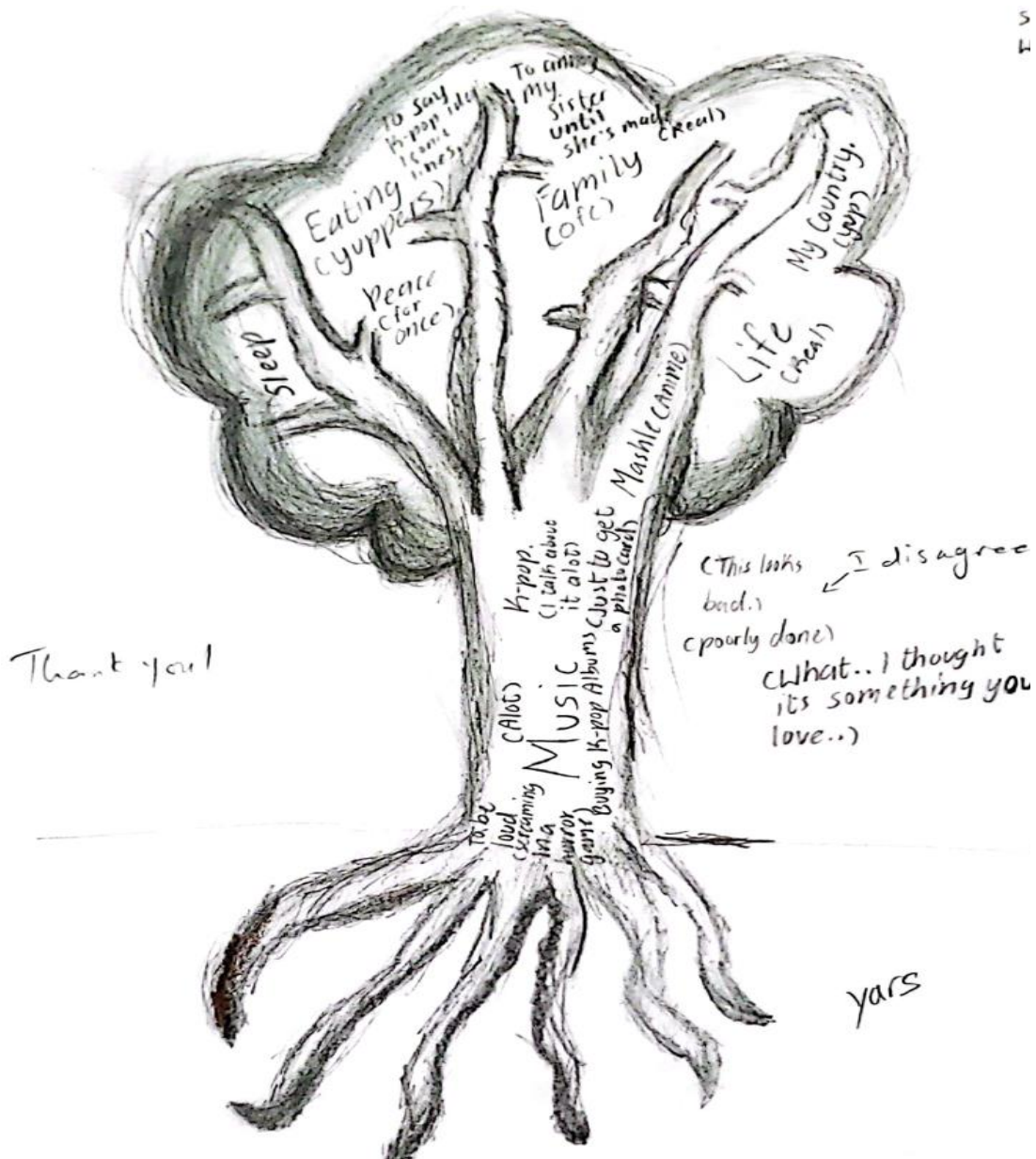


Figure 35: Juliet's finished Tree of Life (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

ways to reconnect no matter what. As far away as the friends were from one another, I noticed they still giggled and laughed at some things that were not visible to the rest of the group. The girls communicated using sign language. I was intrigued by this and asked Sarah how they could understand one another, and she said they learned sign language at a very young age. I could not inquire further because we were in the midst of completing other activities. On the final day, I asked if she would like to touch up her tree to make it look a little catchy, but she said she was fine with the way it looked. The finished tree was not still visible; however, I used a colored pencil to trace some unidentifiable information to make it clearer (see Figure 37).

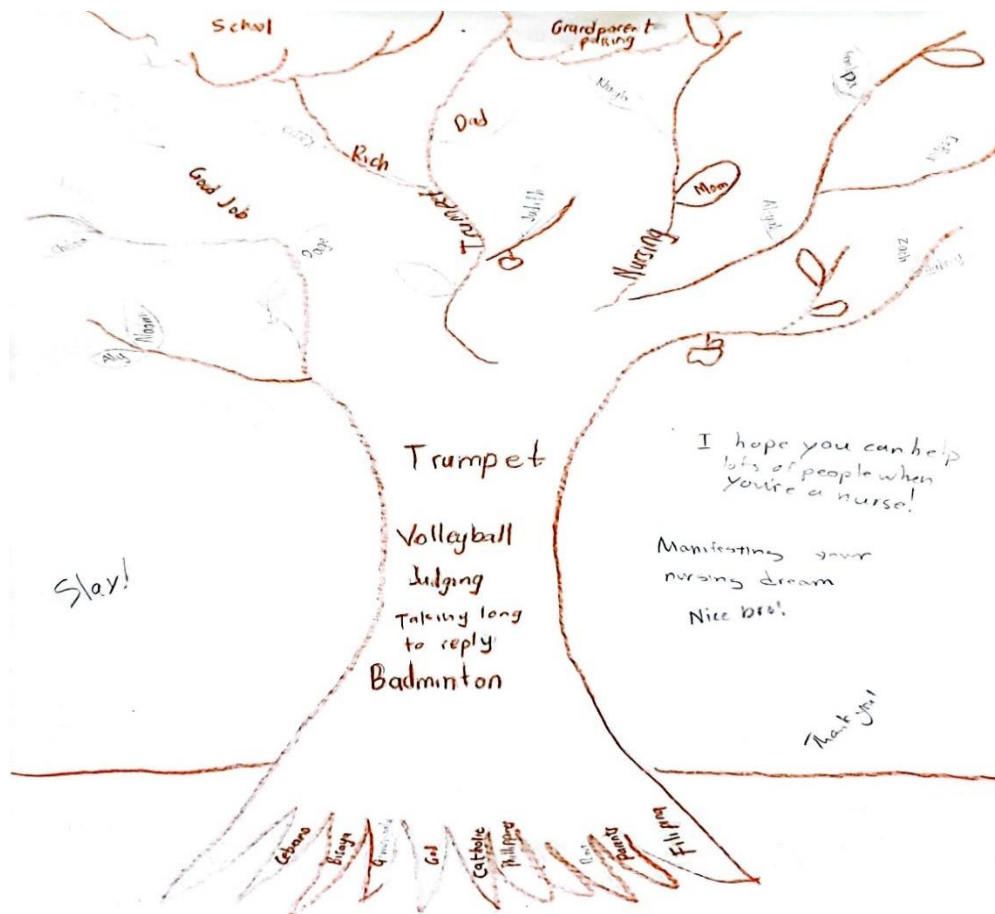


Figure 37: Sarah's completed Tree of Life (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

The group of friends had almost the same design, and none used additional drawing materials. Just like Sarah put in much effort into the "3 pictures 1 story" activity without her friends being there, I wondered how her tree would have looked if her friends were not close during the drawing activity. Or maybe making the drawing simple is also her personal choice. Who knows?

Unwillingly Unfinished Trees. There are instances where some participants' trees were not completed due to some factors that might not have been in their control. Grace, Shelly, and Chang fall under this category. Grace is another diligent student who loves school. She completes her tasks based on the prompts provided and, most times, does not go beyond what is asked of her. The first time she drew, she used a pencil and some colored pencils to create a tree with a big trunk (see Figure 39). She left a little space above for the branches, leaves, fruits, and storms. At first, I was worried that she might need to attach another sheet above because of the possible things she would want to add to her tree. I gently asked if she needed anything while she drew, but she responded that she was good.

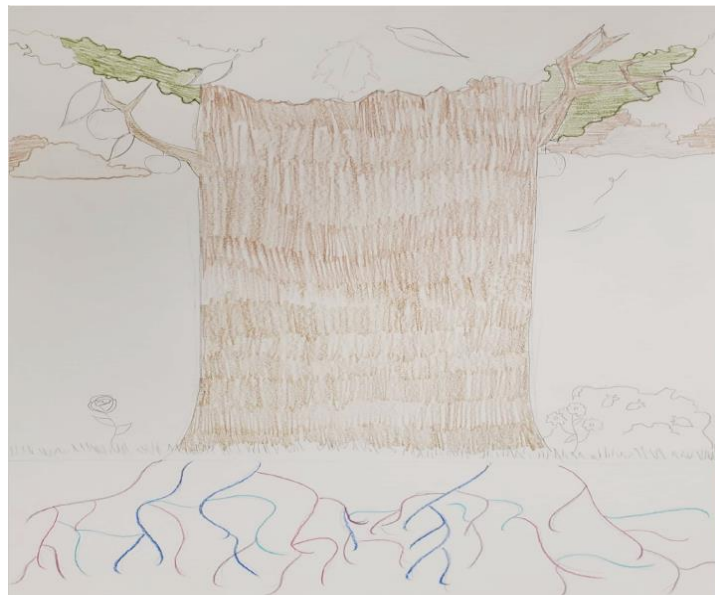


Figure 38: Grace's Tree of Life in progress (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

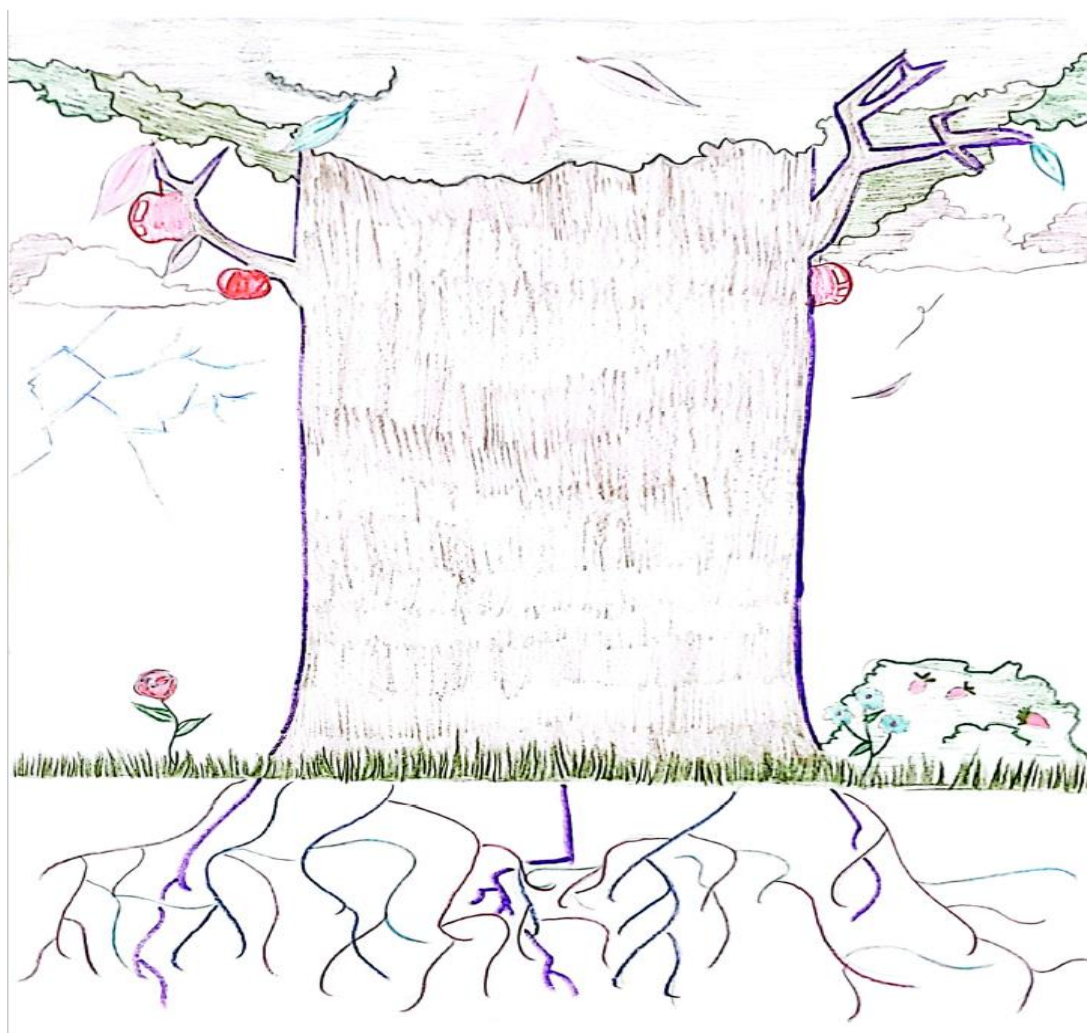


Figure 39: Grace's finished Tree of Life (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

The second time she picked up her drawing, she added a few items to it, like some fruits, and painted them to look almost realistic (see Figure 39). However, Grace was absent on the last day to complete her tree. I was not sure what happened, but I hoped she was fine. I wondered what her tree would look like if she had been present for the final day. Or maybe she would have preferred to leave it the way it looks and not touch it at all.

Shelly and Chang chose to use paints for their drawings. The approach to drawing their Trees of Life at the beginning was quite inspiring. This might be attributed to their level of experience and their maturity. They spent a lot of time on the first day to create a

good foundation for their drawing, where they can build other parts later during the program (see Figures 45 and 46).

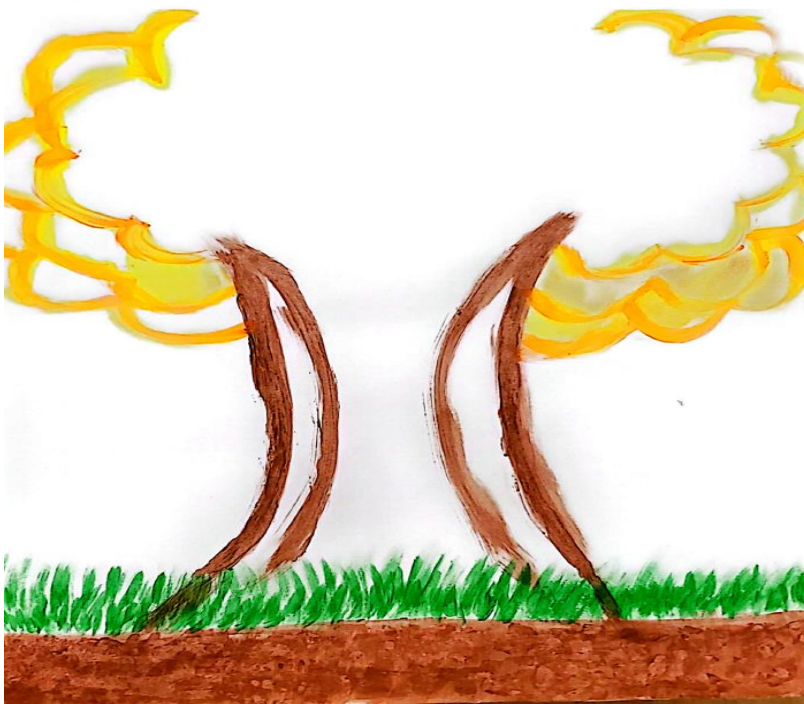


Figure 40: Shelly's Tree of Life in progress (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

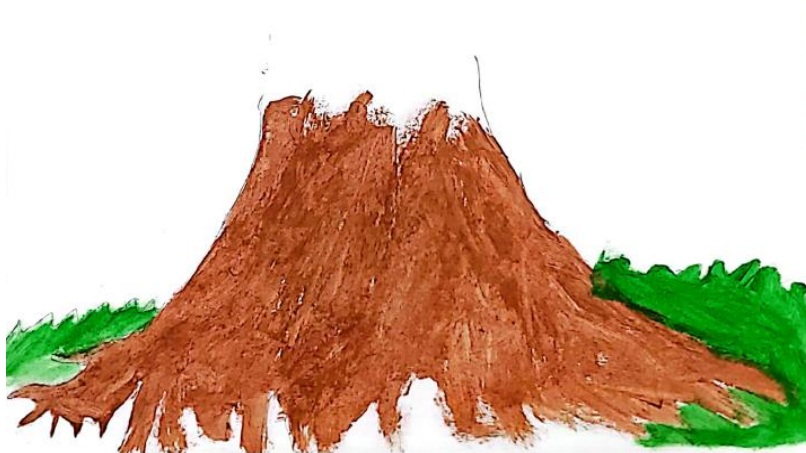


Figure 41: Chang's Tree of Life in progress (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

The next time participants were involved in continuing their trees, Chang was preparing for an examination. He had already told me that he would not be able to participate in the activities fully. Becoming academically successful was definitely more important than completing this tree at that moment. On the other hand, Shelly was so engrossed in her mentor duties at some points that she barely had time to complete her tree. She observed students closely and moved closer to them whenever she felt they needed anything. However, on the last day, Shelly and Chang tried to complete their trees but could not because of the time constraint (see Figures 47 and 48). I wonder what their trees would have looked like if they had the time to complete them.



Figure 42: Shelly's finished Tree of Life (Photo: S. A. Quadri).



Figure 43: Chang's finished Tree of Life (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

The circumstances in which the participants were while they drew their trees necessitated the themes I used in categorizing them. The trees might not seem finished based on my instructor-mind expectation and the different examples of the Tree of Life that are evident online, which may be due to their age or stage of life. However, I know how much effort each participant put into producing their trees, and in my mind, all of the participants' trees are finished. The unique looks of each of those trees give a viewer an insight into the artist's personhood, which is of essence to this research.

Witnessing

On the final day of the Tell Your Story Academy, participants sat in a circle as we shared our stories. This sitting structure was meant to create a form of intimacy between a

speaker and their audience. Witnessing participants tell their stories created an immersive experience as sacred bonds were developed in the process (Vaughan-Lee, 2019; Beard, 2018; Cottle, 2013). In my discussion with the mentors, Chang mentioned that he observed that each of the students was inclined to some people in the group as they shared their experiences. They focused on the people who made them feel comfortable more in the space while they spoke as a form of psychological safety (Newman et al., 2017; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2012). Chang posited that "I could tell who they're more comfortable sharing with because you can see their body language. I noticed that some kids actually lean towards the person they feel closer to and share their story". Chang faced Shelly and said, "Because I can tell that the three girls, when they were talking, were leaning towards you." Shelly developed a bond with some of the students during dinner, where she communicated intensely about their personal and academic life. Therefore, they made eye contact with Shelly when they told their stories. This may be because they felt like she knew them more, and she might relate some of what they were saying to what they had previously shared with her. That personal connection made them subconsciously look up at Shelly intermittently from their drawings. Additionally, Chang said,

I felt like maybe Amy was leaning towards you more because she felt like you were very engaged in asking her about stuff. And then Juliet was shy, but I guess she was leaning towards my way a bit more.

The connection Amy might have had with me might be due to her love for literacy. Most of the tasks she got engaged in during the program must have told her something about me that she might have been interested in. Also, Juliet made eye contact with Chang most of the time because she spent much time discussing her music choices on the fourth

day. While she was disinterested in engaging in other activities, she did not mind talking to Chang about the kinds of songs she enjoyed listening to. Getting students to share their experiences and stories was not easy, as it was a roller-coaster of moods and emotions trying to hold a space for vulnerability (hooks, 1994; Griffith, 2020). Considering that students might not be inclined to talk deeply about their artifacts in the fourth session, I had to prepare my tree to open the world of sharing to them.

My Tree

I had previously spoken to a member of my advisory committee about the possible ways to go about the academy, and she suggested that it might be great to also draw my own Tree of Life as a reflection of my process during the study. At first, I did not quite understand how that would be. However, I knew it was great advice because it was coming from someone with much experience in literacy. On observing how students were withdrawn when it came to talking about their experiences at some points, I remembered Jen's suggestion. However, instead of only talking about my reflection on the process, I also decided to include my thoughts about the participants and what I have learned from each of them. I picked up some colored pencils, drew, and wrote from my heart. I asked myself what each of the participants made me feel. Thinking and reflecting on participants' behavior made me see their beautiful hidden traits.

