DESIGNING LEARNING EXPERIENCES WITH EQUITY-SEEKING YOUTH: STRENGTH-BASED STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINING CULTURE, COMMUNITY, AND CREATIVITY

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Language and Literacy Education)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

November 2018

The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the dissertation entitled:

Designing learning experiences with equity-seeking youth: strength-based strategies for sustaining culture, community and creativity

submitted by Anna Keefe in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Literacy Education

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Abstract

Despite Canada's public commitments to equity and diversity, the nation's education systems are not adequately meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically non-dominant youth. Aboriginal youth in Canada frequently have negative and incomplete educational experiences as a result of racism, deficit perspectives, inequitable funding, and the exclusion of their ways of being and knowing (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Kanu, 2002). Similarly, newcomer youth are excluded from mainstream education systems and programs through a lack of cultural competence, while alternative spaces such as those run by settlement organizations are underfunded (Van Ngo, 2009). As Canada grows increasingly diverse through immigration and begins to acknowledge historic and ongoing infringement on the rights of Aboriginal peoples, what counts as quality education must be revisited and recreated together.

My study considers the teaching and learning processes that work for non-dominant youth seeking equity, including how practitioners and young people negotiate the value of different communicative repertoires with each other and with society. I examine the kinds of learning processes that equity-seeking youth and practitioners want to create together, what strategies they use to move towards their vision, and how they imagine their work could be better sustained despite conflict with dominant systems. I anchor my study with insights gained through interviews with 12 experienced educators and social workers from across Canada. I also conducted research through two partnerships; one with youth and educators at a First Nations high school, and one with newcomer youth and facilitators in a creative arts program run by a settlement organization.

My findings elaborate on existing evidence in the field of culturally sustaining education in formal and informal contexts regarding the importance of relationships and the value of

enabling the full communicative repertoires of learners. Additionally, I uncover new ideas about how relational pedagogy is manifested across the learning ecology through *protecting, hosting, venturing*, and *accessing*. I also identify ways that cycles of acceptance and expression can be set in motion and sustained, and how youth are adapting and countering the practice of authoring identity (e.g., Cummins, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011).

Lay Summary

The goal of this study is to better understand approaches to teaching and learning that work for youth from non-dominant cultural and linguistic backgrounds. I examine what kinds of learning experiences youth and educators want to create, what strategies they use to move towards their vision, and how they sustain promising practices. My study includes interviews with 12 experienced educators and social workers from across Canada; a research partnership with youth and educators at a First Nations high school; and a research partnership with newcomer youth and facilitators in a creative arts program run by a settlement organization. Focusing on the themes of relationships and communication, I uncover a range of strategies for establishing and expanding safe spaces for learning, examine different practices for building confidence and sustaining culture, and explore the ways youth engage in creative projects to express themselves, connect to others, or contribute to their communities.

Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, A. Keefe. The research findings reported in Chapters 4–6 are based on data generation covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H15-00950.

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Glossary

Aboriginal

In Canada the term *Aboriginal* is often used to be inclusive of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. I have used the term Aboriginal when referring to Canadian contexts.

Communicative repertoires

I use the term *communicative repertoires* to emphasize the multiple modes of communication that young people cultivate, draw from, and extend as they learn in formal and informal settings across their lives. These communicative repertoires can include multiple languages, multiple modes of expression, and culturally informed ways of engaging with the self and others (D'warte, 2014; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Pahl, 2008; Rymes, 2018).

Elder

The word *Elder*, particularly when capitalized, is used in Indigenous communities to identify cultural teachers and knowledge keepers. They are not simply or necessarily elderly but have received training and been entrusted with the role of providing spiritual guidance and care (Archibald, 2008).

Equity-seeking youth

The term *equity-seeking youth* refers to young people engaged in the active, positive work of overcoming injustice in the pursuit of individual and collective imagined futures.

Expansive literacies

I have created the umbrella term *expansive literacies* to describe ideas that move beyond framing equity-seeking youth and dominant systems as opposing realities that need bridging. Instead,

these expansive literacies show how different knowledge systems can be extended, reimagined, and redesigned despite and because of conflict with oppressive systems.

Indigenous peoples

Indigenous is a term that is used internationally in academic and political work to claim a collective identity based in shared histories of resisting colonization and maintaining ancestral connections to land (Dei, 2011; Kovach, 2009). Indigenous people also identify according to their specific community or nation. Wherever possible I have indicated the tribal affiliation of Indigenous scholars and used their choice of identifying terms for Indigenous people when paraphrasing or directly quoting them.

Newcomer

I use the term *newcomer* youth as inclusive of people from immigrant and refugee backgrounds who have recently arrived in Canada. However, it is sometimes important to differentiate between immigrant and refugee populations to understand their specific educational and settlement needs.