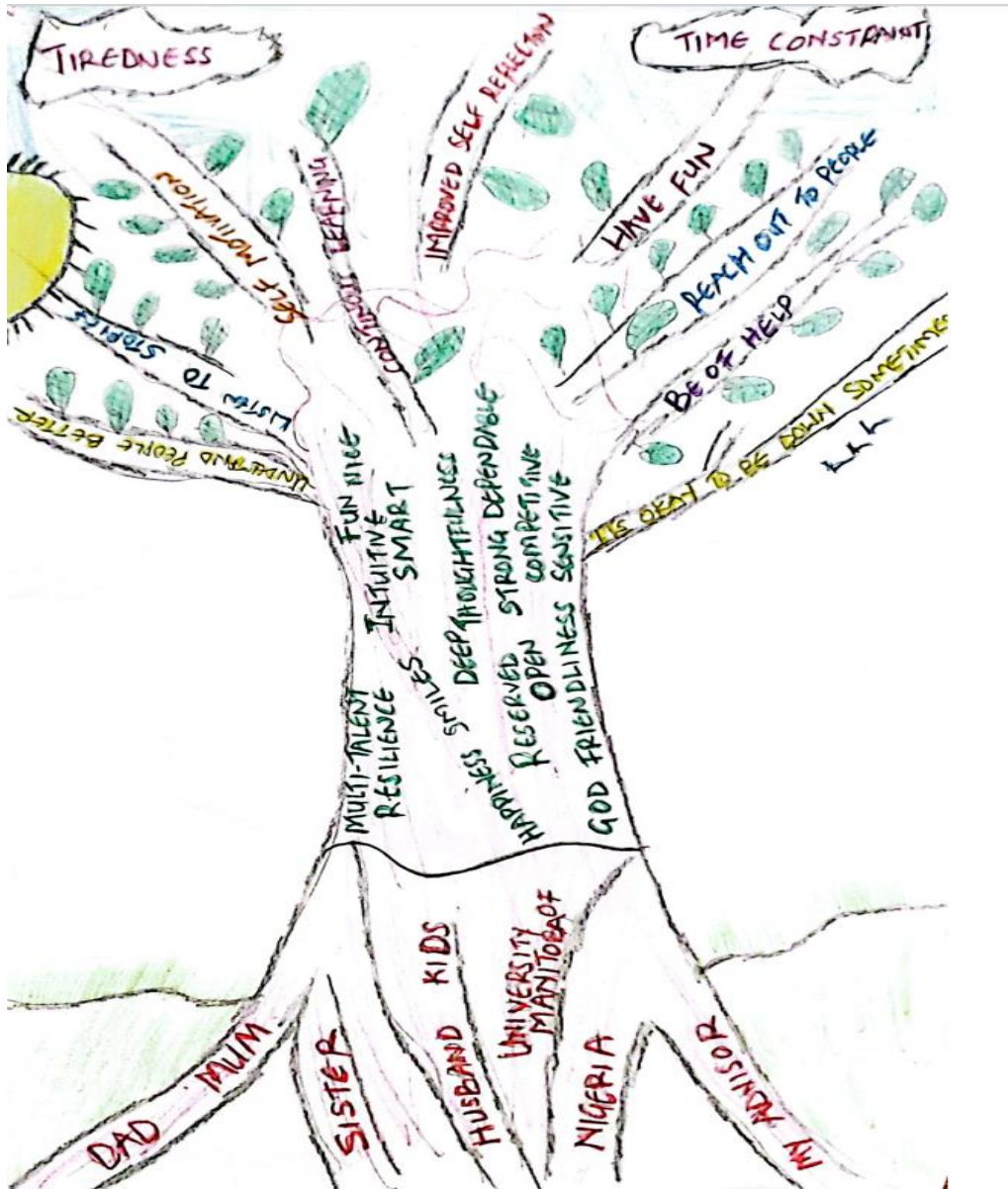


Figure 44: My Tree of Life (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

At the beginning of the sharing process on the last day, I raised my Tree of Life up for everyone to see while we were seated in a circle (see Figure 44). Before I started sharing, I encouraged participants to reflect and think about things they might have learned or noticed about anyone in the group. I also informed them they were welcome to share anything they had learned from someone outside the group. When I began my sharing, students listened attentively, ready to see and imitate the process. I talked about my roots

and how I got immense support from my family, my advisor, and the university community. Then, I began my sharing.

Grace is not here. For her, I said she's multi-talented and resilient. She knows how to do lots of stuff. She loves music. She can dance. She loves to draw. She loves poetry. For her to win an award amongst 100 participants in a competition, that's a huge achievement.

Okay, the next one here is someone who makes me think about smiles and happiness. Guess who? Sarah. I'm happy when I think about Sarah because she always smiles. If you are having a bad day, just think of her. Yeah, think about her. Sarah. When we did the activity Love/Hate, she said she loves to smile, apart from the fact that she said that she loves to sleep.

The next person here is reserved. This person has two opposite qualities that are beautiful. She is reserved, and she is open. And that person is Juliet. She can be so quiet, like, okay, no problem. I'm just in my lane. But when she sees what she loves so much and wants to talk about what she loves and enjoys, she goes all out, just like when we did the love/hate activity. She had more than 10 things on her list, even 20, and she talked passionately.

This next person makes me think about God and friendliness. And that person is [name]. I remember the first day we came here. I asked you about the stories of your names, and [name] said I was named [name] after the [name] in the Bible. Right. And when we did the bead activity, most of the beads she chose were crosses. I love God. [name] is quite religious, and I appreciate her for that. And you are friendly. I know you don't want to be

friendly, but you are. When you mentioned what you love and don't love, you said I am a hater, and I love being a hater. You are a lovely hater. You are a friendly hater.

The next person here is deep and thoughtful. [Name] is very thoughtful, very, very thoughtful. And when you see her, you'll notice that she's just more than what she is on the surface. The next person here is intuitive and smart. Amy, you're quite intuitive. You don't mind volunteering to start activities. You usually say "Oh, I'll go first", which is so lovely. You're self-motivated. You don't need anyone to push you to do anything. When you feel something is right, you do it. Keep up the good work. I love you. "Okay. So the next one I have here is competitive and sensitive. [Name], you are competitive and sensitive. She is quiet, although she loves her friends so much. Without Sarah and [name] in this group, I'm not sure she will be here. But she is quite competitive. Whenever we have all those short activities, you always want to win. Like I remember that time.

Then the next one I have here is fun and nice. Chang, you are fun to be with. Anywhere you are, there are lights; everyone feels alive. And you're really a nice person because you just want to help everyone. If I say, Chang, I need help with this. You're just always there. I'm sure everyone agrees that Chang is nice.

The next one I have here is strong and dependable. Shelly, you are strong and dependable. Whenever I have issues regarding the academy and tell Shelly what my thoughts are, she advises me and gives me easy ways out.

She's always there to give good tips. She's very dependable. Thank you. I love you.

[name], even though you did not start the session with us, you mingled well.

I'm sure you've not met almost everyone in this group before these sessions.... " [name] interrupted, saying, "I had like a few sessions with

you." I continued, "Yeah, this is the second session, and you are doing quite well. Anyone who sees you in this group would wonder if you have been here since day one. You are very brilliant. You're friendly. You're beautiful.

So, from all these qualities, what have I learned? Or what do I feel I can do better in my life? I have my branches. I hope to be able to understand people

well. I hope to listen to everyone's stories, any story you have. Even if it's about a movie you've seen, a book you've read, or anything. I want to be

self-motivated like Amy. I want to be able to get up and say I just want to do this, or I just want to read this book, and I'll finish it, even if it is 10 series

or 20. I want to continue to learn. I want to keep learning, and I hope you all continue learning. I want to improve my self-reflection. I remember

[name] said she judges everything. I want to reflect on what's in my environment, what I am seeing, and how what I observe affects me. That's

a very good character. Keep it up. I hope to have fun in life. Fun is very important. Like Chang, I want to go to concerts, and I want to see K dramas.

I want to do all of those; I want to have fun, and I want to enjoy. And I wish to reach out to people. I want to help as much as I can. And one last thing is

that I also understand that feeling sad is okay. Sometimes, life is not always

a bed of roses. Whenever I encounter a stumbling block in life, I'm usually very down and can be very down. But whatever you're facing, that is not the end of the world. You will still meet beautiful people, go to beautiful places, and do beautiful things. So even though I don't know how to draw storms, I have two storms here. For this group, there are just two major storms. The first one is tiredness, and the next one is time constraints. Like I feel we have so much to share, and these five weeks are just not enough to listen to you and allow you to listen to one another. So that's my story about this academy."

As I shared each of the participants' qualities, I noticed the emotions that washed through their faces. At that point, it seemed like I had known them for years, and some of the students commented that they had heard people give them comments about the characteristics I had noticed in them. My sharing served as a model and a form of encouragement for students to let it all out (Phillips, 1999). My tree made it obvious to the students that I cared, and at that point, they were no longer reserved about how they felt and just let their words flow.

Stories of Self

On the day of the sharing I was the primary witness to the students' telling of their experience. I wanted readers of this study to become secondary witnesses to what transpired on the last day of our session, so I describe here in the next sections the ways and the words students chose to share their trees of life. This section explores the stories of three participants; Amy, Juliet, and Sarah. Having told my story, I asked students who would want to go next. Like always, Amy volunteered to go first for the very last time. She

raised her drawing for everyone to see, then gently placed it on the flip desk on her right.

Amy started,

I listed some of my relatives and stuff that has motivated me like grandparents. They used to look out for me before I went to school every day. And I put down where my parents are from Portugal and Scotland. My parents down and my siblings. Because all of them have been great motivators and have helped in making me the person I am today. I put down things that I like to do daily, or things that influence how I function. So school is a good one. I like my parents, I love my pets. My siblings are okay when they're not talking.

I like to go to [Community Centre] at lunch, because that's where me and all of my friends go. We all sit there we chat, play on our phones and we just like talk to each other about different stuff. I enjoy walking to school with my friends, because I live right near to them. So we all just kind of meet in front our house and walk to school. Some of the skills I have are writing and reading are two of my biggest ones. I'm very good at those. I'm also really good at math, I'm very good at swimming and volleyball. And I'm very proud of my grades. A lot of my books and my writings. And I'm very proud of my pets as well.

Then I have people who have motivated me. I put down some of the characters from books that I enjoyed, like Ernest in *The Swiss Family Robinson*. I thought he was a very cool character. I liked his journey from beginning to end. I have my friends, Teresa, Zack and Toby. Both Robert

and Tegan. Then I have my teacher Miss Manilla, My mom and dad, and I have my grandma but my grandpa recently passed away.

Then the branches, some of my goals. So, I hope one day to become an architect and possibly a lawyer at the same time. I wanted to become an author and possibly a botanist because that's kind of directly related to my weird love of poisons and medical drugs. No offence but the way they did stuff is really funny. And a random goal that I have is inventing time travel. Mostly because I wanted to see the Greeks. Greek fire was an homage to that. So yes, I have received some gifts from people. Some books.. I have received love and help. My storms would be the loss of some people that I loved liked my grandpa and that's one of my biggest insecurities. What else... And that's that.

The room was the quietest it had ever been as everyone listened to what Amy had to share. She looked at her drawing repeatedly as she spoke, as if to draw inspiration for what she wanted to say from it. It was evident that she spoke from her heart. As she spoke, she stopped intermittently, as if she wanted to catch her breath. When she was done sharing, everyone applauded her bravery.

When it was Juliet's turn to speak, she looked a little confused and unsure of what she wanted to share. I calmed her by telling her to share anything she had on her tree. However, instead of looking at her Tree of Life, she looked at the Tree of Life handout I had previously shared. She repeated the questions on the handout and answered them one after the other. She started,

What roots do you have in your life? My roots... I don't really have it written. So like I was born in the Philippines. I moved to Canada when I was like, five years old. My favorite memories are when my mom was like crying because both of her parents died. I didn't cry. For the ground, I live with my parents and my family actually. I go to school in Canada because I live in Canada. My favorite place to visit is the museum. I love to research.

My skills and abilities... I can dance too, I can play an instrument flute, and the recorder. I want to play the trumpet. I can edit videos to these too are very important. My hope and goals... don't really have that much goals cuz like you know, like in order to achieve like editing videos, you have to like watch a tutorial and try to practice editing a lot. So you can be good. And I hope I can watch anime more. Because my sister made me watch an anime called Mashley and I really liked it.

Important people in your life: like I said, my mom's both parents has passed away and whenever I see a leaf it reminds me of my mom's parents. I don't really have that much. Gifts from people... Yes, my friends. People, like my friends have provided me to like cry on their shoulder. Because I've been bullied since I was like child like one. Nursery one, two, three, and four. I'm not bothered that much now because like people get nice on me, but I've been bullied since childhood. And my friends supporting me because like, they give me compliments a lot.

My parents taught me to like.... if I'm alone, something.... that's why I'm introverted. My dad say like stay strong when you're in college, you're

gonna be alone, Good luck! I'm so sad because I've never given anything back in return. What storms have I experienced in the past? My sister having difficulties with the death of our grandparents. She kept crying. I didn't cry, only my sister did. Well, how I managed with it is like I tried to give... actually like comfort my sister. Since I don't know how to comfort people, I say like it's okay. My mom getting mental health problems because she has diabetes. Oh gosh! I'm having a hard time you know, like she might be having like an appointment for her kidney and for kidney failure and she might die soon. I think that's it.

Juliet ended her sharing my talking about her mother's illness and did not know what to say further. The pain in her eyes was visible, like she was trying to push back the tears that might roll down any moment if she had continued. However, she had a smile plastered on her face as if to say that she got it. Worry washed over me, and I wanted to reach out to her and give her a tight hug, telling her it would be all right. However, the form of encouragement we could give her at that time was to applaud her bravery for sharing. The emotion in the room was intense as everyone was being in the moment.

On Sarah's turn, she started sharing,

My roots... I'm from the Philippines. I came here when I was nine months old. Basically, my language is English and a little bit of my mother tongue. My religion is Catholic. For my Trunk, I can play the trumpet and the recorder. I can play volleyball and badminton. I'm apparently good at judging. For my branches, I hope to have a good job, hopefully in the

nursing industry also. My leaf is my cousin, with whom I have spent some time in the Philippines. My storms is just my grandma passing.

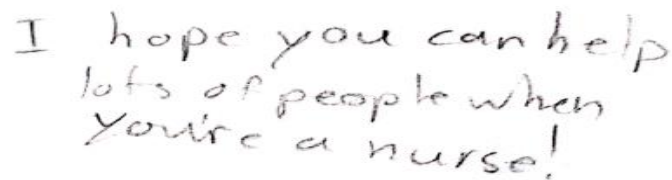
Sarah rushed through her experiences and did not want to talk deeply about some points. This might have been partly because Chang informed the class that we were running out of time and the students would have to go for dinner soon. We applauded Sarah for sharing her experiences with the group. I informed the students that we would hang the trees on a board by the side of the class to form a Forest of Life (see Figure 45).



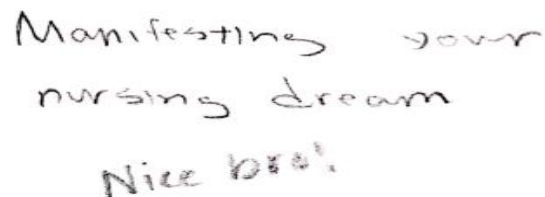
Figure 45: Our Forest of Life (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

Validation and Acknowledgement

As participants hung their trees on the board, I told them they were open to writing messages on one another's trees to promote positive relationships and academic growth (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Pang et al., 2023). I informed them that their comment might be one of hope, or any message they might wish to pass across to the artists having heard their stories. I picked up a pencil and wrote "Thank you" across all the drawings, appreciating participants for making an effort at first to be in the Tell Your Story Academy and then for exploring their experiences with the group. Other comments participants wrote are visible in the images below (see Figure 46).



I hope you can help
lots of people when
you're a nurse!



Manifesting your
nursing dream
Nice bro!



Thank you!

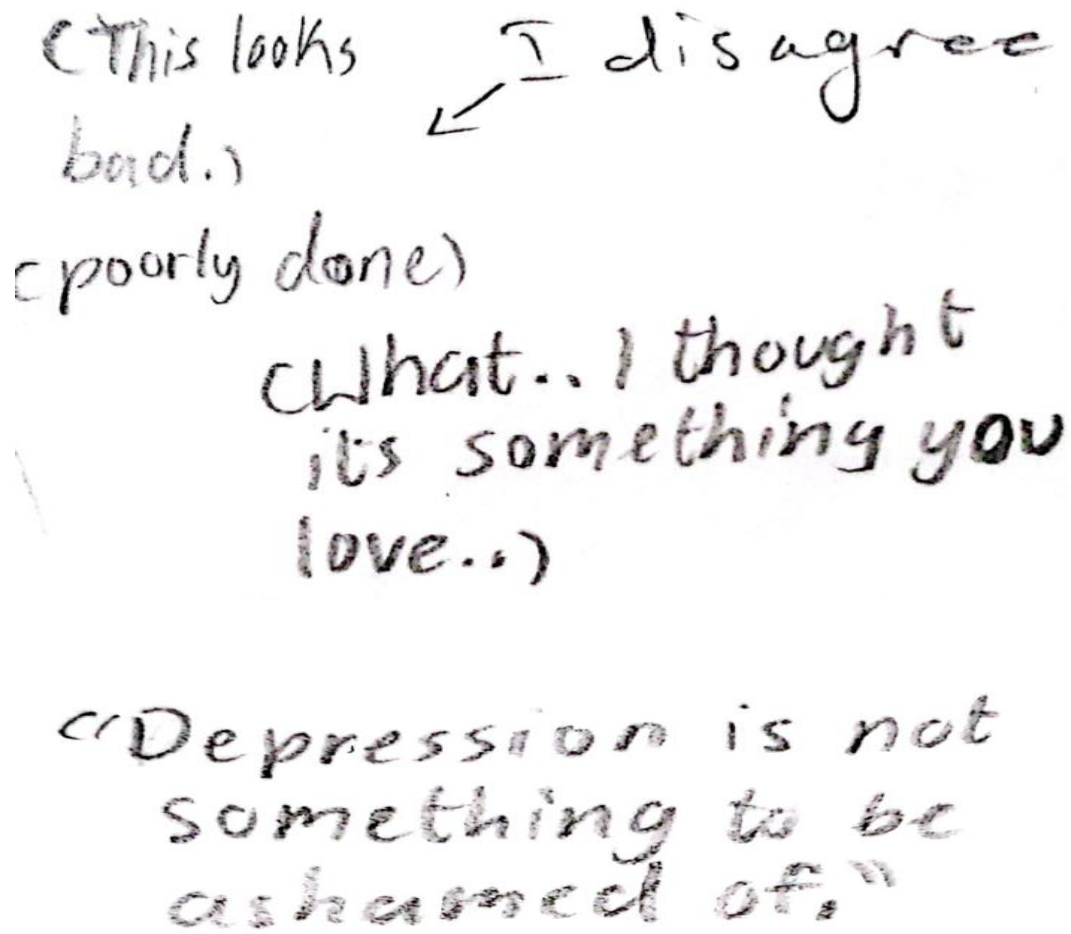
Practice makes amazing
not perfect, what
matters is that you
Put the effort in it.

Manifesting your
nursing dream

Think of
Heeseung if
you're having
a hard time
(JKJK)

Hope for a better
tomorrow.

"Don't be ashamed
since you did nothing
wrong." - Choi Beomgyu
from Txt



(This looks bad.) I disagree
(poorly done)
(What.. I thought
it's something you
love..)
"Depression is not
something to be
ashamed of."

Figure 46: Participants' validation of one another's stories (Photo: S. A. Quadri).

Summarily, participants validated one another's feelings with their comments of hope toward achieving their dreams. A participant commented, "practice makes amazing, not perfect. What matters is that you put the effort in it". Knowing that perfection should not always be the goal is important. Simply making the effort to be better is what makes all the difference. Another student also encouraged the artist to think of "Heeseung" when they are having a hard time since most of them shared that they enjoyed K-pop. Heeseung is a Korean music artist. Other students commented that the artist hoped for a better tomorrow, which might have been because the participant is facing some hardships in the

present. Another participant wrote a quote by Chui Beomgyu, who is also a singer and songwriter. The quote says, "Don't be ashamed since you did nothing wrong". On Julie's tree, some participants made some comments about her feelings towards the way her Tree of Life looked. Someone said, "I disagree," saying that the tree did not look all that bad, while the second person said, "What... I thought it's something you love", encouraging Juliet that she should not view her creation as bad since she had claimed that she loved drawing. Lastly, another person commented on a drawing, saying, "Depression is not something to be ashamed of." This was used to encourage the author that it is all right to be down, and maybe bringing open about it can lead to a form of healing for them.

The participants were all aware of the struggles people their age go through, and their comments and words of encouragement depicted their knowledge of the world around them. As the students moved out of the Tell Your Story space, their faces seemed lit up, as they had just offloaded a burden that had been on their shoulders for a long time.

Trailing the Clues

The Tell Your Story program's significance extends beyond the preparation of a leveling ground and the creation of a relational environment, as the participants' stories are crucial. These narratives, planned and spontaneously shared, demonstrate the diverse forms of knowledge representation, including textual, aural, and visual modes. The program utilized multimodal approaches to facilitate expression, as seen in the reading of picture books on trees, which aimed to reveal the connections between humans and trees, and the underlying emotions, feelings, and ideas that constitute their identities. The tree symbolized growth, heritage, resilience, and strength, qualities that participants exhibited towards the program's conclusion. Writing activities revealed participants' varied

engagement levels, with some hesitant to engage in “school-like” activities, while others who enjoyed academic pursuits embraced this form of expression. The writing responses varied in format, ranging from bullet points to paragraphs, reflecting individual moods, interests, and topic engagement. This highlights the importance of accommodating diverse learning styles and preferences in educational settings.

Furthermore, during the “3 pictures 1 story” activity, participants demonstrated diverse approaches to making meaning of the text, reflecting their individual connections and experiences. Group one employed a personal connection strategy, relating the images to their own experiences, such as feeling disrespected in a grandparent’s home. Group two focused on textual connections, creating a mysterious narrative with a continuous ending inspired by the enigmatic nature of their chosen pictures. Group three utilized a resourceful approach, leveraging a member’s strengths to develop their story, although connecting some of the visual elements was challenging. These varied meaning-making strategies illustrate how students engage with content based on their prior experiences and connections with the materials. The aural component of the program consisted of participants presenting their stories to the group and the group’s attentive listening. Notably, the inclusion of music during the drawing activity resonated with one participant, evoking a sense of value and belonging. Although she focused more on discussing her song choices than completing other tasks, revealing the significance of music in her identity.

With regard to the visual mode, I employed a PowerPoint presentation featuring captivating images to engage participants. Additionally, the incorporation of pictures and picture books enhanced participants’ understanding of the life process of trees. This visual approach enabled participants to utilize personal artifacts and beads as objects to symbolize

their connection to the world around them. These objects served as a form of text, prompting critical thinking and reflection on the significance of their chosen artifacts. The culminating activity of drawing the Tree of Life further demonstrated the power of visual representation, allowing students to express their thoughts and experiences in a creative and gentle manner. This visual expression enabled students to tap into their personal experiences and emotions, fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

During the program, students exhibited resistance at various points, attributed to internal and external factors. These factors included silenced voices, initially perceived strangeness, and personal loss. To address this resistance, students were offered autonomy and choices throughout the activities, enabling them to focus on their interests without judgment. This approach led to the creation of diverse trees, reflecting participants' unique identities and experiences. Therefore, participants were able to 'storitize' their experiences in their writings and drawings. However, the 'destorytization' process was not totally in the hands of participants as various factors led to their trees looking unfinished compared to the 'internet' standards of how a Tree of Life should look. Consequently, the completion of the trees varied, with some participants feeling confident in their work, others struggling with self-doubt, and some unable to complete their trees due to unforeseen commitments. A viewer may perceive some trees as more complete than others based on preconceived notions of a "Tree of Life." However, each tree is complete in its own right, as it represents the participant's identity, experiences, and strengths. This diversity in completion and representation aligns with the study's primary objective of exploring participants' experiences and identities.

Through this experience, I discovered the significance of imitation and incorporated it into subsequent sessions. I observed that when I shared my personal story, “My Unfinished Story,” students responded with equal enthusiasm, sharing their own experiences. However, when I prioritized activity completion over sharing my story, the level of engagement decreased, potentially due to external factors. I hypothesized that continued self-sharing might have maintained student engagement despite external influences. This realization led me to create my own Tree of Life, representing my research journey, which I shared with the group on the final day. As predicted, this vulnerable sharing facilitated unconditional self-expression among participants. They openly discussed their roots, significant relationships, fears, hopes, and dreams, forming meaningful connections with peers. These connections served as encouragement, fostering a supportive environment where students felt empowered to share their stories. To commemorate the shared experiences and foster a sense of community, I instructed participants to leave messages of hope on each other’s drawings. The encouraging comments left on the trees demonstrated how participants received and valued each other’s stories, creating a lasting impact.

As participants shared their stories through visual, written, and performative forms, Chapter Six illuminated how identity was not only expressed but also negotiated through multimodal literacy practices. These expressions were shaped by participants’ agency, their interactions with others, and the affective conditions of the storytelling space. However, understanding these acts of storytelling as part of a broader educational and theoretical landscape requires further interpretation. In the next chapter, *Illuminating the Research Findings*, I turn to the conceptual frameworks discussed in Chapter Two to analyze these

stories through the lens of identity metaphors, critical literacy, and relational pedagogies. By doing so, I make sense of the patterns that emerged across the Tell Your Story Academy and highlight how meaning-making and identity formation intersect in liberatory, affective, and dialogic ways.

Chapter Seven: Illuminating the Research Findings

Aligning the narratives from the Tell Your Story academy to research objectives, this study chapter explores intended versus actual outcomes and their relevance to existing literacy literature. The three previous chapters were written using the inductive approach, moving from the specific observations about participants' reactions to general conclusions on what these reactions could mean. Therefore, the themes in those chapters were generated and developed based on the dataset and the flow of the story. However, this chapter utilizes the deductive approach, where the codes and themes have been predetermined based on the five identity metaphors (difference, self, mind and consciousness, narrative, and position) identified by Moje and Luke (2009). Hence, the stories of and about the participants, including me, will be viewed from these identity lenses to determine their existence and interconnectedness in the learning process. Building on the conceptual frameworks established in Chapter Two—including critical literacy, critical theory of education, and affect theory—this chapter uses Moje and Luke's (2009) five identity metaphors as a lens for analyzing participant narratives. Basing my research on identity as a critical literacy framework led to my exploration of the various forms of identities.

Knowing that an ambiguous word such as identity cannot be contained using a few words, Moje and Luke's identity metaphors helped broadly categorize what identity could mean. Since critical literacy is about reading the word and the world, it means that the personal cannot be separated from the social, as how we understand and interpret the word is based on our individual experiences, which are, in turn, made up of the social. This shows the back-and-forth process between the personal and the social in relation to critical literacy. It is worth noting that the themes discussed in this chapter are viewed from a continuous

sequence of ideas using the five identity metaphors. This is because even though critical literacy should focus on the interrelatedness between the personal and the social, much emphasis is placed on reading the word to understand the world (Freire, 2005). However, this analysis considers explanations from the perspective of “reading the world to understand the word”, as texts are not the subject of analysis but the participants and their experiences.

From I to Us – Identity as Difference

The Tell Your Story Academy included diverse participants of varying academic and cultural backgrounds, including first- and second-generation immigrants. We come to the group with our various identities, and that influences and affects how we interact with other people's bodies, things, and stories, marking the transition “from one state to another” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 48). This is because lived experiences and the knowledge they represent are always impacting us as individuals (Dutro, 2019, p. 3).

Going to the field, I understood how different I was from everyone else. I am a black Nigerian Muslim lady who immigrated to Canada for my Ph.D. program in Education. Even though trauma is faced by people globally, some countries speak about it more often than others. Nigeria is one of those countries where trauma is not frequently discussed in a group, and when it is, it is said in a light and trivial manner. Further, the Nigerian culture talks about adverse circumstances in a positive light so as not to call negativity back into one's life. For instance, instead of saying ‘I am ill or sick’, the Nigerian phrase would be ‘I am strong’. As a child, I wondered why sick people would say they were strong when they were looking weak. However, I grew to understand such circumstances. This is similar to some idiomatic expressions in English, like ‘to kick the bucket’ or ‘to be in the family

way’, but the difference is that the Nigerian culture uses antithesis, where the direct opposite of the negative word is used. This ideology made me feel like anything can be discussed, in as much as participants structure their words so that they would not be affected while they tell their stories. This part of my cultural identity shows my psychological representation of myself and the world, encoded in my memory due to personal and vicarious experiences with my cultural group (Roeser et al., 2006). I did not consider the various forms and impacts trauma can take, whether or not they are acknowledged (Dutro, 2019). Gradually, I came to understand that ‘trauma’ is not taken lightly the way I had thought, and giving students the autonomy to choose what they wish to talk about was the option that gave the most agency to participants.

Interestingly, there is also a recent shift in how trauma is conceived in the Canadian context. Acknowledging the historical injustices and trauma faced by the Indigenous children who attended residential schools started to gain enough recognition in the late 20th century. The purpose of these schools was to eliminate customs, language, and sense of self by compelling them to adopt Euro-Canadian practices, resulting in trauma (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). However, there was increased awareness and action toward reconciliation in the 21st century when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 2008. Also in 2008, the then Prime Minister, Stephen Harper offered a formal apology to Indigenous peoples, acknowledging the harms caused by the residential school system—an act that symbolized governmental recognition of historical injustices (TRC 2015). In the context of this study, the awareness of how trauma has become a more widely known and used term in Canadian society guided my

interactions with the participants, creating a space where participants' emotional and psychological well-being is prioritized.

On the one hand, this study led to the creation of the Tell Your Story Academy, where my intention was to create a space for participants to express themselves and talk about their experiences because “children’s life stories are held against them in schools” (Dutro, 2019, p. 8). Students’ stories and experiences can determine how they are treated in schools based on internal and external factors. By internal factors, I mean that students might view themselves as not worthy enough to be in a particular space because of their backgrounds and family circumstances. This can influence their behavior and engagement with others in the space. Externally, educators or the school system may consciously or unconsciously judge the behavior of these students as disruptive or problematic, rather than creating spaces for understanding and support.

On the other hand, the mentors, who were undergraduate students, brought in a perspective of being volunteers to the group. Even though the mentors were trained to look after the grade level students during the academy, their different identities (see mentors’ profiles, interests, and learning strategies in Chapter Four) were evident in how they approached the academy. Chang’s extroverted nature made him volunteer to be a mentor, and also because his interest in science was built when he volunteered as a high school student. For Shelly, she became a mentor because of her fluidity and spontaneity, believing that it is better to have a taste of everything so that one would not regret being unaware of the path which is the best. In their academic lives, it is apparent how their identities influence the way they learn, which is based on their individual courses. The implication for their individual stories is that undergraduate students in the sciences are not given the

choice to explore their personal experiences in the classroom; however, art courses incorporate individual experiences in their learning. Mostly, Shelly was drawn to artistic expression, while Chang was at the top of following protocols and making sure their roles as mentors were on track.

On the fourth day, when participants were given the choice to select beads that speak to them in one way or another, Shelly offered to make beads for Chang when he was preparing for an exam. Her choice to make Chang's beads shows her love for art and expression because there would not have been any consequence if Chang did not have his beads done. Shelly thought it would be a lot of fun after picking her beads to do one more in Chang's name. However, due to her careful method of bead selection, there was not enough time for her to do Chang's at the end of the day. Irrespective of their differences, the mentors fully participated in the Tell Your Story Academy activities as either participants or mentors. Initially, Shelly and Chang entered the Academy with a mindset of supporting the students when needed. However, as they engaged in the activities, their roles shifted as they started to see themselves as participants. The mentors showed vulnerability in how they shared their experiences and emotions, modelling courage and creating an inclusive environment.

Identity as difference is not limited to our differences individually but how we feel when we are attached to a group, making us feel like we fit in and are valued based on the group's ideals (Moje & Luke, 2009). At the beginning of the academy, there was a disconnect among the students because most attended different schools and were not in the same grade level. These differences were individualistic, as participants did not share most things in common with others. The individual 'I' was apparent, and most were not

interested in the group's activities. In conversation with the mentors, Chang stated that the students "... actually want to do hands-on like cooking food, which is fun and interactive". Apart from participating in hands-on academies, the students must have had other friends in other groups, which must have made them feel like they did not fit in the Tell Your Story Academy. This lack of connection or a form of social identity with other participants created the first-day gap in forming relationships. To build this connection, I decided to talk about myself and show my vulnerability as a human, so that participants would feel safe enough to reciprocate this by talking about themselves too. As Dutro (2019) posits that "vulnerability can be the path to connection in ways that allow the hardest parts of life to reside in classrooms" (p. 8). Additionally, I introduced the "Love/Hate" activity for students to reflect on what they like or dislike and share their list with the group. As students listened to other people's lists, participants started to take mental notes of what makes them similar to or different from another person in the group. After this activity, participants started to create bonds based on what they had in common, like their love for reading, their likeness for the same kinds of music or pets.

The showing and telling of participants' differences through the activities they were involved in affected their views of the Tell Your Story Academy. This is because in the context of affect theory, entering the realm of causality cannot be ruled out as we have the power to affect the world around us and vice versa (Hardt, 2007). Recognizing that our emotions and experiences can cause or influence our perceptions and actions, while the world around us can shape our feelings and responses. Students' resistance to sharing their experiences shifted as everyone started to view 'us' as a group of storytellers. As individuals shared, there was a feeling of freedom to express themselves, as participants

saw one another from different lenses having heard their stories. Hence, it became somewhat reciprocal – I have heard and witnessed your story, so you should witness mine too. Dutro (2019) explains that to witness is “to be present, to listen, to see” (p. 6). These actions show the movement that occurred in how participants thought about the academy at the beginning of the sessions and at the end, prompting participants to take action by sharing their stories with the group.

From Intrinsic to Extrinsic – Identity as Self

This aspect of identity shows how participants thought about themselves in terms of reading and writing and how they acted during the activities based on these thoughts. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic selves reveals two contrasting mindsets: students who draw self-assurance from within and those who rely on external validation, such as peer approval, to feel confident. Moje and Luke (2009) argue that while various theories acknowledge the influence of “culture or social interaction; of the role of the Other; of larger structures; or of history, space, and time”, research on literacy and identity from the perspective of self carries the risk of modeling the subject as either an autonomous agent or meaning-maker or as a passive pawn of more powerful institutional structures and power relations (p. 424). This means that there is a connection between the subject as autonomous and the subject as influenced by social structures or power relations. This reflects a broader critique within critical theory of education, which interrogates how authority and compliance are normalized in learning spaces (Giroux, 2024; Freire, 2005).

Even when designed to be participatory, pedagogical actions can inadvertently mirror institutional hierarchies, making it essential for facilitators to remain critically reflective. For instance, an individual may autonomously decide not to engage in reading

or writing because of the social structure in place. For the Tell Your Story, different factors influenced students' engagement in reading and writing activities – including tiredness, first-day estrangement, and wanting to be in other academies with hands-on activities. During the first session, I pulled out the book *What Do You See When You Look at a Tree* by Emma Carlisle (2022) and I asked participants who would be interested in reading to the group. The room was so quiet for a few seconds that we could almost hear one another breathe. I almost called on specific students to read before a participant volunteered to read. I informed her that it would be beneficial for her voice to be loud and for her to read slowly, for everyone to follow along with the story as they viewed the illustrations in the book. It was obvious that the reader was bold enough to read since no one else was willing to do it.

The next time we were about to read a poem titled “Driftwood” in the book *My Heart Was a Tree* by Michael Morpurgo (2023), I decided to make everyone read to gear them up and make them feel involved. The poem is about the nine lives of wood; hence, I shared reading about the lives with all the participants, including me. At this point, I was not giving participants much of a choice due to the silent response I got from the group at first. I must confess that I used my position as the facilitator to encourage everyone to read, which is evidence of the power relation described by Moje and Luke (2009). However, how the students read was much of their choice. Even though I instructed students to read out loud for everyone to hear them, some of the participants' voices were not loud enough for me to hear them. As students read with different pitches, the other students were still calm and did not complain about not hearing a student well. At intervals, I asked some of the students to raise their voices, and I verified from the other students if they could hear them well and everyone confirmed that they heard what was being read. At first, I

concluded that it might be because some of the students read quickly, that was why it was difficult for me to hear them. However, I also realized that some of the students might have been a little anxious to read out loud that they might not have concentrated when someone else read. Also, since we were grouped in an out-of-school program, the space might have affected or contributed to students' lack of active participation. Considering how context can affect engagement and participation, I prepared targeted physical activities to stimulate student engagement (Tribble, 2017).

Unlike reading, which involves interpreting text, writing has evolved to encompass diverse forms of expression, enabling students to convey their thoughts and ideas through various mediums and styles. While reading is primarily a receptive skill, writing is a productive skill that allows students to express themselves creatively, leveraging their strengths and interests. For the writing pieces, I provided various prompts for students to reflect on and respond to in their personal journals. Because documenting our thoughts was pivotal in the final completion of the Tree of Life, I made it mandatory for students to write in their journals. However, how they chose to write was up to them. I informed students that they could write in bullet points or paragraph forms, depending on how comfortable they felt about writing. Some participants drew images or emojis on their pages after writing to show their emotions at that time (see Figures 9, 17, and 22). This indicated that most students were visual and preferred to include images as a form of expression.

Additionally, the actual drawing of the Tree of Life can be categorized as part of the writing process because it is an essential form for students to express themselves or talk about their identities. Participants' inclination to either draw/write or not led to the formation of different forms of trees, which might be considered finished or not, according

to the ‘normal’ standard of how a tree should look in summer with leaves and fruits, like Amy’s tree (see Figure 33). Amy’s intrinsic thoughts about her abilities to read and write were optimistic because of her love for school. This intrinsic notion of herself extended to the output of how she ended up completing her tree. On the other hand, Juliet mentioned that she loved doodling during the ‘Love/Hate’ activity, but she ended up not including some of the parts of the tree, like leaves, fruits, and storms (see Figure 40). Juliet is an enthusiastic student about things she loves; for instance, she enjoyed talking about her likes and dislikes and took time to pick out some of her favorite songs that were added to the group’s playlist. While some students added the final details to their trees, Juliet spent most of her time shading her tree and singing along as the songs played. I checked in with her at intervals to determine if she needed anything to aid the process, but she assured me she was in control. However, I would say she lost interest in the process at some point, possibly due to seeing other people’s bold choices of painting their trees with vibrant colors. This might have contributed to her comment about her tree, saying, “This looks bad. poorly done”. In Juliet’s situation, there was a back-and-forth process between the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affected her views of herself and her tree. Initially, she expressed how much she loved to sketch, which raised her confidence that she must have felt she could still cover up for the time if she did other things like sing. However, the extrinsic factor hit when she saw what others did and compared her tree with others, leading to her viewing herself as not good enough at drawing her tree.

Also, Sarah’s choice of how her tree looked was influenced by her friends, which is an extrinsic factor. She chose the same materials as her friends and mostly paused to confirm if her responses to the activities aligned with her friends’ expectations. Looking at

her tree (see Figures 41 and 42), Sarah's branches were thin, and most of the wording written in her drawing was unclear. She drew her tree the same way her friends did and spent most of her time having small chats with them during the activities. However, when Sarah was separated from her friends during the "3 pictures, 1 story" activity, she was able to show her skills as an individual separate from her friends. Shelly confirmed this when she said

And she has her trait, although she's usually quiet. She's very observant of the three, very, very observant. In her time of silence, that's when she's able to summarize an individual or a situation in a few minutes. She did that very well when we were doing that three-picture story. She listened to everything everyone was saying and summarized it. We wrote a very brief paragraph based on that, and that's what we submitted. And I was like, wow!

In all cases, Amy, Juliet, and Sarah knew who they were and what they loved before the academy, which signals their identity as difference; however, the interactions they encountered contributed to their self-perception. These three students were interpellated into being readers and writers, and they subconsciously responded quite differently based on how the people and the environment affected their views at that time. The ability of the call to elicit a response that places the respondent in a specific subject position embedded in a specific ideology or knowledge system is crucial to interpellation (Moje & Luke, 2009). However, in this case, the call might be obvious or not. A prominent call was my invitation for them to draw their trees and write about themselves, and the unapparent call was the comparisons students might have made in their minds as they viewed their peer's trees.

From Social to Personal – Identity as Mind and Consciousness

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, various aspects can serve as ‘critical’, ranging from understanding the world around to knowing oneself in depth to gain enough identity confidence. In the Tell Your Story Academy, students had experienced bullying at one point or another. Their voices had been silenced to the point that most preferred to work in the background, below the eyes of the public, even though it was just a small group of us. Therefore, critical literacy is not simply about knowing how to make the world a just and equitable place for all but also about becoming aware of the self to find one’s place in society. As Moje and Luke (2009) put it, “It is in the development of the mind that the self comes into being” (p. 426). Hence, when the mind is being developed, individuals can decide the identities they want to rise or answer to when called.

Specifically, in the Tell Your Story Academy, various activities and interactions contributed to the development of the minds of participants. Attending the academy for the first time, participants were skeptical about what aspects of themselves they would have to share with the group and if their opinions or revelations of the self would be appropriate in the group. This notion of self-disclosure as ‘bad’ must have been embedded based on previous experiences because at a young age, most children get excited during the ‘show and tell’ activity when they are asked to talk about an item they love. Or somehow, as we grow up, we become less confident about sharing about ourselves. The students had experienced bullying, so they had likely learned how to protect themselves by not putting too much of their real selves out in the open to be criticized or humiliated. This made students resist sharing about themselves at the early stages of the academy. On the first day, I told the students to bring in an artifact that had meaning to them, and until the fourth day,

when they would be sharing the story behind these artifacts, most students did not bring any object. Of eight students, two brought their artifacts; another two decided not to share their stories or artifacts, while the remaining four did not attempt to bring any object for sharing.

Unlike Moje and Luke's (2009) conception of identity as mind consciousness, which is the application of literary tools to develop the mind, this study also emphasizes the impact of positive interaction and relationship building as the primary tools in developing the mind. These tools are essential due to the out-of-school context and the vulnerability involved in discussing personal experiences because what we, as teachers, want "is for children to feel central, included, seen and heard" (Dutro, 2019, p. 11). To aid the hearing of students' voices, participants were given a chance to express themselves at will whenever anything popped up in their minds, hoping that we could all listen and learn from what was being said. This allowed Amy to share some stories with the group while some students tried to complete some writing activities (see Chapter Five – Critical Analogy). Amy told a story of how cats were parachuted to Borneo to decrease the spread of malaria in the region back in the 60s. Additionally, she expressed her displeasure in some of the books she had read, where the authors might have written a sequel to make fun of their readers by not ending their pieces appropriately. This shows Amy's critical side of verifying information she hears and questioning authors' storylines, meaning she is not a passive consumer of texts. Her spontaneous outburst about these issues created a space for other participants to contribute to talking about the books they have also read that they would have wished to re-write. At this point, one of the participants told the group about a book she was writing, and we all listened to the synopsis of her book.

As much as being able to own and accept one's awareness of self is a huge step toward finding one's place, finding a space for these experiences to be shared and witnessed by others is essential. Dutro (2019) argues that “to witness is to be present, to listen, to see” (p. 6). This shift from personal withholding to relational sharing reflects what Affective Liberation Literacy frames as the co-construction of agency through shared emotional and dialogic engagement (Freire, 2005; Anwaruddin, 2016; Lyiscott, 2017). The students' increasing openness illustrates how critical literacy practices—when paired with affective attentiveness—can deepen awareness and participation, especially in non-traditional settings. Dutro (2019) emphasizes that storytelling alone does not guarantee benefit to the teller unless it occurs within a context of care and critical engagement. In this study, the act of being witnessed supported such a context, fostering reciprocity and meaningful connection among Tell Your Story participants.

Students withheld their unique stories, thinking their contributions might not be valuable in the space we (me, the mentors, and the students) created with and for one another. Some felt like their experiences might be heavier than other people's journeys, and they feared that they might be viewed strangely by a group of people they had just recently met. Gradually, as we explored slices of our experiences during the various activities embedded in the icebreakers, participants started to open up about deeply rooted experiences they would not have shared in normal circumstances. Such emotional openings reflect principles of Affective Liberation Literacy, where affective attunement, critical consciousness, and narrative agency converge to create learning spaces rooted in trust, transformation, and co-created knowledge (Anwaruddin, 2016; Barnwell, 2020).

On the fourth day, the second to the last session, when students were unwilling to bring or talk about their artifacts, I worried that maybe the space was not well designed to share these experiences, and I thought about how to encourage more sharing. Then, I realized that all that was needed was a strong start from me. This was one of the factors that led to me thinking of myself as a participant in the study as well, and not just a researcher aiming to learn from the experience. I realized that my story would impact the students and serve as a framework for how their stories might be told. Therefore, learning about me and my experiences developed participants' minds to move from the residual state to a more action-oriented perspective to talk about their traumas and fears. As one person finished their story, another person picked up the pace, and my fear of finishing way before the close time turned into the fear of not giving participants a fair opportunity to talk about themselves fully.

Hearing students' stories, the hurt in their eyes was visible at some points. And as Dutro (2019) confirms,

And because the body is always testifying to our experiences, stories of trauma are found in a quivering of lip or hand, eyes not quite focusing on a page, limbs moving oh-so-slowly across a room or squirming all the way out of chairs (p. 6).

The decision to move from listening to one person talk about themselves to sharing one's own story is a form of taking action. As sensitive as some of these stories were, most students will not want us to see them broken, just like William in Dutro's (2019) description would not want her to see him broken. William was a 2nd grader in Dutro's classroom who faced extreme domestic violence and instability at home. Despite frequent social worker visits, William's behavior in the classroom became volatile. His behavior served as

a shield to protect him from feeling vulnerable. This phenomenon of using behavior as a protective mechanism was also evident in my study. One typical example of when a student tried to wear a protective shield was when Juliet talked about her mother's health challenges, and she expressed her fear of her mother dying with a huge smile on her face. As I listened to her talk, I was scared of watching her break, and I felt like reaching out to her and telling her that everything would be fine. Nevertheless, all of the participants also shared these pieces of themselves, and the significant way we could acknowledge that we were present and witnessed all these stories was to write positive messages on each other's trees after they were hung to form the Forest of Life (see Figure 45). Therefore, listening to and acknowledging what they have listened to shows that participants were invested in these stories, and the knowledge that everyone in the group is going through one form of difficulty or another developed the minds of participants to take action towards sharing their stories.

From Context to Text – Identity as Narrative

The formation of identities is based on experiences, and our experiences are narratives of the past that can influence the present and future. This understanding of identity as unfolding over time aligns with the temporality dimension in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and supports Moje & Luke's (2009) conception of identity as narrative. Moreover, the flexible, student-led approach in this academy embodies the core principles of critical pedagogy, where identity development and meaning-making are relational and emergent (Freire, 2005; Janks, 2018). Hence, given this study's emphasis on identity, storytelling and narratives are essential components. As this study has become an experience for me and has been added to my life's narrative, participants in the Tell Your

Story Academy also went through the process, which has now become part of their experiences. This orientation toward identity, voice, and representation aligns with liberation literacy, which centers racial, linguistic, and social justice through multimodal storytelling (Lyiscott, 2017). This means that our narratives about ourselves and others are extensions of our identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, cited in Moje & Luke, 2009). The primary objective of this research is to know what identities are prevalent while students learn and if these identities intersect. Identity as narrative is the glue that holds all the other identity metaphors together in this research because storytelling was used to engage students so that I could observe their unique differences and similarities. This makes me think about what makes up a narrative. Are narratives just stories told about one's self and others? Alternatively, is it something more?

Everything has a beginning, middle, and end; things have histories and are connected through time. Does this mean time is narrative? I am not trying to be philosophical, but I cannot help but think this way since education is part of philosophy. For this research, I would say that thinking in time means thinking in narratives, chronologically aligning events and situations based on when they happen and finding a link or sequence to these events. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that "locating things in time is the way to think about them" (p. 29). In line with this, Massumi (2011) agrees that "the reality of the world exceeds that of objects, for the simple reason that where objects are, there is already their becoming. And where the becoming has been, there is already more to come" (p. 11). This is why the themes in this chapter show a shift or change from one position to another, emphasizing how things were with the students before immersing themselves in the Tell Your Story activities, and considering the changes in the

end. The ultimate text created by each participant is the Tree of Life, which is an approach to get students to think about their past, present, and future. However, much work was put into getting students to explore these aspects of themselves, as several factors influence or affect participants' output of their narratives. Therefore, not only was the planned content for the academy needed to position participants to share their stories, but also, the space and how relationships were built were essential to participants' final tellings. Participants' narratives and stories of self were more elaborate than their actual drawings (see Chapter Six – Stories of Self) because of the affect of human and non-human entities in the space (Vallelly, 2019). Hence, even the context became a text that mirrored how participants decided to construct 'self' and claim their identities.

The space arrangement when participants converged each day was different. These physical and emotional arrangements echo Ahmed's (2004) emphasis on how affect circulates in space, generating atmospheres that either open or close down possibilities for connection. Through this co-created environment, students were not just positioned to learn but also to feel and express, a hallmark of Affective Liberation Literacy. The ambiance was bright but calming, and the music participants chose was played on some specific days. Participants felt like they owned the space because the rules guiding the circle were co-created by everyone present. These little things matter in restructuring participants' narratives and discussing personal experiences with others. As students started to ease into the sessions daily, they felt safe enough to discuss anything in the group. Additionally, Moje and Luke (2009) argue that identity-as-narrative offers "the possibility of documenting how people recognize others or respond to the recognitions of others via the

telling of their stories” (p. 429). Listening to other people’s stories and being able to acknowledge them validated participants’ narratives of ‘self’ (see Figure 46).

From Here to There – Identity as Position

Our differences positioned us to think and act in specific ways from the beginning of the Tell Your Story Academy. My roles as a Ph.D. student, a researcher, and the academy's facilitator influenced my positioning within the group. As a Ph.D. student and a researcher, I was eager to go into the field and surprise myself afterward with the findings, leading to earning my desired degree. Although my conceptual framework shows reciprocity in the learning process, I never considered myself a learner in the field during data collection. I knew I would learn from the process, but I did not expect to learn during the sessions, let alone make my learnings known to other participants. However, I observed that listening to people speak about their vulnerabilities requires some level of vulnerability from me, too (Dutro, 2019). My interaction with other participants affected my view on my roles, which made me shift from being a passive learner during the data collection process to an active learner, making my learnings known to the group. Additionally, there were instances where I would have loved to participate in the activities like the students. However, due to my role as the facilitator, there were several things I had to oversee, including students’ level of engagement in activities, as knowing when students' energies were depleting was vital to me so I could pick up the mood with high-energy icebreakers.

This was almost the same for the mentors because they ensured students were as comfortable as possible. Therefore, they were not fully engaged during some of the activities. Chang had volunteered to mentor students in previous years, but it was Shelly’s first time mentoring students at the community program. However, they both thought their

presence at the academy allowed them to sit back until their services were required. Telling them that they would be actively involved in the activities came as a shock to them. Shelly first looked at Chang's face to confirm if they could participate and they simultaneously agreed. Chang said,

But I guess to include us made the kids kind of closer to us because they actually got to know us. I didn't feel like we were just mentors, but I felt like we were their big brother and big sister in a way.

Chang's statement shows that the mentors' shift from just being mentors to active participants positively affected the students' perceptions of them. Conversely, this potentially contributed to a sense of unity and trust in the students, encouraging them to tell their stories without prejudice. Regarding the students, their shift in position occurred as a shift in their "sense of agency and interpellation" (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 432). The sense of agency was evident in how students chose to go about their activities, writing, and drawing, as how they felt at particular times interfered with their level of engagement.

Every evening, students got into the session tired from schoolwork, which made some of them resist being active writers or readers. Hence, the agency they had on how to go about these activities positioned them in specific ways within the group when compared to an active student such as Amy, who was willing to engage with others. The agency felt by students might also be because of the context of being in an out-of-school program where there were no standard or compulsory systems of how things should be conducted. On the other hand, the interpellation was evident during the collaborative activity (see Chapter Five), where group two members nominated Amy to write and flesh out their story. Although the group converged for a few minutes to discuss how they could get a good story

from the three pictures they chose, they were dispatched easily to attend to other matters with the hopes that Amy would do a beautiful job writing their story, being a lover of school and literacy activities. Amy was called upon to be a writer and reader, and she answered when she agreed to get the job done. We shifted our ground in the group from one position to another, which was evident from the beginning to the end, just like the narrative was shifting in time. This shift also signals taking action to achieve the academy's objectives of getting participants to tell their stories, which, I would say, was a success.

The Path to Synthesis

The findings discussed in this chapter illuminate how students' identities were not only expressed but actively constructed, negotiated, and reimagined through relational, affective, and critical literacy practices. The Tell Your Story Academy became a space where identity was experienced as both personal and collective, discursive and embodied—demonstrating that identity is never fixed but evolves through social and affective encounters (Moje & Luke, 2009; McCarthy, 2002; Cho, 2018).

In response to Research Question 1—*In what ways do relational and affective experiences influence students' identity construction during planned activities?*—this study revealed that emotional safety, mutual vulnerability, and peer recognition were foundational to students' willingness to share and reflect on their identities. Through the careful curation of space and relationships, participants moved from initial hesitation to storytelling, illustrating Zembylas' (2021) notion of relational affect as a driver of transformation in educational settings.

As for Research Question 2—*What role does storytelling play in enabling students to reflect on, critique, and reimagine their identities?*—participants used multimodal storytelling activities to externalize their memories, beliefs, and aspirations. Stories functioned not only as narrative tools but also as affective and dialogic practices. They helped students articulate who they were, reframe how they saw themselves, and empathize with others—demonstrating what Freire (2005) calls “dialogue as an existential necessity” (p.88).

Research Question 3—*How does the Tree of Life approach foster connection, resilience, and critical engagement among students as they explore their identities?*—was answered through students’ engagement with the visual and metaphorical structure of the Tree of Life. Their trees served as sites of both expression and transformation. Though some trees appeared “unfinished,” they reflected a refusal to conform to imposed standards, instead foregrounding authenticity, resistance, and growth—key principles of Affective Liberation Literacy.

Finally, Research Question 4—*How did my positioning influence students’ participation, engagement, and identity construction during the activities?*—was illuminated through my shifting role as researcher, facilitator, and co-learner. My openness and shared vulnerability helped to “level the ground,” making space for trust, reciprocity, and co-construction of meaning (Clandinin et al., 2018; Ellis, 2007). This cyclical shifting of roles aligned with teacher-practitioner inquiry, underscoring the importance of relational ethics and participatory pedagogy in research with youth.

These findings were further interpreted through the conceptual lens of Affective Liberation Literacy, which emerged from the intersections of Critical Theory of Education,

Critical Literacy, and Affect Theory (see Chapter Two). This framework enabled an analysis of identity not only as narrative or discursive but as a felt, relational, and socially situated process (Barnwell, 2020; Massumi, 2015; Lyiscott, 2017; Anwaruddin, 2016). Participants' movements from silence to voice, from isolation to collective expression, reflected a deeply affective process of identity formation grounded in care, critique, and connection. By centering students' lived experiences and emotional realities, this study showed how critique, emotion, and narrative work in tandem to foster deeper engagement and belonging. It echoed the affective call of Ahmed (2004), the political charge of Lyiscott's (2017) liberation literacy, and the reflexive engagement of Freire's (1994) pedagogy of hope.

In this way, the Tell Your Story Academy functioned not simply as a literacy intervention but as a site of becoming, a space where participants enacted Affective Liberation Literacy through their stories, relationships, and acts of self-expression. Having illuminated these findings through theoretical and narrative interpretation, the next chapter, *Synthesizing the Journey: Lessons Learned and Pathways Forward*, offers a broader reflection on what this research contributes to identity-centered literacy education. It considers the pedagogical and methodological implications of this work and proposes new directions that honor students' affective truths, critical voices, and shared humanity.

Chapter Eight: Synthesizing the Journey- Lessons Learned and Pathway Forward

As I bring this study to a close, I find myself looking back on the journey it has taken me—a path shaped by questions, discoveries, and reflections. When I first set out, I wondered how students learn through their identities and experiences, seeing "learning" as a way of becoming attuned to the world. However, along the way, I realized that learning often begins from within, through exploring personal stories—stories rarely shared openly yet have the power to transform. By employing Moje and Luke's (2009) identity framework, I delved into the unfolding of students' identities as they engaged in activities within an out-of-school context, uncovering the complexities and nuances of identity formation and its profound impact on learning. These stories were more than just accounts of self; they became bridges that connected students to one another, fostering empathy, awareness, and a deeper engagement with learning. Reflecting on the twists and turns of this research, I am reminded of how recounting our experiences helps shape who we are, individually and collectively. This chapter serves as a reflection on that journey, offering a summary of the key findings, exploring their theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications, and paving the way for future research that continues to examine the intricate relationship between identity and learning.

Summary of Research Findings

This thesis, titled *Critical Literacy Stories Untold: Exploring Students' Identities in an Out-of-School Context*, explores how students learn based on their identities and experiences. Using Moje and Luke's (2009) identity framework, I examine identity through five lenses: identity as difference, identity as narrative, identity as mind and consciousness, identity as self, and identity as position. The research employed narrative inquiry and

practitioner inquiry as methodologies and was conducted in an out-of-school program where students engaged in the Tree of Life approach to explore their identities. Additionally, undergraduate students who served as mentors were interviewed to understand how their identities are evident in their learning.

What does it mean to be critically literate? This question has guided my journey throughout the study. Drawing from Bacalja's (2018) definition of critical literacy as an approach for students to engage with and understand various texts in new ways, I came to recognize that "texts" can mean many things at once. Initially, I envisioned critical literacy as students interacting with different forms of texts and sharing perspectives shaped by their observations and experiences. While I anticipated varying perspectives due to diverse life experiences, I aimed to observe how these differences would manifest in their discussions and interactions. As the research unfolded, I realized that students themselves are complex worlds worth exploring. Identity, therefore, was not merely a framework for evaluating students' development or learning; it became the very foundation of that development and learning.

One of the key findings of this research emphasizes how individual experiences define collective storytelling. The diversity of stories in the *Tell Your Story Academy* revealed that identity is not static but a dynamic narrative influenced by personal experiences and connections with others. In this space, students' differences were not obstacles but sources of strength that enriched the storytelling process. Identity formation was deeply rooted in the opportunities students were given to narrate their experiences, which created a collective understanding. Initially, students were resistant to sharing personal narratives. However, they became more open and vulnerable through the Tree of

Life approach. Witnessing each other's stories validated their own experiences, creating a cycle of reciprocal learning that transformed how participants viewed themselves. This reciprocal storytelling emphasized that individual identities contribute to collective growth, where witnessing others' journeys facilitates a deeper awareness of one's own. This process required a safe and supportive environment where relational trust was prioritized. By creating this space, students were encouraged to become active listeners and storytellers, reflecting on their identities and shared humanity.

The findings also highlighted the significant role of mentors in the program. Mentors transitioned from passive guides to active learners, enriching the collaborative storytelling process. Their own diverse backgrounds were not just differences; they became assets that enhanced the inclusive atmosphere of the academy. Each mentor brought unique perspectives, which contributed to a dynamic exchange of ideas and experiences. Mentors' growth, alongside the students', reinforced the collaborative nature of critical literacy, demonstrating that learning is a shared endeavor. As a facilitator, I alternated between guiding the process and learning alongside participants. This shift in positionality, for both myself and the other participants, marked a critical transformation. Identity as position was dynamic: I became a learner of my students, students claimed ownership of their stories, and mentors embraced their dual roles as guides and learners. These shifting roles and relationships illustrate how identity is continually negotiated through engagement with others. The findings revealed that these connections helped participants feel supported in both their emotional and cognitive development as storytellers.

Additionally, this research reflects my belief in the importance of linking lived experiences to learning. As a PhD student, I found that drawing on personal narratives

helped me make sense of new knowledge, forming connections between past observations and emerging ideas. For the undergraduate mentors, such opportunities varied by discipline. Those in the sciences, like Chang, had limited chances to explore personal narratives, while those in the arts, like Shelly, often integrated their experiences with learning content. The research not only captured students' stories but also narrated the process of their storytelling, the challenges, breakthroughs, and transformations they experienced. In essence, this research practices what it preaches by using stories to understand identity, offering new insights into what it means to be critically literate.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes significantly to the theoretical understanding of identity and critical literacy, revealing identity's fluidity shaped by personal experiences and social interactions. By employing Moje and Luke's identity framework, this research illustrates the profound role identity plays in the learning process and challenges traditional notions of identity in education. As Yoon and Sharif (2016) suggest, critical literacy should encompass the exploration of identity, as understanding oneself in relation to others is essential for meaningful engagement in societal issues. This study takes this idea further, proposing that identity formation is inherently collaborative and context-dependent, expanding the theoretical discourse surrounding critical literacy and identity in educational research. These findings were further interpreted through the conceptual lens of *Affective Liberation Literacy*, which emerged from the intersections of critical theory of education, critical literacy, and affect theory (see Chapter Two). This framework allowed me to examine identity not only as a narrative or discursive construction but as a felt, embodied, and socially situated process. Concepts such as critical affect (Barnwell, 2020; Massumi,

2015), liberation literacy (Lyiscott, 2017), and critical affective literacy (Anwaruddin, 2016) supported a more expansive view of critical engagement—one that accounted for emotion, vulnerability, and voice in the act of becoming literate and whole.

A crucial aspect of the identity development discussed in this study is the way individual learning strategies reflect students' self-awareness and personal values. The interviews with the Tell Your Story Academy mentors revealed that identity formation is not only about learning content but also about recognizing one's needs and interests. For example, Chang's perspective on scheduling—focused on taking time for rest when needed—highlights the importance of understanding one's personal boundaries. This contrasts with Shelly's approach, which was more about balancing enjoyable courses to maintain a manageable workload. The insights shared by the mentors underscore how essential it is to align academic strategies with personal preferences and well-being, a factor often overlooked when students base decisions on the expectations of others, whether from family or peers. Both mentors' approaches show that scheduling is not just about managing time but about recognizing one's needs, leading to a deeper understanding of how personal identity and academic life are intertwined.

Another most striking aspect of this research is how it reframes "identity as difference." Often, diversity is viewed as a challenge to overcome, but this study shows how it can be a source of strength. Yoon's (2016) work highlights how diversity shapes classroom interactions, emphasizing the importance of cultural inclusivity. In her classroom, differences were celebrated, fostering a space where students valued one another's cultures. However, while recognizing differences is crucial, this study posits that the focus should move beyond identification to mutual recognition. In the *Tell Your Story*

Academy, as participants shared their stories, their differences became threads weaving a collective narrative. The act of searching for similarities within their differences fostered a sense of belonging, transforming the space into a community of storytellers. This aligns with Christensen's (2017) assertion that teaching is not about categorizing students by race or ethnicity but about exploring the intersections of their lives. Such an approach redefines how diversity and inclusion are viewed, a discussion elaborated further in the pedagogical implications section.

The metaphor of "identity as self" also emerged as a vital component of this study. Here, identity is seen as both intrinsic and extrinsic, shaped by how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. Moje and Luke (2009) emphasize that students derive their sense of self through interactions with 'texts', broadly defined. This study expanded the notion of "text" to include stories, artifacts, and even non-verbal cues. In the academy, students initially chose to talk about topics like their bead selection; however, there was a natural flow to their storytelling later in the sessions, with students engaging deeply to maintain the rhythm of the group. This transformation illustrates how identity as self evolves through connection and shared purpose.

Closely tied to the identity as self is the metaphor of "identity as mind and consciousness," which highlights the role of critical reflection and relationships in identity development. While many critical literacy studies focus on broader social justice issues—such as bullying (Pescatore, 2015), diversity (Han, 2015), and ecological justice (Wargo, 2019)—this study centers on the self. It emphasizes that developing critical consciousness begins with understanding one's own story. This brought about naming the academy 'Tell Your Story' for participants to explore their personal experiences in meaningful ways.

The metaphor of "identity as narrative" reveals how storytelling serves as both a tool for self-expression and a means of knowledge construction. Narration, as this study shows, is not a linear process but one shaped by verbal and non-verbal interactions. Every element in the academy, from the setting to the ambiance, served as "text" that participants interpreted and used to shape their stories. This aligns with Rogers and Labadie's (2015) work on multimodal literacy, where diverse means of expression enrich learning experiences. In the academy, storytelling became a powerful tool for connection, allowing participants to navigate the space between individual and collective narratives. Leading by example, I participated actively in storytelling, modeling vulnerability and openness, encouraging participants to do the same. Unlike studies such as Poulus and Exley's (2018), which focus on explicit teaching of techniques, this study demonstrates the power of modeling and shared experience in fostering storytelling.

Reflecting on these metaphors, I realized that an essential thread runs through all of them: connection. While reviewing literature, I identified three primary theories—critical theory, humanistic learning theory, and intersectionality—as central to this research. Critical theory, rooted in Paulo Freire's work, emphasizes the transformative potential of education (McKernan, 2013). Humanistic learning theory highlights the importance of autonomy and freedom in learning (Gandhi & Mukherji, 2022). Intersectionality explores how various aspects of social identity interact simultaneously (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2009). However, the findings of this study necessitated the inclusion of affect theory, as it captures the ways participants were shaped by their connections and interactions to both human and non-human elements.

Connection is, in many ways, an identity of its own. Now, it is not like I am bringing something different at the end of this study, because the idea of “identity as connection” has been embedded in the stories all along. The naming of "identity as connection" in this chapter is not a divergence from the five metaphors of Moje and Luke (2009), but a natural expansion made possible through the affective, critical, and narrative insights of the study. It finds theoretical grounding in affective relationality (Ahmed, 2004; Zembylas, 2016) and liberation literacy's emphasis on communal belonging and social action (Lyiscott, 2017). The bonds we form shape how we see ourselves and how others perceive us. I recall a childhood moment when my father proudly told his friends that his children were not liars. That statement, rooted in the connection I have with my father, made me identify as an honest person, which I carry with me to date. Similarly, the connections formed in the academy reshaped participants' identities as they leaned into the storytelling process. The relationships built in that space encouraged participants to reconstruct their sense of self, not through imposition but through mutual recognition and shared purpose.

Through these theoretical implications, the findings of this study emphasize that identity formation is not a solitary endeavor but a deeply social and collaborative process. It reveals that our stories, and the connections they foster, are at the heart of who we are and how we learn.

Methodological Implications

This study highlights the power of narrative inquiry and teacher-practitioner inquiry in investigating the complex, relational, and emotional dimensions of identity construction. These approaches proved especially effective in an out-of-school context where participants' lived experiences, voices, and emotions took center stage. Rather than merely

collecting data, the research process became a collaborative act of co-construction—a storying of selves through reflective engagement and dialogic practice.

Narrative inquiry, grounded in the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), enabled participants to share their stories on their own terms and timelines. As stories unfolded across sessions, it became clear that identity was not something fixed to be "found," but something lived, shaped, and retold through interactions with others, space, memory, and materials. Stories were not simply data; they were the methodology. This approach created space to observe how identity emerged at the intersection of personal history, present engagement, and imagined futures. As Clandinin et al. (2018) emphasize, relational ethics and attentiveness to participants' lived contexts are foundational to narrative inquiry—a stance I upheld throughout the Tell Your Story Academy.

Teacher-practitioner inquiry as a stance deepened this engagement by placing my own pedagogical practices under scrutiny. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) argue, practitioner inquiry enables educators to generate knowledge from within their practice, not just about it. It fostered ongoing reflection on how I designed sessions, responded to students, and learned alongside them. Rather than assuming a position of authority, I embraced what Campano (2009) describes as an ethical responsiveness—an openness to being affected by students' insights and needs.

These methodological choices were not neutral; they were grounded in the conceptual framework of Affective Liberation Literacy (see Chapter Two). This framework demanded a research design that could accommodate emotion, vulnerability, power, and voice as central components of identity. In this context, both narrative and practitioner inquiry provided the flexibility to attend to the *how* and *why* of students' engagement—

what they chose to say, what they left unsaid, and how they navigated meaning-making through relational encounters.

Furthermore, creating multiple points of entry into the learning and research process, such as drawing, writing, discussion, and reflection, allowed participants to express themselves through varied modalities. This aligns with recent calls for identity-centered and multimodal literacy practices (Lyons & Scull, 2024; Jiang, 2023), which recognize that identity is often communicated through more than words. It also echoes the principles of *critical affective literacy* (Anwaruddin, 2016) and *liberation literacy* (Lyiscott, 2017), where emotion and cultural expression are integral to learning and transformation.

More importantly, this study affirms that methodologies rooted in reflection, relationship, and responsiveness are not only well-suited for identity research—they are essential. Narrative and practitioner inquiry allowed me to honor the dignity and complexity of participants' stories, and to view research as a shared, evolving process of becoming.

Pedagogical Implications

The implications of this study are best understood through the lens of *Affective Liberation Literacy*, a pedagogical stance that merges critique, emotional awareness, and identity formation. The Tell Your Story Academy was a direct enactment of this pedagogy: it emphasized student voice, relational trust, and critical meaning-making through narrative. It demonstrated how fostering spaces of care, co-construction, and mutual vulnerability can cultivate deeper, more inclusive literacy engagement. Also, the implications of this study extend to curriculum development, teacher training, and curricular implementation. This

study emphasizes the need to rethink how equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are approached in educational settings. While EDI initiatives often aim to create environments where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel valued and have equitable opportunities to succeed, there is a tendency for these programs to overly focus on differences, sometimes at the expense of fostering shared human experiences. As defined by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017) and Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD, 2023), diversity acknowledges and appreciates differences such as race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. On the other hand, inclusion calls for practices that ensure everyone is respected and can participate fully.

In practice, some educational programs have focused primarily on addressing historical and structural inequities, as evident in some of the literature reviewed for this study. It has come to focus that some educational programs on implicit bias are essential for raising awareness of prejudices and systemic inequalities, inadvertently reinforcing divisions by centering solely on differences. For example, Corsino and Fuller (2021) observe that such initiatives often lack strategies to foster shared values and common goals, essential for building unity. Similarly, studies like those by Scacco and Warren (2018) and Mousa (2020) reveal that focusing solely on reducing bias does not consistently improve intergroup relationships. This underscores the need for a more balanced approach that simultaneously addresses inequities while cultivating commonalities among students. However, the findings of this research support the idea that diversity and inclusion should not only highlight individual differences but also leverage them as opportunities for

connection. By framing diversity in this way, educators can shift the narrative from separation to interconnectedness.

This approach aligns with OECD's (2023) call for educational strategies that integrate equity discussions with a focus on shared goals, creating inclusive communities while addressing systemic disparities. Hence, including storytelling and multiple forms of expression at all levels of education—grade, undergraduate, and graduate—can provide powerful entry points for fostering diversity and unity. Moreover, the importance of social support, as highlighted by the mentors in this study, reinforces the value of building connections within diverse educational communities. Both Chang and Shelly emphasized the need for social networks that foster belonging and provide mutual encouragement. Hence, integrating these ideas can help educators foster more inclusive environments that prioritize both diversity and the power of social connection.

Another critical implication of this research is educators' need to embrace vulnerability in their teaching practices. Vulnerability, often viewed as a weakness within traditional teaching paradigms, can become a powerful tool for fostering authentic connections in the classroom. As Ellis et al. (2011) argue, the researcher's willingness to share personal experiences fosters deeper connections and reciprocity. Similarly, when educators share their own struggles, doubts, and experiences, they create a sense of trust that encourages students to do the same. During the *Tell Your Story Academy*, my active participation in activities and willingness to share my own stories broke down hierarchical barriers and created an atmosphere of mutual respect. Modeling vulnerability humanizes the teacher and invites students to see learning as a shared journey rather than a one-sided transfer of knowledge (Freire, 2005).

This study also highlights the importance of designing learning experiences that prioritize relationality and connection. In educational systems often preoccupied with outcomes and performance metrics (Peel, 2017), relational aspects of learning are frequently overlooked. However, fostering relationships among students and between students and educators can transform classrooms into communities of support rather than competition. Therefore, educators are invited to rethink how identity exploration can be integrated into pedagogy to promote connections. The mentors' perspectives on “engagement with others” (Chapter Four) further reinforce this point. Shelly’s group-directed learning and Chang’s focus on building connections through the “reward system” of engagement demonstrate the impact of reciprocal relationships in fostering an inclusive learning environment. These ideas suggest that learning goes beyond content delivery and involves building strong social bonds that can positively influence academic experiences.

Also, providing students with structured opportunities to explore and articulate their identities through storytelling, reflective writing, and multimodal projects allows them to connect their personal narratives to broader academic and social themes. This is particularly crucial in today’s globalized world, where understanding one’s identity in relation to others is vital for navigating complex social and cultural landscapes (Young, 2018). By incorporating identity exploration into the curriculum, educators can equip students with the tools to engage with societal issues while deepening their self-awareness.

Moving Forward

Wrapping up this study opens pathways for moving forward, not only in terms of future research but also in how we conceptualize identity, literacy, and education in practice. The findings and implications of this research emphasize the need for educational

approaches that are deeply humanistic, relational, and inclusive. While the journey of this research has answered the questions, it has also revealed new possibilities and raised further inquiries that are worth exploring.

One significant way forward is expanding the discourse on identity beyond traditional educational paradigms. The dynamic and relational nature of identity, as evidenced by this study, calls for more research into how interactions within diverse educational contexts influence identity formation. Researchers could explore the intersection of identity with technology, globalization, and rapidly changing societal norms. How, for instance, does the digital age reshape the way students construct and share their narratives? How can educators balance the opportunities and challenges presented by these changes to foster inclusive and meaningful learning experiences? Also, future studies could delve deeper into the role of storytelling as both a pedagogical and methodological tool. This research has shown that storytelling facilitates connection, empathy, and self-awareness. Investigating how storytelling can be adapted across different educational levels and cultural settings would provide valuable insights into its transformative potential. Additionally, exploring the integration of storytelling in an educational context with other creative modes—such as art, performance, and digital media—could further enrich its application.

Another way forward can involve embracing pedagogical shifts that reflect the lessons learned in this study. Teachers at all levels can benefit from professional development programs highlighting the value of vulnerability, relational teaching, and multiple modes of expression. These programs should encourage educators to reflect on

their positionality and foster environments where students feel empowered to share their authentic selves.

Finally, future research could expand on the theoretical frameworks used in this study by incorporating other emerging perspectives that address the relational and emotional dimensions of learning. The inclusion of another metaphor to the existing five (identity as connection) elaborates on the importance of relationships, not only among students but also between students, teachers, and the learning environment. Investigating how these connections shape educational outcomes would deepen our understanding of identity in education.

On a final note, moving forward means embracing education as a relational, inclusive, and ever-evolving journey. This research serves as a reminder that learning is not confined to the acquisition of knowledge but extends to the ways we engage with ourselves and others. As educators, researchers, and policymakers, we are called to nurture spaces that honor the richness of human experiences, cultivate empathy, and inspire lifelong growth. The road ahead is not without challenges, but it is filled with opportunities to reimagine education in ways that resonate with the diverse and interconnected world we live in.

In closing, this study illustrates the power of integrated frameworks—critical theory of education, critical literacy, and affect theory—not as separate traditions but as dynamic, interwoven ways of understanding identity, emotion, and learning. Through the concept of *Affective Liberation Literacy*, this research offers not just a theoretical contribution but a practical, humanizing pedagogy that centers stories, relationships, and transformation. As we move forward in reimagining literacy education, we must continue

to ask: What stories remain untold? Whose emotions are left unacknowledged? And how can we design learning spaces that embrace the full complexity of who we are?

References

- Adamson, L. (2022). Fear and shame: students' experiences in English-medium secondary classrooms in Tanzania. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1-16.
- Ahmad, N. & Rana, A. (2005). Impact of music on mood: Empirical investigation. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2696883
- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Ahmed, S. (2014). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Second edition. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press.
- Albers, P., Vasquez, V. M., & Harste, J. C. (2017). Critically reading images in digital spaces and digital times. In K. A. Mills, A. Stornaiuolo, A. Smith, & J. Z. Pandya (Eds.), *Handbook of writing, literacies, and education in digital cultures* (pp. 223-234). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Alhosseini, F. (2023). Resilience among newcomer students in Canada: A transformative and socio-ecological analysis of narratives from Tree of Life workshops. *Doctoral dissertation*. University of Toronto.
- Allen, J. P., Narr, R. K., Nagel, A. G., Costello, M. A., & Guskin, K. (2021). The Connection Project: Changing the peer environment to improve outcomes for marginalized adolescents. *Development and Psychopathology*, 33(2), 647-657.
- Anderson, B. (2009). Affective atmospheres. *Emotions, Space, and Society*, 2(2), 77-81.
- Anwaruddin, S. M. (2016). Why critical literacy should turn to 'the affective turn': Making a case for critical affective literacy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 37(3), 381-396.
- Arendt, H. (1961). *Crisis in education: Between past and future*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Armbruster, P., Patel, M., Johnson, E., & Weiss, M. (2009). Active learning and student centered pedagogy improve student attitudes and performance in introductory biology. *CBE Life Science Education*, 8, 203-213. Doi: 10.1187/cbe.09-03-0025
- Aronowitz, S. (2024). Against schooling: Education and social class. In A. Darder, K. Hernandez, K. D. Lam, & M. Baltodano (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (4th ed., pp. 133-149). Routledge.

- Bacalja, A. (2018). What critical literacy has to offer the study of video games. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 41(3), 155-165.
- Baker-Bell, A. (2020). Dismantling anti-black linguistic racism in English language arts classrooms: Toward an anti-racist black language pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 59(1), 8–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2019.1665415>
- Barnwell, A. (2020). *Critical Affect: The politics of method*. University of Melbourne: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bao, D. (2018). Fostering self expression: Learners create their own visuals. In D. Bao (Ed), *Creativity and Innovations in ELT Materials Development: Looking Beyond the Current Design* (p. 193-210).
- Bayram, N. & Aydemir, M. (2021). Decision-making styles and personality traits. *An Online International Research Journal*, 3(1), 905-915.
- Beard, L. J. (2018). This story needs a witness: The imbrication of witnessing, storytelling, and resilience in Lee Maracle's Celia's song. *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 30(3-4), 151-178.
- Beck, A. (2005). A place for critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(5), 392-400.
- Behrman, E. (2006). Teaching about language, power, and text: A review of classroom practices that support critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(6), 490-498.
- Berger, P. & Thomas, L. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor Books.
- Berger, R. (2020). *Dramatic storytelling & narrative design: A writer's guide to video games and transmedia*. CRC press.
- Berlant, L., Cvetkovich, A., Gould, D., Boler, M., & Davis, E. (2022). On taking the affective turn: interview with Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, and Deborah Gould. *Cultural Studies*, 36(3), 360-377.
- Beyes, T., & De Cock, C. (2017). Adorno's grey, Taussig's blue: Colour, affect and organization studies. *Organization*, 24(1), 59–78.
- Bishop, E. (2014). Critical literacy: Bringing theory to praxis. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 30(1), 51–63.

- Bishop, E. (2024). Critical literacy: Bringing theory to praxis. In A. Darder, K. Hernandez, K. D. Lam, & M. Baltodano (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (4th ed., pp. 385-396). Routledge
- Bloom, B. S. (Ed.). (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals*. Handbook I: Cognitive domain. Longmans, Green.
- Bloom, B. S., Engelhart, M. D., Furst, E. J., Hill, W. H., & Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. *Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain*. New York: David McKay.
- Boden, M. (2005). *The creative mind: Myths and mechanisms*. Routledge.
- Bondy, J. M. & Johnson, B. E. (2020). Critical affect literacy: A call to action in a trump administration. *Action in Teacher Education*, 42(4), 354–367.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (J. B. Thompson, Ed.; G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Harvard University Press.
- Boyd, V., Wilson, C., & Smith, C. (2023). Building a risky-safe-space: Using reflective pedagogies and values to support writing development in work based learning. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 20(4). <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.20.4.06>
- Brady, J. (1994). Critical literacy, feminism, and a politics of representation. In C. Lankshear & P. McLaren (Eds.), *The politics of liberation: Paths from Freire* (pp. 142-153). Routledge.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Brewe, E., Kramer, L., & Sawtelle, V. (2012). Investigating student communities with network analysis of interactions in a physics learning center. *Physical Review Special Topics Physics Education Research*, 8(1). DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevSTPER.8.010101
- Bullough, R. V. (2005). Teacher vulnerability and teachability: A case study of a mentor and two interns. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 23-39.
- Butler-Kisber, L. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry: Thematic, narrative and arts-based perspectives* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Byfield, L., Shelby-Caffey, C., Bacon, H., & Shen, X. (2016). Digital literacy and identity formation in 21st century classrooms: Implications for second language development. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 5(1), 39-45.
- Cameron, J., Narin, K. and Higgins, J. (2009). Demystifying academic writing: reflections on emotions, know-how and academic identity. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 33(2), 269-284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098260902734943>
- Čamo, M. & Osmić, A. (2020). The concept and importance of trust in the student—teacher relationship: Sociological discourse. *Sociological Discourse*, 10(19), 67-80.
- Campano, G. (2009). Teacher research is a collective struggle for humanity. In M. Cochran-Smith & S. Lytle (Eds), *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generations*. (pp. 326-342). New York: Teachers College Press
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, December 2018.
- Cantisano, J. N., Rimé, B., & Muñoz-Sastre, M. T. (2014). The social sharing of emotions (SSE) in the Dominican Republic's cultural context: Autobiographical descriptive data. *Universitas Psychological*, 13(2), 457-466.
- Carlisle, E. (2022). *What do you see when you look at a tree?* Templar Publishing.
- Carpenter, S. K., Cepeda, N. J., Rohrer, D., Kang, S. H. K., & Pashler, H. (2012). Using spacing to enhance diverse forms of learning: Review of recent research and implications for instruction. *Educational Psychology Review*, 24, 369-378.
- Cartun, A. & Dutro, E. (2020) The humanizing potential of risky writing: Tracing children's and teacher candidates' critical-affective literacy practices. *Reading Psychology*, 41(6), 583-604.
- Cavanagh, M. (2011). Students' experiences of active engagement through cooperative learning activities in lectures. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 12(1), 23-33. Doi:10.1177/1469787410387724
- Cense, M., & Ganzevoort, R. R. (2019). The storyscapes of teenage pregnancy. On morality, embodiment, and narrative agency. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 22(4), 568-583. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1526373>
- Cerbin, W. (2018). Improving student learning from lectures. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 4(3), 151-163.

- Chase, S. (2011). Narrative inquiry: Still a field in the making. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed., pp. 421-434). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chiou, W. & Yang, C. (2006). Teachers' modeling advantage and their modeling effects on college students' learning styles and occupational stereotypes: A case of collaborative teaching in technical courses. *Adolescence*, 164(41), 723-737.
- Cho, H. (2018). *Critical literacy pedagogy for bilingual preservice teachers: Exploring social identity and academic literacies*. Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7935-1>
- Christensen, L. (2017). Critical literacy and our students lives. *Voices from the Middle*, 24(3), 16–19.
- Clandinin, J. (2023). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Clandinin, J., Caine, V., & Lessard, S. (2018). *The relational ethics of narrative inquiry*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D. J., Murphy, M. S., Huber, J., & Orr, A. M. (2010). Negotiating narrative inquiries: Living in a tension-filled midst. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 103(2), 81–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220670903323404>
- Clough, P. (2008). The affective turn: Political economy, biomedicine and bodies. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25(1), 1-22.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. Teachers College Press.
- Comber, B. (2015). Critical literacy and social justice. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 58(5), 362–367. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.370>
- Comber, B. (2016). *Literacy, place, and pedagogies of possibility*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Connelly, F. M & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 375–385). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

- Cooper, K., Haney, B., Krieg, A., & Brownell, S. (2017). What's in a name? The importance of students perceiving that an instructor knows their names in a high enrollment biology classroom. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 16(1), 1-13.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2015). *A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Learning by design*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Corsino, L., & Fuller, A. (2021). Educating for diversity, equity, and inclusion: A review of commonly used educational approaches. *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science*, 5(e169), 1-6. doi: 10.1017/cts.2021.834
- Cottle, T. J. (2013). Witness to story. *Schools Studies in Education*, 10(2), 143-170.
- Dana, N. F., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2020). *The reflective educator's guide to classroom research: Learning to teach and teaching to learn through practitioner inquiry* (4th ed.). Corwin Press.
- Daston, L., & Galison, P. (2010). *Objectivity*. Zone Books.
- Daley, E. (2003). Expanding the concept of literacy. *Educause Review*, 33 – 40. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255657003_Expanding_the_Concept_of_Literacy
- Deleuze, G. (1988). *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Translated by Robert Hurley. San Francisco City Light Books, 1988.
- Deliza, R. & MacFie, H. (1996). The generation of sensory expectation by external cues and its effect on sensory perception and hedonic ratings: A review. *Journal of Sensory Studies*, 11(2), 103-128
- Demoiny, S. B., & Ferraras-Stone, J. (2018). Critical literacy in elementary social studies: Juxtaposing historical master and counter-narratives in picture books. *The Social Studies*, 109(2), 64–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2018.1451981>
- Denborough, D. (2008). *Collective narrative practice: Responding to individuals, groups, and communities who have experienced trauma*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre.
- Dewi, D. S., Hartono, R., Wahyuni, S., & Saleh, M. (2023). Incorporating multiliteracy pedagogy elements into EFL speaking class through digital. Storytelling. *Issues in language studies*, 12(2), p.79-97.
- Doherty, P. (2007). From Passivity to Interactivity: How the Traditional Lecture has Evolved as a Method of Instruction. *The ITB Journal*, 8(1), 38-46. <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/itbj/vol8/iss1/4>

- Dooley, K. & Exley, B. (2015). Afterschool mediaclub: Critical literacy in a high diversity, high-poverty urban setting. In Yoon, B., & Sharif, R. (Eds.) *Critical literacy practice: Applications of critical theory in diverse settings*. Springer, Singapore, pp. 41-56.
- Dressel, D. P. (2022). Breaking the Ice to Build Relationships: Using Icebreakers to Create a Positive Classroom Environment. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 93(6), 14-18.
- Dutro, E. (2019). *The vulnerable heart of literacy: Centering trauma as powerful pedagogy*. Teachers College Press.
- Dutro, E., & Cartun, A. (2016). Cut to the core Practices: Toward visceral disruptions of binaries in practice-based teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 58, 119–128.
- Efland, A. (2002). *Art and cognition: Integrating the visual arts in the curriculum*. Teachers College Press.
- Efron, S., & Ravid, R. (2013). *Action research in education: A practical guide*. The Guilford Press.
- Egugbo, C. C. & Salami, A. T. (2021). Policy analysis of the 6-3-3-4 policy on education in Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 23(1), 44-53.
- Ehret, C. (2018). Moments of teaching and learning in a children's hospital: Affects, textures, and temporalities. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 49(1), 53–71.
- Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(1), 3–29.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4), 273-290.
- Elwell, A. (2022). Critical affective literacy, feminist pedagogies, and democracy: Exploring possibilities for the high school English classroom. In S. Riddle, A. Heffernan, & D. Bright (Eds). *New Perspectives on Education for Democracy: Creative Responses to Local and Global Challenges*, (p. 138 - 152). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Evertson, C ., Poole, I ., & the IRIS Center. (2003). *Establishing classroom norms and expectations*. Retrieved from https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf_case_studies/ics_norms.pdf

- Fafunwa, A. B. (1991). *Up and On! A Nigeria teacher's odyssey*. Lagos: West African Book Publishers Ltd.
- Feldhusen, J. F. (1994). Talent identification and development in education (TIDE). *Gifted Education International* 10(1), 10-15.
- Fernandha, A. & Grasiawaty, N. (2021). Role conflict and well-being among working students: The viewpoint of a full-timer. *Journal of Educational Studies*, 6(2), 191-205.
- Feshbach, N. & Feshbach, S. (2009). Empathy and education. In J. Decety and W. Ickes (Eds), *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy* (p. 85-98). Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Fenwick, T. (2015). Sociomateriality and learning: A critical approach. In D. Scott & E. Hargreaves (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of learning* (p. 83-93). London: Sage.
- Fiedler, M. (2007). Postcolonial learning spaces for global citizenship. *Critical Literacy: theories and Practices*, 1(2), 50-57.
- Filgona, J., Sakiyo, J., Gwany, M., & Okoronka, A. (2020). Motivation in learning. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 10(4), 16-37.
- Finlay, L. & Hewitt K. (2022). The transformative experience of finding a relational home with a psychotherapist. *European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, Volume 12, 29-46.
- Fiore, J. (2018). A pilot study exploring the use of an online pre-composed receptive music experience for students coping with stress and anxiety. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 55(4), 383-407.
- Firkins, A.S. (2015) The four resources model: A useful framework for second language teaching in a military context. *Technical Studies Institute Journal*, Royal Saudi AirForce: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- Fisher, D., Frey, N., Marsh, J. P., & Gonzalez, D. (2018). Practitioner research: Inquiry that impacts adolescent and adult literacy learning and teaching. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 62(2), 237-240.
- Forster, E. C. (2020). Power and paragraphs: academic writing and emotion. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 19.
- Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the oppressed* (R. R. Barr, Trans.). New York, NY: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th ed.). The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203891315-58>
- Furtak, R. A. (2018). *Knowing emotions: Truthfulness and recognition in affective experience*. Oxford University Press.
- Gach, J., & Wallace, E. R. (2010). *History of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Gandhi, M., & Mukherji, P. (2022, July 19). *Learning Theories*. Pub Med. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32965860/>
- Garingan, E. (2021). The sound of silence: The barriers on students' oral participation in the classroom. *IJRDO-Journal of Educational Research* 6(6), 01-11.
- Galloway, S. (2023). *Storytelling*. Retrieved from <https://www.profgalloway.com/storytelling/>
- Geisler, C. (2001). Textual objects. *Written Communication*, 18(3), 296-325.
- Gergen, K. J. (2009). *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. Oxford University Press.
- Ghiso, M.P., Spencer, T., Ngo, L., Campano, G. (2013). Critical Inquiry Into Literacy Teacher Education. In: Kosnik, C., Rowsell, J., Williamson, P., Simon, R., Beck, C. (eds), *Literacy Teacher Educators*. SensePublishers, Rotterdam. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-200-6_5
- Giroux, H. A. (2024). Critical theory and educational practice. In A. Darder, K. Hernandez, K. D. Lam, & M. Baltodano (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (4th ed., pp. 50-74). Routledge.
- Ginns, P., Muscat, K., & Naylor, R. (2023). Rest breaks aid directed attention and learning. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 40(2), 141-150. DOI: 10.1080/20590776.2023.2225700
- Glapka, E. (2019). Critical affect studies: On applying discourse analysis in research on affect, body, and power. *Discourse and Society*, 30(6), 600-621.
- Gomoll, A. S., Hmelo-Silver, C. E., Tolar, E., Šabanović, S., & Francisco, M. (2017). Moving apart and coming together: Discourse, engagement, and deep learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 20(4), 219-232.
- Gordon, J. A., Council, T., Dukes, R., & Muhammad, G. (2019). Defying the single narrative of Black girls' literacies: A narrative inquiry exploring an African American read-in. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 15(1), 1-26.

- Gonzales-DeHass, A. R., & Willems, P. P. (2003). The relationship between parental involvement and student motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(1), 141- 152.
- Grabe, W. & Stoller, F. (2019). *Teaching and researching reading*. Routledge.
- Graham, S., & Hebert, T. P. (2011). Writing to read: A meta-analysis of the impact of writing on reading. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(4), 710-744.
- Graham, S., Liu, X., Bartlett, B., NG, C., Harris, K., Aitken, A., Barkel, A., Kavanaugh, C., & Talukdar, J. (2018). Reading for writing: A meta-analysis of the impact of reading interventions on writing. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(2), 243-284.
- Griffith, P. (2020). Being vulnerable in the classroom: Presence, power and pushback in peace education. In E. J. Brantmeier & M. K. McKenna (Eds), *Pedagogy of Vulnerability* (p. 259- 274). Information Age Publishing.
- Grishakova, M. & Poulaki, M. (2019). *Narrative complexity: Cognition, embodiment, evolution*. U of Nebraska Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Edward Arnold (Original work published in 1985).
- Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. ASCD.
- Han, K. T. (2015). Challenges in implementing critical literacy practices in remote rural teacher education programs. In B. Yoon & R. Sharif (Eds.), *Critical literacy practice: Applications of critical theory in diverse settings* (pp. 129-146). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-567-9>
- Hankivsky, O., & Cormier, R. (2009). *Intersectionality: moving women's health research and policy forward*. Vancouver: Women's Health Research Network.
- Hanstra, C. (2017). Complexity storytelling: The science of complexity within the art of communication. *Emergence: Complexity & Organization*, 19(1).
- Hardt, M. (2007). Foreword: What affects are good for. In P. T. Clough & J. Halley (Eds.), *The affective turn: Theorizing the social* (pp. ix-xiii). Duke University Press.
- Harmon, W. (2017). Building relationship: Create classroom rules with your students for a powerful start to the year. *The Heart of Education University*. <https://theartofeducation.edu/2017/08/3-benefits-creating-classroom-expectations-students/>

- Harrison, C. (2018). Critical internet literacy: What is it, and how should we teach it? *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 61(4), 461–464. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.713>
- Harvey, L., & Palese, E. (2018). #Neverthelessmemespersisted: Building critical memetic literacy in the classroom. *Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 62(3), 259-270. <https://doi: 10.1002/jaal.898>
- Harste, J. C. (2014). The art of learning to be critically literate. *Language Arts*, 92(2), 90-102.
- Herman, F. & Tondeur, J. (2021). Untangling the sociomateriality of the classroom: biographies of school spaces. *Oxford Review of Education*, 47(5), 681-695. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03054985.2021.1924654>
- Hendricks, E. A. & Tanga, P. T. (2019). Effects of bullying on the psychological functioning of victims. *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development*, 31(1), 1-17.
- Holmes, M. (2010). The emotionalization of reflexivity. *Sociology* 44(1), 139–154.
- Honeyford, M. (2014). [From aquí and allá: Symbolic convergence in the multimodal literacy practices of adolescent immigrant students.](#) *Journal of Literacy Research*, 46(2), 194-233.
- Honeyford, M. & Boyd, K. (2015). Learning Through Play: Portraits, photoshop, and visual literacy practices. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 59(1), 63-73.
- Honeyford, M. & Ntelioglou, B. (2021). Beyond Trying to Find a Number: Proposing a Relational Ontology for Reconceptualizing Assessment in K–12 Language and Literacy Classrooms. *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes*, 77(4), 427–446.
- Honeyford, M., & Watt, J. (2024). “What’s the use?”: Undoing, decolonizing, liberating, and righting literacies assessment in turbulent times. *Language and Literacy / Langue et littérature*, 26(3), 137–154. <https://doi.org/10.20360/langandlit29724>
- Honeyford, M., Watt, J., Roche, S., Cain, N., & Ferguson, K. (2025). Movement, movie making, and soil art: hope in affectively de/ composing pedagogies. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 20(1), 160-180.
- Honeyford, M. & Trussler, P. (2019). Encountering Materiality, Place, and Affect in Pop Up Installation Pedagogy. In K. Lenters & M. McDermott's *Affect, embodiment, and place in critical literacy: Assembling theory and practice* (p. 189 - 202). New York: Routledge.

- Hong, J. S., Peguero, A. A., & Espelage, D. L. (2018). Experiences in bullying and/or peer victimization of vulnerable, marginalized, and oppressed children and adolescents: An introduction to the special issue. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 88(4), 399.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Hospel, V. & Galand, B. (2016). Are both classroom autonomy support and structure equally important for students' engagement? A multilevel analysis. *Learning and Instruction*, 41, 1-10.
- Howard, C. M., Adams-Budde, M., Myers, J., & Jolliff, G. (2017). Shaping our literate lives: Examining the role of literacy experiences in shaping positive literacy identities of doctoral students. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 11(2), Article 8.
- Huang, L., Zhou, J., Wang, D., Wang, F., Liu, J., Shi, D., Chen, X., Yang, D., & Pan, Q. (2023). Visualization analysis of global self-regulated learning status, hotspots, and future trends based on knowledge graph. *Sustainability*, 15, 2798. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15032798>
- Humphrey, S. (2018). 'We can speak to the world': Applying meta-linguistic knowledge for specialized and reflexive literacies. In Harman, R. (Ed.), *Bilingual learners and social equity: Critical approaches to systematic functional linguistics* (Vol. 33, Issue 1, pp. 45-70). Springer. <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-60953-9>
- Hutchinson, M. (2012). Exploring the impact of bullying on young bystanders. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 28(4), 425-442.
- Hyun, J., Ediger, R., & Lee, D. (2017). Students' satisfaction on their learning process in active learning and traditional classrooms. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 29(1), 108-118. <http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/>
- Imagine Forest. (2021). *150 Inspiring Picture Writing Prompts (Free Google Slides)*. Retrieved from https://www.imagineforest.com/blog/picture-writing-prompts/#google_vignette
- International Literacy Association. (2021). *Why literacy?* Retrieved on July 03, 2022, from <https://www.literacyworldwide.org/about-us/why-literacy>
- Jackson, J. (2008). *Language, identity, and study abroad: Sociocultural perspectives*. UK: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Jacob, A. & Menon, N. (2023). Mythos to myth to mythopoeia: A cyclical process. *Mythlore*, 42(1), 147-164. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48747483>

- Janks, H. (2010). *Literacy and power [Bibliographies]*. Routledge.
- Janks, H. (2018). Texts, identities, and ethics: Critical literacy in a post-truth world. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 62(1), 95–99. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.761>
- Jewitt, C. & Kress, G. (2010). Multimodality, literacy and school English. *The Routledge International Handbook of English, Language and Literacy Teaching*, 342-352.
- Jiang, J. (2024). “Emotions are what will draw people in”: A study of critical affective literacy through digital storytelling. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 67, 253–263. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1322>
- Johnson, E., & Vasudevan, L. (2012). Seeing and hearing students’ lived and embodied critical literacy practices. *Theory into Practice*, 51(1), 34–41.
- Johnston, K. C., & Harper, T. (2021). Refining literacy pedagogy through practitioner inquiry partnerships. *The Reading Teacher*, 75(2), 169–177.
- Jones, B. (2010). Writing a safe space. *Creative Writing: Teaching Theory & Practice*, 2(2).
- Jones, J. S., & Raisborough, J. (2007). Introduction: Situating risk in the everyday. In J. S. Jones & J. Raisborough (Eds.), *Risk, Identities and the Everyday* (pp. 1-18). Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Jones, K., & Curwood, J. S. (2020). Tell the story, speak the truth: Creating a third space through spoken word poetry. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 64(3), 281–289. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1080>
- Jones, S. M., & Thomas, A. (2022). Funds of courage: Advancing social justice in children’s reading for pleasure. *Literacy*, 56(1), 3–13.
- Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2023). Multiliteracies: A short update. *International Journal of Literacies*, 30(2), 1–15.
- Karambiria, M., Bourne, M., Bayala, J., Ndiaye, A., & Sanogo, D. (2023). Trees are not all the same. Assessing the policy and regulatory barriers to the upscaling of Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) in Senegal. *Forests, trees and livelihoods*, 32(4), 221-243.
- Knight, J. K. & Brame, C. J. (2018). Peer Instruction. *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 17(2).
- Kirbie’s Cravings. (2022, March 5). *3 Ingredient Cake (No Butter, Oil or Milk)*. Retrieved from <https://kirbiecravings.com/3-ingredient-cake/>

- Kiss, K.L. & Townsend, J.S. (2012). Teacher inquiry: From knowledge to knowledges. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 21(2), 23-41.
- Krashen, S. (1993). We learn to write by reading, but writing can make you smarter. *A Journal of English Language Literatures in English and Cultural Studies*, 27-38.
- Krashen, S. (2004). *The power of reading*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Kraus, W. (2007). The narrative negotiation of identity and belonging. In M. Bamberg (Ed.), *Narrative – State of the Art* (pp. 123–140). John Benjamins Publishing.
- Kroll, L. R., & Meier, D. R. (Eds.). (2015). *Educational change in international early childhood contexts: Crossing borders of reflection*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kuby, C. R., Spector, K., & Thiel, J. J. (Eds.). (2018). *Posthumanism and literacy education: Knowing/becoming/doing literacies*. New York: Routledge.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). *Culturally relevant pedagogy: Asking a different question*. Teachers College Press.
- Lambert, J. & Mitrani, V. (2013). Building relationships through conversation. *Learning Forward*, 16(2).
- Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M. (2011). *New literacies*. Open University Press.
- Laverick, W. (2007). Violence, risk and identity: ‘Doing gender’ or negotiation of structural barriers to non-violent alternatives? In J. S. Jones & J. Raisborough (Eds.), *Risk, Identities and the Everyday* (pp. 19-36). Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Leander, K. M., & Boldt, G. (2012). Rereading “a pedagogy of multiliteracies”. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 45(1), 22–46.
- Leander, K. M., & Ehret, C. (2019). *Affect in literacy teaching and learning: Pedagogies, politics and coming to know*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Leder, H., Belke, B., Oeberst, A., & Augustin, M. (2004). Aesthetic and symmetric objects in adversarial and flanker tasks. *British Journal of Psychology*, 95(4), 489-508.
- Lee, I. (2023). The power of teacher narrative: Critical incidents as an impetus for teacher professional development. In D. Gui & D. Wong (Eds.) *The Power of Storytelling in Teaching Practices*. (pp 17-34). London: Routledge.
- Leland, C., Harste, J., & Huber, K (2005). Out of the box: Critical literacy in a first-grade classroom. [*Language Arts*](#), 82(4), 257-268

- Leland, C., Harste, J., Ociekpa, A., Lewison, M., & Vasquez, V. (1999). Talking about books: Exploring critical literacy: You can hear a pin drop. *Language Arts*, 77(1), 70-77
- Lennon, S., Riley, T., & Monk, S. (2018). The uncomfortable teacher-student encounter and what comes to matter. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 23(5), 619–630.
- Lenters, K. (2016). Riding the lines and overwriting in the margins: Affect and multimodal literacy practices. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 48(3), 280–316.
- Lenters, K., & McDermott, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Affect, embodiment, and place in critical literacy: Assembling theory and practice*. Routledge.
- Lewis, C. (2014). Affective and global ecologies: New directions for critical literacy. In *Moving critical literacies forward: A new look at praxis across contexts* (pp. 187–193). New York: Routledge.
- Lewison, M., Leland, C., & Harste, J. C. (2015). *Creating Critical Classrooms: Reading and Writing with an Edge* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Leys, R. & Goldman, M. (2010). Navigating the genealogies of trauma, guilt, and affect: An interview with Ruth Leys. *University of Toronto quarterly*, 79(2), 656-679
- Liebich, L. (2018). *Presentation skills: Imitate, imitate, imitate*. <https://lukasliebich.com/2018/01/07/presentation-skills-imitate-imitate-imitate/>
- Linklater, R., Judge, J., Sorqvist, P., & Marsh, J. (2023). Auditory distraction of vocal motor behaviour by different components of song: Testing an interference-by process account. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*.
- Lloyd, M. H., Kolodziej, N. J. & Brashears, K. M. (2016). Classroom discourse: An essential component in building a classroom community. *School Community Journal*, 26(2), 291-304.
- Lock, S. (2016). The Tree of Life: A review of the collective narrative approach. *Educational Psychology Research and Practice*, 2(1), 2–20.
- Lombardi, M. & Wall, T. (2006). Duke University: Perkins Library. In D. Oblinger (Ed.), *Learning Spaces*. Retrieved from: www.educause.edu/learningspaces
- Löw, M. (2018). *The sociology of space: Materiality, social structures, and action*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lu, A. S., Green, M. C., Sousa, C. V., Hwang, J., Lee, I., Thompson, D., & Baranowski, T. (2023). To pause with a cliffhanger or a temporary closure? The differential

- impact of serial versus episodic narratives on children's physical activity behaviors. *Communication Research*, 1 26.
- Luk, J. (2004). The dynamics of classroom small talk. *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 115-132.
- Luke, A. (2012). Critical literacy: Foundational notes. *Theory Into Practice*, 51 (1), 4–11. DOI: 10.1080/00405841.2012.636324.
- Luke, A. (2014). Defining critical literacy. In J. Z. Pandya & J. Avila (Eds.), *Moving Critical Literacies Forward: A New Look to Praxis Across Context* (pp. 19 – 31). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Luke, A. (2018). *Critical literacy, schooling, and social justice: The selected works of Allan Luke*. Routledge.
- Luke, A., & Freebody, P. (1999). A map of possible practices: Further notes on the four resources model. *Practically Primary*, 4(2), 5–8
- Lyiscott, J. (2017). Racial identity and liberation literacies in the classroom. *The English Journal*, 106(4), 47-53.
- Lyiscott, J. (2018, May 23). *Why English class is silencing students of color*. [Video]. TEDxTheBenjaminSchool. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4dc1axRwE4>
- Lyons, D., & Scull, J. (2024). Critiquing narrative inquiry's epistemological pillars within a large-scale study into the teaching of phonics. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 47(2), 114-125.
- Marsh, J. (2016). The digital literacy skills and competences of children of pre- school age. *Media Education*, 7(2), 178– 195. doi: 10.14605/MED72160
- Marsh, J. (2018). Childhood in the digital age. In S. Powell & K. Smith (Eds.), *An introduction to early childhood studies* (4th ed., pp. 53– 64). London, UK: SAGE.
- Massumi, B. (2011). *Semblance and event: Activist philosophy and the occurrent arts*. MIT Press.
- Massumi, B. 2015. *Politics of affect*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Matusov, E., von Duyke, K., & Kayumova, S. (2015). Mapping concepts of agency in educational contexts. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 50(3), 420-446.
- McCarthy, S. J. (2002). *Students' identities and literacy learning*. Routledge.

- McIntosh, K., Peterson, N., Robbie., K., & Simonsen, B. (June, 2023). *Lesson plan: Co creating classroom expectations with students (elementary schools)*. Eugene, OR: Center on PBIS, University of Oregon.
- McKay, C. & Macomber, G. (2023). The importance of relationships in education: Reflections of current educators. *Journal of Education*, 203(4), 751-758.
- McKay-Semmler, K. & Semmler, S. (2013). The art of making conversation: Learning the skills of small talk. *Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal*, 40(1), 6.
- McKernan, J. A. (2013). The origins of critical theory in education: Fabian socialism as social reconstructionism in nineteenth-century Britain. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 61(4), 417-433. DOI: 10.1080/00071005.2013.824947
- Mejia, J. A., Revelo, R. A., Villanueva, I., & Mejia, J. (2018). Critical theoretical frameworks in engineering education: An anti-deficit and liberative approach. *Education Sciences*, 8(158), 1-13. doi:10.3390/educsci8040158
- Mepieza, R. Y. (2024).The power of ice breaker activity: Examining the impact of icebreakers on student participation and engagement in the classroom. *European Journal of Learning on History and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 22-36.
- Meretoja, H. (2019). *The ethics of storytelling: Narrative hermeneutics, history, and the possible*. Oxford University Press.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mertler, C.A. (2017). Action research: Improving schools and methodology: Themes, variations, and possibilities. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(6), 608-615.
- Meyer, B., Bergstorm, P., & Wiklund-Engblom, A. (2021). Sociomaterial entanglement in one-to one computing classrooms: exploring patterns of relations in teaching practices. *Education Inquiry*, 12(4), 347-364.
- Minsky, M. (2018). *The emotion machine: Commonsense thinking, artificial intelligence, and thefuture of the human mind*. Simon and Schuster.
- Mishler, E.G. (2004). Historians of the self: Restorying lives, revising identities. *Research in Human Development*, 1(1), 101–121. doi:10.1207/s15427617rhd0101&2_6
- Mohajan, H. K. (2020). Quantitative research: A successful investigation in natural and social sciences. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 9(4), 52-79.

- Molinari, L. & Grazia, V. (2023). Students' school climate perceptions: Do engagement and burnout matter? *Learning Environments Research*, 26(1), 1-18.
- Moje, E. B., & Luke, A. (2009). Literacy and identity: examining the metaphors in history and contemporary research. *International Reading Association*, 44(4), 415–437.
- Moore, D. (2025): Reading for ripples: A critical affective literacy tool for feeling with traumatic events in the classroom. *Changing English*, 1-10.
- Mousa, S. (2020). Building inclusion through intergroup contact: Experimental evidence from Iraqi displaced communities. *Science*. 69(6505), 866-870.
- Movchan, L. & Zarishniak, I. (2017). The role of elective courses in students' professional development: Foreign experience. *Comparative Professional Pedagogy* 7(2), 20-26.
- Mrema, D. (2023). Using narrative practices to support academic development in an after school program. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, (1), 16–24. <https://doi.org/10.4320/RQJF8949>
- Mulcahy, D. (2019). Pedagogic affect and its politics: Learning to affect and be affected in education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 40(1), 93-108.
- Murdock, E. (2016). *Multiculturalism, Identity and Difference: Experiences of culture contact*. Palgrave Macmillan. DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59679-6
- Muth, W. (2016). “A Big Circle of Unity” incarcerated fathers being-in-text. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 48(3), 317–345.
- Mwale, A., Whitlock, C., Boakye, N., & Julien, C. (2022). Using the Tree of Life in brain injury contexts: An invitation to accessible and culturally sensitive practices. In N. Boakye & A. Mwale (Eds.), *Systemic Approaches to Brain Injury Treatment*, 35-55, New York, Routledge.
- Myhill, D., Cremin, T., & Oliver, L. (2023). The impact of a changed writing environment on students' motivation to write. *Frontiers in Psychology* 14, 1212940, <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1212940/full>
- Ncube, N. (2006). The Tree of Life project: Using narrative ideas in work with vulnerable children in Southern Africa. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 2006(1), 3–16.

- Ncube, N., & Denborough, D. (2006). The Tree of Life: A review of the collective narrative approach. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1, 1-12.
- Ncube-Mlilo, N., & Denborough, D. (n.d.). Tree of Life: Psychosocial support tool based on narrative practices [Handbook]. *REPSSI (Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative)*. <https://www.repssi.org>
- Nembhard, I. M. & Edmondson, A. C. (2012). Psychological safety: A foundation for speaking up, collaboration, and experimentation in organizations. *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*, 491–504.
- New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60-92.
- Newman, A., Donohue, R., & Eva, N. (2017). Psychological safety: A systematic review of the literature. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27(3), 521–535. Doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.01.001. ISSN 1053-4822.
- Noddings, N. (2013). Care ethics and moral education. In *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd ed., pp. 1–29). University of California Press.
- OECD (2023), *Equity and inclusion in education: Finding strength through diversity*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e9072e21-en>.
- Onega, S. & Landa, J. (2014). *Narratology: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development. (2019). Skills matter: Additional results from the survey of adult skills, *OECD Skills Studies*. Retrieved July 03, 2022, from https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/publications/Skills_Matter_Additonal_Results_from_the_Survey_of_Adult_Skills_ENG.pdf
- Osterman, K.F. (2023). Teacher practice and students' sense of belonging. In: Lovat, T., Toomey, R., Clement, N., Dally, K. (Eds), *Second International Research Handbook on Values Education and Student Wellbeing*. Springer International Handbooks of Education. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24420-9_54
- Owu, A. (Director). (2021). *The Griot* [Film]. Nigeria: Goodness Emmanuel Productions.
- Özhan, M. B., & Yüksel, G. (2021). The effect of school burnout on academic achievement and well-being in high school students: A holistic model proposal. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 8(1), 145-162. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.824488>

- Pang, Z., Fu, Y., Lala, D., Ochi, K., Inoue, K., & Kawahara, T. (2023). Prediction of validating response from the emotional storytelling corpus. *The 37th Annual Conference of the Japanese Society for Artificial Intelligence*.
- Peel, A. (2017). Complicating canons: A critical literacy challenge to common core assessment. *Literacy*, 51(2), 104–110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12106>
- Pérez-Torres, V. (2024). Social media: a digital social mirror for identity development during adolescence. *Current Psychology* 43, 22170–22180.
- Perham, N., Hodgetts, H., & Banbury, S. (2013). Mental arithmetic and non-speech office noise: An exploration of interference-by-content. *Noise and Health*, 15(62), 73–78. <https://doi.org/10.4103/1463-1741.107160>
- Perry, J. C., Fisher, A. L., Caemmerer, J. M., Keith, T. Z. & Poklar, A. E. (2018). The role of social support and coping skills in promoting self-regulated learning among urban youth. *Youth & Society*, 50(4), 551–570.
- Pescatore, C. (2015). Developing critical literacy in a tenth grade English class. In B. Yoon & R. Sharif (Eds.), *Critical literacy practice: Applications of critical theory in diverse settings* (pp. 111-125). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-567-9>
- Philips, L. G. (1999). The role of storytelling in early literacy development. *Rattle*, 51. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234561370_The_Role_of_Storytelling_in_Early_Literacy_Development
- Povinelli, E. (2022). Affects after finitude. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 96(3), 545-565.
- Poulos, D., & Exley, B. (2018). Critical literacy for culturally diverse teenagers: “I’ve learned something that is actually useful”. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 62(3), 271–280. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.886>
- Prince, M. (2004). Does active learning work? A review of the research. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 93(3), 223–231. Doi: 10.1002/j.2168-9830.2004.tb00809.x
- Qu, S., & Dumay, J. (2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 8(3), 238-264. DOI 10.1108/11766091111162070
- Quadri, S. (2024). The conceptualization of critical literacy and its historical development. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, 15(1), 124–132.
- Qureshi, A. (2023). Engaging youths through visuals. *Arts-Based Interventions and Social Change in Europe*, 39-50.

- Radford, L. (2014). On the role of representations and artefacts in knowing and learning. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 85(3), 405-422.
- Ramsey-Soroghay, B. N. (2022). Community development in Nigeria: History, current strategies and its future as a social work method. *People Centred – The Journal of Development Administration*, 6(4), 133-141.
- Rands, M. L. & Gansemer-Topf, A. M. (2017). The room itself is active: How classroom design impacts student engagement. *Journal of Learning Spaces*, 6(1), 26-33.
- Rhodes, R. J. (2019). Personal story sharing as an engagement strategy to promote student learning. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 16(1).
- Rice, J. (2008) The new 'new': Making a case for critical affect studies. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 94(2): 200–212.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage.
- Rime, B. (2007). The social sharing of emotion is an interface between individual and collective processes in the construction of emotional climates. *Journal of Social Issues*, 63(2), 307-322.
- Robin, B. R. (2016). The power of digital storytelling to support teaching and learning. *Digital Education Review*, 30. <http://greav.ub.edu/der/>
- Roeser, R.W., Peck, S.C., & Nasir, N.S. (2006). Self and identity processes in school motivation, learning, and achievement. In P. Alexander & P.H. Winne (Eds.), *Handbook of educational psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 391–424). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Rogers, R., & Labadie, M. (2015). Critical literacy in a kindergarten classroom: An examination of social action. In B. Yoon & R. Sharif (Eds.), *Critical literacy practice: Applications of critical theory in diverse settings* (pp. 23-40). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-567-9>
- Rogers, R. & Mosley, M. (2006). Racial literacy in a second-grade classroom: Critical race theory, whiteness studies, and literacy research. *International Literacy Association*, 41(4), 462-495.
- Rowley, J., Rajbans, T., & Markland, B. (2020). Supporting parents through a narrative therapeutic group approach: A participatory research project. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 36(2), 115-132.
- Rutherford, D. (2016). Affect theory and the empirical. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 45(1), 285-300.

- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Salisu, A. & Ransom, E. (2014). The role of modeling towards impacting quality education. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 32, 54-61.
- Sanders, M. (2013). Classroom design and student engagement. *Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting*, 57, 496. DOI: 10.1177/1541931213571107
- Sanders-Bustle, L., & Lalik, R. (2017). Writings on the wall: Nurturing critical literacy through a community-based design project. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 61(1), 65–73. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.641>
- Santoro, N. & Forghani-Arani, N. (2015). Interrogating practice in culturally diverse classrooms: what can an analysis of student resistance and teacher response reveal? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(1), 58-70.
- Sato, C. (2004). Rethinking adult literacy training: An analysis through a third world feminist perspective. *Women and Literacy: Moving to Power and Participation*, 32(1/2), 73-89.
- Scacco, A., & Warren, S. S. (2018). Can social contact reduce prejudice and discrimination? Evidence from a field experiment in Nigeria. *American Political Science Review*, 112(3), 654-677.
- Schleppegrell, M., & Moore, J. (2018). Linguistic tools for supporting emergent critical language awareness in the elementary school. In Harman, R. (Ed.), *Bilingual learners and social equity: Critical approaches to systematic functional linguistics* (Vol. 33, Issue 1, pp. 23-44). Springer. <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-60953-9>
- Schibler, K., Hahn, L. & Green, M. (2024). Investigating responses to narrative cliffhangers using affective disposition theory. *Media Psychology* 27(1), 1-25.
- Scholes, L., & Stahl, G. (2022). Reading is complex: Implications for research and practice. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 45(2), 107–120
- Seah, L. H., Tan, A. L., & Adams, J. (2022). Developing content teachers' language awareness through practitioner-researcher inquiry into student writing. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 119, 103858.
- Sedgwick, E. (2003). *Touching feeling: Affect, pedagogy, performativity*. Durham : Duke University Press.

- Sedova, K. & Navrátilová, J. (2020). Silent students and the patterns of their participation in classroom talk. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 29(1), 1-36.
- Seigworth, G. J., & Gregg, M. (Eds.). (2010). *The affect theory reader*. Duke University Press.
- Senehi, J. (2002). Constructive storytelling: A peace process. *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 9(2), Article 3. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/pcs/vol9/iss2/3>
- Sfard, A., & Prusak, A. (2005). Telling identities: In search of an analytic tool for investigating learning as a culturally shaped activity. *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), 14–22. doi:10.3102/0013189X034004014
- Siefkes, M. (2012). The Semantics of Artefacts. How We Give Meaning to the Things We Produce and Use. *Zeitschrift für interdisziplinäre Bildwissenschaft*, 8(2), 67-102.
- Siegel, D. J. (2020). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. Guilford Press.
- Simmons, A. M. (2018). Student use of SFL resources on fantasy, canonical, and non fiction texts: Critical literacy in the high school ELA classroom. In Harman, R. (Ed.), *Bilingual learners and social equity: Critical approaches to systematic functional linguistics* (Vol. 33, Issue 1, pp. 71-90). Springer. <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-60953-9>
- Slingerland, G., Kooijman, J., Lukosch, S., Comes, T., & Brazier, F. (2021). The power of stories: A framework to orchestrate reflection in urban storytelling to form stronger communities. *Community Development*, 54(1), 18-37.
- Smith, D. & Shortt, J. (2003). *The bible and the task of teaching*. Nottingham: The Stapleford Centre.
- Sobe, N. (2012). Researching emotion and affect in the history of education. *History of Education*, 41(5), 689-695.
- Solomon, R. C. (2007). *True to our feelings: What our emotions are really telling us*. Oxford University Press.
- Stefanidou, C., & Skordoulis, C. (2014). Subjectivity and Objectivity in Science: An Educational Approach. *Advances in Historical Studies*, 3(4), 10.4236/ahs.2014.34016.
- Stein, N. L. (1982). The definition of a story. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 6(6), 487-507.

- Stevens, L., & Bean, T. (2007). *Critical literacy: Context, research, and practice in the K-12 classroom*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Tavares, V. (2019). A review of peer interaction and second language learning for ELL students in academic contexts. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, 10(2), 113-121.
- Thiel, J. (2015). Shrinking in, spilling out, and living through: Affective energies as multimodal literacies. In G. Enriquez, E. Johnson, S. Kontovourki & C. Mallozzi (Eds.), *Literacies, learning, and the body: Putting theory and research into pedagogical practice* (pp. 90–104). New York: Routledge.
- Thompson, L. & Clay, T. (2008). Critical literacy and the geography classroom: Including gender and feminist perspectives. *New Zealand Geographer*, 64(3), p. 228-233.
- Thompson, W. F., Schellenberg, E. G., & Letnic, A. K. (2011). Fast and loud background music disrupts reading comprehension. *Psychology of Music*, 40(6), 700–708. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735611400173>
- Treadway, D., Yang, H., Yang, J., Duke, A., & Bentley, J. (2021). Strategic silencing: A political perspective on the workplace bully–bystander relationship. *Special Topics and Particular Occupations, Professions and Sectors*, 55-74.
- Tribble, E. B. (2017). Affective contagion on the early modern stage. In A. Bailey & M. DiGangi (Eds.), *Affect theory and early modern texts: Politics, ecologies, and form* (pp. 195–212). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Truran, W. J. (2022). Affect theory. In C. H. Patrick, J. I. Bradley & P. H. Lalita (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Emotion*, (pp. 26 – 37). Routledge.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Retrieved from https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-7-2015-eng.pdf
- Turner, J. R., Allen, J., Hawamdeh, S., & Mastanamma, G. (2023). The multifaceted sensemaking theory: A systematic literature review and content analysis on sensemaking. *Systems*, 11(3), 145.
- Turrill, E. A. (2008). Hey... you in the green! Knowing the names of your students for classroom management. *Journal*, 29(4), 5-6.
- Twiss, T., & Bingham, G. E. (2023). Positioning readers through books: Interrogating representation and power in children's literature. *Reading Horizons*, 62(1), Article 4.

- UNESCO. (2017). *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254>
- UNESCO. (2018). *International Literacy Day 2018: Literacy and skills development*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366322>
- Vallely, N. (2019). (Non-)Belief in things: Affect theory and a new literary materialism. In S. Ahern (ed.), *Affect Theory and Literary Critical Practice: A Feel for the Text*, (pp. 45-63). Palgrave Studies in Affect Theory and Literary Criticism.
- Valsiner, J. (2007). *Locating the self ... looking for the impossible? Or maybe the impossible is the only possibility*. Presentation at the Conference: Culturalization of the Self, Chemnitz, 1 December 2007.
- Van de Ven, A. (2015). Education between artefact and text. *Agora*, 50(3), 28-36.
- Van Dijk, L. A. & Jochems, W. M. (2002). Changing a traditional lecturing approach into an interactive approach: Effects of interrupting the monologue in lectures. *International Journal of Engaging Education*, 18(3), 275-284.
- Vasquez, V. (2017). Critical literacy. *Oxford Research Encyclopedias of Education*. Retrieved April 17, 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.20>
- Vasquez, V., Albers, P. & Harste, J. (2013). Digital Media, Critical Literacy, and the Everyday. In *Reclaiming writing: composing spaces for identities, relationships and action*, (eds Meyer, R. & Whitmore, K.) pp. 214-227.
- Vasquez, V., Janks, H., & Comber, B. (2019). Critical literacy as a way of being and doing. *Language Arts*, 96(5), 300-311.
- Vaughan-Lee, C. (2019). The Power of Immersive Storytelling: A tool for transformative learning. *Childhood Education*, 95(3), 23-31.
- Vogler, G. (2021). Bridging the gap between affect and reason: On thinking-feeling in politics. *Journal of Social Theory*, 22(3), 259-276.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1986). *Thought and language* (A. Kozulin, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1934)
- Wagner, C. J. (2023). Toward a shared conception of children's content area identities in literacy, math, and science: A systematic integrative review. *Review of Educational Research*, 94(3), 343-375.

- Wargo, J. (2019). Sounding the garden, voicing a problem: Mobilizing critical literacy through personal digital inquiry with young children. *Language Arts*, 96(5), 275-285.
- Waylan, R. L., Scott, L. W., Mone, M. A., & Winkel, D. E. (2013). Work and school at the same time? A conflict perspective of the work–school interface. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 20(3) 346–357.
- Wells, K. (2011). *Narrative inquiry*. Oxford University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1999). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wentling, T. (2024). Critical pedagogy: Disrupting classroom hegemony. In A. Darder, K. Hernandez, K. D. Lam, & M. Baltodano (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (4th ed., pp. 324-331). Routledge.
- Westby, C. (2010). Multiliteracies: The changing world of communication. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 30(1), 64-71.
- White, J. W. (2011). Resistance to classroom participation: Minority students, academic discourse, cultural conflicts, and issues of representation in whole-class discussions. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 10(4), 250-265.
- Wigfield, A., & Ecclestone, K. (2000). Expectancy-value theory of motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 68-81.
- Williams, M. K. (2017). John Dewey in the 21st century. *Journal of Inquiry & Action in Education*, 9(1), 91-102.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Wirz, D., Ort, A., Rasch, B., & Fahr, A. (2023). The role of cliffhangers in serial entertainment: An experiment on cliffhangers' effects on enjoyment, arousal, and intention to continue watching. *Psychology of Popular Media*, 12(2), 186.
- Wong, G. (2014). Research Questions. In V. Wright-St Clair, D. Reid, S. Shaw & J. Ramsbotham (Eds.), *Evidence-based Health Practice*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Wong, X., Gobbo, F., & Lane, M. (2010). Turning Time from Enemy into an Ally Using the Pomodoro Technique. In D. Šmite, N. Moe, P. Ågerfalk (Eds.), *Agility Across Time and Space: Implementing Agile Methods in Global Software Projects*. Springer.

- Wright, K., Hodges, T., Dismuke, S., & Boedeker, P. (2020). Writing motivation and middle school: An examination of changes in students' motivation for writing. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 59(2), 148-168.
- Yoon, B. (2016). *Critical literacies global and multicultural perspectives*. Springer. DOI 10.1007/978-981-287-943-1
- Yoon, B., & Sharif, R. (2015). History of critical literacy through the various theoretical frameworks. In B. Yoon & R. Sharif (Eds.), *Critical literacy practice: Applications of critical theory in diverse settings* (pp. 9-19). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-567-9>
- Young, S. L. B. (2018). From situated privilege to dis/abilities: Developing critical literacies across social issues. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 61(5), 501–509. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.720>
- Zech, E., Rimé, B., & Nils, F. (2004). Social sharing of emotion, emotional recovery, and interpersonal aspects. In: P. Philippot and R. Feldman, *The Regulation of Emotion* (pp. 157 - 185), Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: New York. <http://hdl.handle.net/2078.1/92729>
- Zembylas, M. (2007). Emotional capital and education: Theoretical insights from Bourdieu. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 55(4), 443–463.
- Zembylas, M. (2016). Affect theory and Judith Butler: Methodological implications for educational research. In M. Zembylas & P. Schutz (Eds). *Methodological advances in research on emotion and education*, 203-214.
- Zembylas, M. (2021). *The affective turn in educational theory*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education.
- Zembylas, M. (2024). Revisiting the notion of critical thinking in higher education: theorizing the thinking-feeling entanglement using affect theory. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 29(6), 1606-1620.
- Zommer, Y., & Morpurgo, M. (2024). *My heart was a tree: Poems and stories to celebrate trees*. Two Hoots.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter to the Community Program Management

Salmah Quadri,
Principal Investigator,
University of Manitoba,
Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Sr. Manager of Community Impact and Engagement,

Dear (staff name),

I, Salmah Quadri, a Ph.D. in Education candidate at the University of Manitoba, am presently conducting a study entitled "CRITICAL LITERACY STORIES UNTOLD: EXPLORING STUDENTS' IDENTITIES IN AN OUT-OF-SCHOOL CONTEXT" as part of the requirements of the program. In this regard, I am hoping to get your approval to conduct the data gathering and collection for my study during the winter program 2024. The program would include the Aspire students and their mentor. The goals of my study fit very well with the learning and inquiry activities promoted by the community program.

My plan is to gather data throughout the six weeks of the winter program (six weeks), where I will be meeting with the students and the mentor for one hour per week. I have designed an academy titled "Tell Your Story" for participants to be engaged in the winter experience. I am asking your help to facilitate the recruitment of parents and students for my study. I would like you to include the information and consent information for my study in the community program's registration packages. We can discuss the best way to do this.

It is important to note that the students (participants) do not need to do anything above and beyond the Tell Your Story Academy – all I will be doing is observing them (taking my own notes) and analyzing their journals for my research – but the activities they will do as part of the program will be the same as all the other students that choose to take part in this Academy.

However, participation in this study is entirely voluntary, parents/students may withdraw at any time without penalty, and all the information provided will be kept in utmost confidentiality and will be used only for academic purposes.

Please see the attached Consent Form for more details about my study. If there are any concerns, please feel free to contact me on my cell phone at XXX or via email at XXX My academic advisor can also be contacted via email at XXX

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.

Yours faithfully,

Salmah Quadri

Appendix 2: Tell Your Story Lesson Plan

Overview

Who we are and how we relate to the world around us depends on our identities, which come out of our lived stories and experiences. Understanding every part of our past, present, and future might give us insight into who we are and who we hope to become. We don't even always recognize our important stories or how we were feeling or making sense of things at a particular time until much later. Knowing the roots of our emotions and reactions can help us move forward as better versions of ourselves. "Tell Your Story" academy aims to unpack the stories that shape us, using a simple text we might be attached to. Therefore, we will focus on the "Tree of Life" activity to enable us to tell our stories and ambitions in a fun but subtle manner. At the program's end, students collectively would have created a forest of life, stating their hopes for the future.

Goals

The goals of this program are to:

1. Encourage students' autonomy and agency.
2. Build on participants' strengths.
3. Create a space to make a positive difference individually and/or collectively.
4. Foster the importance of how identity and experience impact our learning.
5. Develop self-worth to work towards a greater ambition.

Specifications

Meetings will be held once a week for six weeks. In the first week, we would start by building positive relationships amongst ourselves. This is important in creating a safe space for everyone. On the second day, we would move further to listening to and telling some stories about trees and further discussing what we think of them. This would serve as a scaffold for the following week's activity. On the third and fourth days, we would spend our time doing the "Tree of Life" activity, where each student will draw their individual trees. Students would be given some prompts to help them in filling up their trees. On the fifth day, students would be asked to bring any text of their choice to explore in groups how and why the text is important to them. This text would be attached to their tree. On the sixth day, we would together form a "Forest of Life" and students would reflect on the challenges trees face and move from that to considering the challenges young people face. Finally, from their reflections, we would create a collective document we can call ours.

Materials: Paper rolls, paints, painting brushes, markers, flip charts, journals, pencils, and colored pens

Weekly/Daily Activities

Day 1: Introduction and Building Relationships (2 hour)

Activity 1: Tell us a story about your name.

This activity would help us learn about our lived experiences and culture and aid the remembrance of each other's names through our stories.

Icebreaker: Facts about me

We would share a unique fact about ourselves and make a humorous confession.

Storytellers' rules: We would generate some ground rules, which might include – being curious, being respectful, listening, taking turns, avoiding judgment, and understanding that everything shared is confidential. These rules will be used throughout the program.

Icebreaker: Once upon a time...

Someone starts a story with “once upon a time” and everyone begins to add lines to the story.

Activity 2: Listening to and telling stories about trees

Prompts to think about when discussing stories about trees:

1. What does a tree mean to you?
2. What has been your experiences of trees?
3. Is there a particular tree that has stood out to you, and why?

Day 2 & 3: Doing the Tree of Life (2 hour)

Activity: When I was a child...[my experience, briefly]. I will ask the students the following questions: Do you like trees? What kind of trees?

Next, students will bring out their drawing materials and draw their trees. They should note that their trees need to have roots, ground, trunk, branches, leaves, and fruits.

As they draw, they might reflect on the prompts below to fill up the parts of their trees.

Roots may mean:

History, Ancestors, Family name

Origins, Spirituality, Lineage

Where you're from, Music, Grandparents

Countries where family came from, Language

Name of ancestors, Drum symbolizing spiritual practice

Hard times, things parents went through, Healing practices

Can do roots last if you aren't sure what to put here.

What grounds you if not your root?

Ground: Where we live, and what we do each day

E.g., Go to school | Ride the bus

Trunk: Our skills. What are you good at?

E.g., I'm a good friend | I can skip

What do your friends think you do well?

Things you enjoy... Things you take pride in...

E.g., Singing | Football

Is there a story for each skill? What is the history of the skill?

Branches: What are your hopes and dreams?

These might be big and specific dreams even if unattainable in a lifetime.

E.g., No more war | To be a professional hockey player

What is the history of this dream or wish?

How do manage to hold onto this dream or wish?

Where did it come from?

Leaves: The leaves represent people and significant figures in your life. They may be alive or no longer alive.

Did you have a good time with this person?

What was special about this person?

Would this person like it if you remembered them and put them on this tree?

What are some ways of honoring this person?

People on the roots and on the leaves may not be real people.

Fruits: Gifts that you have been given

E.g., Love | iPod | School uniform | Courage | Food | Books | Kindness

Hugs | Comfort

Or, even: Birds | Flowers | Sun | Clouds

Fruits may also be the ways that you have contributed to your family and community.

Note: This activity is for fun and to learn something different about yourselves.

Day 4 – Sharing Your Stories (2 hour)

Students will bring any text of their choice for this session (a book, music, a drawing, a newspaper clip, a movie scene, a picture, a letter, a message, etc.)

Activity: They would attach their favourite parts of the texts to their trees.

Students would be grouped to discuss the importance of their text to the tree.

Prompts

- Why are you attracted to the text?
- How did you come across the text and when?
- What do you love most about the text?
- What motivating theme did you get from the text or what inspires you in the text?

- How do you feel when you view the text?
- How does the text connect to the stories on your tree?

Day 5: Forest of Life (2 hour)

Icebreaker: Emotions wheel

Everyone would be asked to place a dot on whichever part of the emotion wheel best represents their feelings.

Activity: We will put all the individual trees together in one area that creates a forest experience, with an understanding that the trees are part of something bigger.

Afterwards, they will be encouraged to share their thoughts on the following prompts:

- What are some shared experiences?
- What are some of the dangers and difficulties that forests face?
E.g., Fire | Lightning | Wind | Beetles | Deforestation | Dutch Elm disease | Cold | Clear-cutting | Flood | Bugs
- When these things happen, is it the tree's fault?
- What are some of the storms of life?
- What are some of the dangers any child faces? (Collective not individual question)
- What are some of the effects of these dangers on children's lives? (Naming, collective)
- What does the forest do to respond and protect themselves from hardships?
E.g., Trees bend | Reseed and overpopulate.
- When the storms come, what do the animals do?
E.g., Hide | Protect young | Run.
- How do children respond to the storms of life? (Ideas documented)
- How do children contribute to the passing of someone else's storm or to other people's happiness?

Next, students would be asked to take some time to write in detail about how they get through hard times. We would create a collective document/text from their write-ups, in the form of poetry that can be added to the forest.

Appendix 3: Mentors' Interview Protocol

Preamble

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. You have been asked to participate in this interview as part of a research project conducted by me, Salmah Quadri, a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba.

The research project is titled "Critical Literacy Stories Untold: Exploring Students' Identities in an Out-of-School Context". The study is designed to observe and analyze how students' identities and experiences inform learning. You are being asked to participate in this because you would be serving as a mentor to students registered in the Tell Your Story Academy that I have designed. Your opinions about your experiences and learning would be valuable for my research. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, I am interested in your thoughts and experience with regards to critical literacy.

Your responses in this interview are entirely voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any or all of the questions in this interview. I expect that the interview will last approximately one hour, depending on how much information you would like to share. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview because I do not want to miss any of your comments. All responses will be kept confidential. This means that only your unidentifiable interview responses will be shared with my advisor, Dr. Charlotte Enns and that any information I include in the analysis of the interview responses will not identify you as the respondent.

If you wish to withdraw from the study for any reason, you can do so at any time by informing me via email at XXX or my advisor, Dr. Charlotte Enns, via email at XXX

After the interview, I will transcribe the audio recording files to the written forms. Immediately after the transcriptions are done, I will send you the documents for your review, so you can delete any information you would not want to be included in the study. You will have two weeks to review your responses and send them back to me via email. If you do not get back to me after two weeks, I will assume you are content with the information in the transcripts and will move ahead to analyze the data.

I have received your signed Consent Form – do you still agree to participate in this interview? Do you have any questions about the information on the Consent Form before we begin?

Interview Questions

Before the Activities

1. What kind of student are you and what is your area of specialization?

Follow-up questions:

Do you have specific learning strategies?

How do you describe your learning style?

2. How would you like to teach?

Follow-up questions:

How did the course align with your thoughts on teaching?

What did you enjoy most about the course?

What would you like to adjust about how the course was delivered?

3. What is your greatest challenge as a student?

Follow-up question:

What possible strategies can be employed to keep you highly motivated to learn?

4. Was there a time when you linked classroom discussions with your own experiences?

Follow-up questions:

Describe that instance.

How do you feel talking about your personal experiences in class?

Did relating your experiences with class content help you comprehend better?

5. Let's talk about a time when you had to direct your learning.

Follow-up questions:

How did you go about it?

Did you consider a scenario you have experienced outside a formal setting?

6. Do you think your identity is evident in your work?

Follow-up questions:

When you write some assignments, do you cite your experiences as an example?

Asides from schoolwork, is your identity/who you are as a person reflected in other things you do?

After the Activities

1. What was the Tree of Life process like for you?

Follow-up questions:

What aspect did you enjoy most?

Is there something you would have done better?

Did the process help you reflect better on who you are and who you hope to be?

2. Will you be comfortable having your future students talk about themselves in relation to classroom content?

Follow-up question:

How would you try to incorporate the Tree of Life exercise in your future teaching?

3. Do you think the students enjoyed retelling their stories?

Follow-up questions:

Did you notice any changes in the students before and after the program?

In your opinion, were the students able to see themselves in the texts they chose?

4. Before we conclude this interview, is there anything else you will like to share?

General questions:

What do you mean by...?

Tell me more about....

Can you provide an example of...?

Wrap-up

Is there anything else that I have not asked you about your thoughts and experiences on critical literacy that you think would be important to share? If I have additional questions or would like to clarify something, can I reach out to you? I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on critical literacy with me.

Appendix 4: Assent Form



**University of Manitoba
Faculty of Education
Student Assent Form**

Study title: Critical Literacy Stories Untold: Exploring Students' Identities in an Out-of-School Context

Investigator: Salmah Quadri

Why you are here?

My name is Salmah. I am a student at the University of Manitoba and I am interested in studying storytelling. I want to involve you in some storytelling activities, where you will be able to share your experiences with other students. I want to see if you would learn better when you tell your stories to others. This form tells you about the study. If there is anything you do not understand, please ask your parent, your guardian, or me.

Why am I doing this study?

I want to learn more about how students' identities (who they are and what they believe) help them learn.

What will happen to you?

My study is part of the six-week winter program 2024. You have selected the Tell Your Story Academy, which I designed for this study and will include the following activities:

1. You will be engaged in reading, storytelling, writing, and drawing activities to talk about your stories once a week for one hour.
2. You will be in a community of storytellers and will share your experiences with others.
3. You will engage in a drawing activity, where you will be asked to draw a tree of life (this will be explained later in more detail). This drawing is important to make a connection between a text on trees I will be reading to you and your experiences.
4. Then, you will bring any text (book, poem, website, etc.) you are attached to and share why you love it.

If you want to be in the study, you will do all the activities mentioned above and the following things will also happen:

5. As you discuss with your peers, I will pop in to observe and listen to you talk. As you talk, I will write what sticks out to me in my journal.
6. During the activities, you may journal your thoughts and feelings in a notepad. After the end of the Tell Your Story Academy, you will be given three weeks to view your journals with your parents or any adult that you trust to remove any information you

are not comfortable with before you finally submit it to me. I will scan your journals and use it to see how your experiences and identities have helped you learn.

7. When you pick your own text, I will ask you to submit the text for me to make a scanned copy of it. The copies I make will be used to explain how your love for the text makes you feel about learning.

During the program, I will engage you in a series of class discussions, which would aid your reading, writing, and drawing processes. Again, as you discuss with your peers, I will write some important things I hear you say, which would serve as part of the data that will assist me in knowing how you learn. Being in my study does not mean that you will do any different activities than other students in the Tell Your Story Academy. It just means that I will write down some of the things you say, and scan and keep copies of some of your writing and drawing.

Will the study hurt?

You will be asked to share your personal experiences during the program if you are comfortable doing so. If you do not want to disclose any information, you don't have to share it.

What will you get if you are in the study?

By participating in the Tell Your Story Academy, which I have designed specifically for the purpose of this study, you can improve your critical literacy skills, which means you will have a better understanding of stories and other people's feelings and beliefs. Also, you will be able to share your experiences and stories, which may give you the power to make positive changes in yourself and society. You will get all these things by being part of the Tell Your Story Academy, even if you decide not to be in my study.

What if you have any questions?

You can ask questions any time, now or later. You can talk to me, Salmah, by cell at ____.

Who will know what I did in the study? (Confidentiality and Anonymity)

Any confidential information you give to me will be kept private (or secret). Your name will not be on any study papers and no one but me will know that it was you who was in the study.

Do you have to be in the study?

To participate in this research, both you and your parent/guardian have to agree and give written consent (sign these forms). The consent will not be complete if either of you does not sign. However, you do not have to be in the study. No one will be mad at you if you don't want to do this. If you don't want to be in this study, just say so. We will also ask your parents if they would like you to be in the study. Even if your parents want you to be in the study you can still say no. Also, you can participate in the Tell Your Story Academy without participating in the study.

Even if you say yes now you can change your mind later. It's up to you.

What can I do if I am no longer interested in participating in the study?

If you do not wish to participate in the study after giving your consent at the beginning, you can opt-out anytime. You, or your parents, can simply tell me you are no longer interested in participating in the study by calling me at XXX or sending me an email at XXX.

Do you have any questions?

What questions do you have?

Assent

I want to take part in this study. I know I can change my mind at any time.

_____ **Verbal assent given** Yes ☐

Print the name of the child

Written assent if the child chooses to sign the assent.

Signature of Child

Age

Date

I confirm that I have explained the study to the participant to the extent compatible with the participant's understanding and that the participant has agreed to be in the study.

**Printed name of
person obtaining assent**

**Signature of
person obtaining assent**

Date

Appendix 5: Parents' Consent Form



**University of Manitoba
Faculty of Education
Consent Form – Parents/Guardians**

Research Project Title: Critical Literacy Stories Untold: Exploring Students' Identities in an Out-of-School Context

Principal Investigator and contact information: Salmah Quadri (XXX)

Principal Investigator Department: Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology

Research Supervisor (if applicable) and contact information: Dr. Charlotte Enns (XXX)

Research Supervisor's Rank: Professor

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

A Brief Description of the Purpose of the Research

I am a Ph.D. student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am studying how grade 7-9 students enrolled in the Tell Your Story Academy (that I have designed) can be empowered or critically literate regardless of their various identities and experiences.

- Critical literacy involves looking beyond what authors want their readers to see. It involves reading texts to find biases in them. However, the way we interpret texts is sometimes subject to our experiences of the world, or what researchers refer to as different identities (for example, cultural and racial differences).
- I will facilitate a series of critical literacy activities as part of the six-week winter program with a group of 10 - 15 middle years students. An undergraduate student may also be assigned to serve as a mentor for the group.
- I want to see if the students' learning is a function of their identity and experiences. If so, in what way (what kind of identities), and also if learning leads to action.
- Also, to avoid the traditional form of teaching where students are viewed as empty containers to be filled with knowledge, this study employs Participatory Action Research as its method, giving students autonomy for their learning, while I act as a facilitator and also a participant in the study.

Participants Selection

The community program has consented to this research being conducted, therefore, the program organizers has reached out to you (the parents of students who have enrolled in the Tell Your Story Academy) via email, including a link with the recruitment information (this consent form and an assent form for the student to sign). I am seeking your consent on behalf of your child to participate in the study. Your child's assent is also required for full consent to participate in the study. If you choose to allow your child to participate in my study, and your child also agrees, the signed consent/assent forms should be sent to my university email which is password-protected.

Procedures Involving the Participant: Their Nature, Frequency, Duration, and the Total Time Involved

I am asking you to allow your child to participate in my study which is part of the winter program. This will involve participating in a series (six weekly sessions – once a week for one hour) of critical literacy activities. These activities would involve reading a text on trees to students while they reflect on important points and make notes in their journals. Also, students will be invited to draw a tree of life, which might show the connections between their reflections and their experiences. Next, students would be asked to bring in any text of their choice, which might be in the form of short stories, magazines, music, pictures or paintings to further connect what they love to what they learn. Lastly, as a collective, we would come up with a poem that will include various parts that must have been decided by the students. In between these activities, students will be invited to discuss in group about their thoughts, so that they can also learn from one another.

As students discuss, I will move around the groups to listen and observe how students interact. I will write down what I hear, including paraphrases of what students say. My notes will also contain a description of the settings and the materials that students are using. Specifically, students will be asked about what inspires them and what they hope to improve on in learning. My observations of their responses will be handwritten in my journal notes.

Also, students will share their journals with me after the winter program is completed and after they have had three weeks to review their journals with their parents or any adult they trust so that they can remove any information they do not want to share or include in the study before submitting.

I want to emphasize that your child's participation in this study will not involve any extra time outside of the regular sessions and they will be doing the same activities as all the other students. I will just be keeping notes and studying their journal as part of my study.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

All the information I collect will be kept confidential and I will not share any private or identifying information about your child to anyone aside from my academic advisor. I will not use their real name in any of my notes or writing. This study is being completed as part of a doctoral program, therefore, information shared by participants will be discussed with my advisor and my committee. The signed consent/assent forms (which must be sent to my personal email), data from participants' journals, and any artifact brought by students in

relation to the study will be scanned electronically and saved in my U of M OneDrive - the password-protected, dual authentication, cloud storage platform that is hosted by the University of Manitoba. This study will take the following steps:

- a) Collect consent forms through UM password-protected email and store them on OneDrive;
- b) Include the critical literacy activities as described above;
- c) Store all data gathered in my U of M OneDrive (including scanned pages of my journal and the students' journals). All hard copies of notes will be shredded and disposed of and all electronic data will be permanently deleted after five years of the completion of the study;
- d) Research dissemination – I will publish my thesis and may present/publish information about my study in academic journals or conferences.

Direct Benefit to the Participant

Your child may benefit from participating in the Tell Your Story Academy that I designed because literacy is an important and compulsory subject in schools. The techniques learned can be transferred to their actual classroom learning and in life in the long run. They will improve their critical literacy skills and understanding. Additionally, participants will have the opportunity to develop voice and agency as they view and understand the power of multiple perspectives in relation to ideas, feelings, and texts. These are the benefits of participating in the Tell Your Story Academy. There are no additional direct benefits to participating in my research study; however, the information I learn from your child may help to improve literacy teaching for future teachers.

Potential Risk to the participant:

This research poses minimal risks to your child, no more than what they might experience in normal everyday life. Participants in the study are not being asked to do anything different than other students who have applied for the Tell Your Story Academy that I have designed. The students registered for the Tell Your Story Academy, including those who have chosen to participate in the study will be asked to share their personal experiences during the program; however, to reduce or eliminate risks, your child will be given the option of choosing what they want to share with me and their peers.

How the participant may withdraw from the research, without negative consequences.

If you, or your child, are no longer interested in participating in the study you can inform me personally or my academic advisor. Participants may withdraw from the study without consequence or prejudice at any time. Hence, I will immediately delete every file and it will not be included in the analysis. After the second week of the program (approximately 01/24), the data already collected will be incorporated into study field notes and cannot be removed, but no new data will be included. Participants can remain in the Tell Your Story Academy, and their experience in the academy will not be impacted by their withdrawal.

Possible Disclosure

Although this is not the focus of my research and I do not expect this, if your child/ward discloses any abuse, I am obligated to report it to Child and Family Services.

Debriefing/Study Summary

At the end of the six-week program, I will have a discussion with all the students in the study about the things that we learned from their writing and experiences in the program. I will also explain how information obtained from them would be used. These will be part of the preliminary findings.

If you would like a written summary of the findings of my study, please include your e-mail address at the end of this consent form. You can expect this summary after my final defence. (approximately 05/25)

Research Results

The results of this research will be disseminated firstly to my advisory committee for review and then through the UM library in my published thesis. I may also share some of the information in academic presentations or journal publications.

All confidential data (consent forms, field notes, journals) will be destroyed after five years of the completion of the study and my final defence.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Officer at 204-474-7122 or HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature: Salmah Quadri Date: _____

Email (to receive Research Summary): _____

Appendix 6: Letter to Parents



University of Manitoba
Faculty of Education

Salmah Quadri,
Principal Investigator,
Faculty of Education,
University of Manitoba,
Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I, Salmah Quadri, a PhD in Education candidate at the University of Manitoba, am presently conducting a study entitled "CRITICAL LITERACY STORIES UNTOLD: EXPLORING STUDENTS' IDENTITIES IN AN OUT-OF-SCHOOL CONTEXT" as part of the requirements of the program. The purpose of this study is to empower students to understand texts (including books, songs, paintings, drawings, etc.) based on their identities and experiences. The main point is for students to understand that all their experiences help them learn.

I have designed an academy titled "Tell Your Story" as part of the winter experience, where students will be engaged in a series of critical literacy activities that I will be facilitating. You are receiving this letter because you have registered your child/ward for the winter program 2024. Hence, I am asking you to allow your child to participate in my research study. The goals of my study fit very well with the learning activities promoted by the community programs. I will lead the Tell Your Story Academy and conduct my study simultaneously. I will be collecting information(data) for my study for the full winter program (six weeks) during the weekly, one-hour Tell Your Story Academy sessions with the students. The implications for students participating in the Academy and this study are that students will have insights into a transformational form of education that includes their experiences and points of view. Also, because literacy is an important and compulsory subject in school, students can transfer the techniques learned to actual classroom learning, which can also be invaluable in life in the long run. To be part of my study, your child does not need to do anything above and beyond the Tell Your Story Academy – all I will be doing is observing them (taking my own notes) and analyzing their journals for my research – but the activities they will do as part of the program will be the same as all the other students that choose to take part in this Academy. During the observation and analysis process, I will be looking for comments or information that help me understand how students connect their personal experiences with general topics or discussions. For example, if the topic is about cooking, I will observe their discussions about any experiences they have had concerning the topic.

However, participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you or your child would be free to withdraw at any time without penalty, and all the information provided will be kept in utmost confidentiality and will be used only for academic purposes.

If you would like your child to be part of my study, you must complete the Consent Form attached, in addition to selecting the 'Tell Your Story Academy' during the winter 2024 application process. There is also an Assent Form for your child to sign to let me know that they agree to participate. Both of these forms must be completed, signed and returned directly to me (by email: (XXX)).

Please see the attached Consent Form for more details about my study. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me on my cell phone at XXX or via email at XXX. My academic advisor, Dr. Charlotte Enns, a Professor in the Faculty of Education, can also be contacted via email at: XXX.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request and this opportunity for your child.

Yours faithfully,

Salmah Quadri

Appendix 7: Mentors' Consent Form



**University of Manitoba
Faculty of Education
Consent Form – Mentor**

Research Project Title: Critical Literacy Stories Untold: Exploring Students' Identities in an Out-of-School Context

Principal Investigator and contact information: Salmah Quadri (XXX)

Principal Investigator Department: Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology

Research Supervisor (if applicable) and contact information: Dr. Charlotte Enns (XXX)

Research Supervisor's Rank: Professor

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

A Brief Description of the Purpose of the Research

I am a Ph.D. student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. The purpose of this participatory action research is to find out how grade 7-9 students who would be enrolled in the Tell Your Story Academy (that I have designed) can be empowered or critically literate regardless of their various identities and experiences.

- Critical literacy involves reading the word to understand the world, which means looking beyond what authors want their readers to see. It involves reading texts to find biases in them. However, the way we interpret texts is sometimes subject to our experiences of the world.
- I will facilitate a series of critical literacy activities as part of a six-week winter program with a group of 10 - 15 middle years students and you, an undergraduate student, who will serve as a mentor for the students.
- I want to see if the students' learning is a function of their identity and experiences. If so, in what way (what kind of identities), and also if learning leads to action.
- Also, to avoid the traditional form of teaching where students are viewed as empty containers to be filled with knowledge, this study employs Participatory Action Research as its method, giving students autonomy for their learning, while I act as a facilitator and also a participant in the study.

Participant Selection

The community program has consented to this research being conducted, and since you have been assigned to work with the Tell Your Story Academy, you are also invited to participate in my research study. I will meet with you personally to verify if you would be interested in participating in the study. If so, I will send you this consent form via email and after signing, you can send it to my university email which is password-protected.

Procedures Involving the Participant: Their Nature, Frequency, Duration, and the Total Time Involved

I am asking you to be a participant in my study which is part of the winter program. This will involve participating in a series (six weekly sessions – once a week for one hour) of critical literacy activities. These activities would involve reading a text on trees while you reflect on important points and make notes in your journals. Also, you will be invited to draw a tree of life, which might show the connections between your reflections and your experiences. Next, you would be asked to bring in any text of your choice, which might be in the form of short stories, magazines, music, pictures or paintings to further connect what you love to what you learn. Lastly, as a collective, we would come up with a poem that will include various parts that must have been decided by the participants. In between these activities, participants will be invited to discuss in group about their thoughts, so that they can also learn from one another.

As participants discuss, I will move around the groups to listen and observe how they interact. I will write down what I hear, including paraphrases of what students say. My notes will also contain a description of the settings and the materials that would be used. Specifically, participants will be asked about what inspires them and what they hope to improve on in learning. My observations of their responses will be handwritten in my journal notes. I expect you to also observe and take notes during these sessions.

Also, in addition to helping facilitate the regular critical literacy activities, I am asking you to be interviewed by me at the beginning and end of the program for 1 hour each. Within the program duration, I will check with you, to fix a suitable time and place (maybe a free class in the Faculty of Education, or any place that would be convenient for you) for the interviews within the first and last weeks of the study. The first interview will be questions on your experiences about critical literacy and if you have adapted your life experiences in your learning; while the last interview consists of general questions regarding what you have learned during the Tell Your Story Academy and what you will most likely improve on in your future practice. These interviews will take place outside of the teaching sessions. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Also, I will ask you to share – notes from your journal, whatever notes you are comfortable sharing with me, two weeks after the completion of the Tell Your Story Academy. Lastly, there will be a member-checking process after the transcription of each interview. At this stage, I will send you the transcribed interviews for your review to check for the accuracy of the information. You will have two weeks to review the interview transcripts to remove any information you are not comfortable sharing or to make any corrections. If the documents are not sent back after two weeks, then, I will assume you are content with the information in the transcript.

Recording Devices to be Used

The interviews with you will be recorded with an audio tape recorder (Digital Voice Activated Recorder- Audio Recorder Dictaphone) and the recording will be transferred using a USB cord to my password-protected computer on U of M OneDrive and then permanently deleted from the recorder after the audio files are transcribed. Specifically, the audio recordings will be saved in SharePoint, a password-protected, dual authentication, cloud storage platform that is hosted by the University of Manitoba.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your identity will only be known by me and my academic advisor, Dr. Charlotte Enns, Professor in the Faculty of Education. This study is being completed as part of a doctoral program, therefore, information shared by you will be discussed with my advisor and my committee. However, this would only be indirectly identifiable data (i.e., transcripts of interviews or field notes of classroom discussions, etc.). Additionally, I will use a pseudonym for you in my analysis of the data instead of your real name. All data (consent form, journal, interview transcripts, and any artifact provided by you in relation to the study) will be scanned electronically and will be stored on my U of M One-Drive - the password-protected, dual authentication, cloud storage platform that is hosted by the University of Manitoba. All the data will be permanently deleted five years following the completion of the study. This study will take the following steps:

- a) Collect consent forms through UM password-protected email and store them on OneDrive;
- b) Include the critical literacy activities as described above;
- c) Store all data gathered in my U of M OneDrive (including scanned pages of your journal). All hard copies of notes/documents will be shredded and disposed of and all electronic data will be permanently deleted after five years of the completion of the study;
- d) Research dissemination – I will publish my thesis and may present/publish information about my study in academic journals or conferences.

Direct Benefit to the Participant

You may benefit directly from the Tell Your Story Academy that I have designed for this research because literacy is an important and compulsory subject in schools. The techniques learned can be transferred to your future classroom teaching and in life in the long run. You will improve your critical literacy skills and understanding. The direct benefit of participating in my research study is that it will give you an opportunity to reflect on your learning and analyze how the children are learning. These skills will help you become a better teacher and researcher and increase your awareness of a more transformational form of education for students of diverse identities.

Potential Risk:

This research poses minimal risks to you, no more than what you would experience in normal everyday life. You may be asked to share your personal experiences during the program. To reduce or eliminate risks, you will be given the option of choosing what you

want to share with the group. Also, you will have the option of not answering any questions you are not comfortable with during the interviews.

How the participant may withdraw from the research, without negative consequences.

This study is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. If you are no longer interested in participating in the study can inform me personally or by informing my supervisor, Dr. Charlotte Enns. Participants may withdraw from the study without consequence or prejudice at any time. Hence, I will immediately delete every file and transcript and it will not be included in the analysis. After the second week of the program (approximately 01/24), the data already collected will be incorporated into study field notes and cannot be removed, but no new data will be included. You can continue to serve as the mentor for the students registered in the Tell Your Story Academy and your experience in the academy will not be impacted by your withdrawal from the research study.

Debriefing/Study Summary

After the collection of data (on the sixth week of the program), and the completion of the final interview, we will debrief what we learned from the study and I will give you an explanation of how information obtained from you will be used. These will be part of the preliminary findings.

If you would like a written summary of the findings, please include your e-mail address at the end of the consent form. You can expect this summary after my final defence (approximately 05/25).

Research Results

The results of this research will be disseminated firstly to my advisory committee for review and then through the UM library in my published thesis. I may also share some of the information in academic presentations or journal publications.

All confidential data will be destroyed after five years of the completion of the study and my final defence.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics

Officer at 204-474-7122 or HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature: Salmah Quadri Date: _____

Email (to receive Research Summary): _____