Practitioner

I use the term *practitioner* interchangeably with the term *educator*, recognizing that many different supportive adults can be learning guides to young people across different contexts in their lives (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).

Relational Literacy Pedagogy

I use the term *relational literacy pedagogy* to describe teaching and learning that emphasizes collaborative social processes and communication.

School Area Consultants

Throughout the dissertation I use the term *school area consultants* to refer to cultural and linguistic education specialists who work with teachers in their "board," "division" or "district" – which are provincially specific terms that might identify them.

Self-Determination

Self-determination is a legal, political and ideological goal for many Indigenous nations (Cornell & Kalt, 2007). In Canada, self-determination for Aboriginal people means interacting with the Canadian government on a nation-to-nation basis, challenging paternalistic policies, and asserting control over their own affairs (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the care and consideration of number of people who have supported me through the process of researching and writing this dissertation.

Firstly, I would like to thank the practitioners and youth who took time out of their busy lives to contribute their knowledge to this research. These are your stories and ideas that I have gathered as a learner alongside you. Your examples of determination and creativity uplifted me, and I hope they will uplift others striving towards the same goals of equity for all learners.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Maureen Kendrick, for her patience, encouragement, and insight. Despite changes and challenges in my research plan, and through multiple iterations of this dissertation, you have persevered alongside me. I also appreciate the hard work of my committee members Dr. Jim Anderson and Dr. Theresa Rogers, who shared their deep knowledge and provided thoughtful feedback and creative suggestions. Additionally, I am grateful to Dr. George Belliveau, Dr. Jolie Mayer-Smith, and Dr. Cynthia Nicol for their mentorship and kindness, and for teaching me about the research process through inclusion in their projects.

I would also like to thank the following friends and colleagues at UBC and in Vancouver who inspired me to keep learning and pushing boundaries while staying grounded: Winnie Tang, Sara Davidson, Ngwatilo Mawiyoo, Janice Valdez, Douglas Guilbeault, and Jayne Simpson. You are exemplary human beings who remind me to live and work with integrity and passion.

I am grateful for the financial support of The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Killam Foundation, the R. Howard Webster Foundation and the UBC Faculty of Education. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Alan Yoshioka for his editorial assistance.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family for making this journey with me, particularly to my daughter Lucia for her spirit, my mother Kathleen for her encouragement and childcare, and my partner Matthew for his loving kindness.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Disclaimer and Invitation

When I was 19, I took a summer job in Northern Canada working for a recreation department. Our boss told us there was an Aboriginal side of town and a white side of town. We stayed in row housing on the Aboriginal side of town with other summer students imported from the south. That summer taught me about the impacts of colonialism and invited me to grow through relationships with people who saw the world differently. When I came home, people wanted to hear stories and I wanted to tell them, but I did not know what to say. Should I share the stories of pain, vignettes of addiction and abuse that did not belong to me? Should I share the stories of oppression, racist hiring and police indifference that would feed my righteousness by condemning other white people? Should I share stories of cultural vibrancy, the drumming and togetherness, as proof of what people already thought they knew about Aboriginal people? Every time I spoke, the story felt incomplete, oversimplified, ultimately untrue.

I drew a circle and on one side I painted the beauty I had seen, the landscape, the people, the music and the sun that never set. On the other side I painted images of darkness, of unborn children and alcohol and holes that could not be filled because it was too late. I called the piece "Two truths and I lie" because I recognized the falseness in the isolated and oppositional truths. I saw the limits of my ability to interpret and retell the story as an outsider. I also titled the painting to honour the children I had worked with that summer because whenever they were joking or teasing about something they would let you know by saying, "I lie, I lie." Through their humour and playfulness they offered me a space to rest and begin again. Finally, the title of the piece refers to a game I used to play as a child, "Two truths and a lie," in which the teller shares three stories about themselves, and the listeners have to guess which one is the lie. You can win

this game by employing certain strategies. You have to watch for when the teller gets uncomfortable and tugs at their sleeves, or sounds overconfident, that might be where the lie is hidden. You have to watch for the trap, the story that sounds like it could not possibly be true but is, and that is why it had to be told. As the teller you want to trick your audience, but you also want to intrigue them, you want people to say, "I never knew that about you" even if they've known you for years. I hung the art up with some fishing line so that it would float and spin in the air, turning unpredictably between the darkness and the light, lying, laughing, and waiting for me to begin.

This research story begins in that summer of my awakening, but also in every season of my work with children and youth since then. The following year I worked with the children of Haitian migrant workers who live in company housing on sugar cane plantations. The convent where I volunteered served as the community centre, the hospital and the childcare centre. I saw the children arrive each morning in their uniforms and play with the toys sent from France. I saw them play in the streets with games they had invented from what they could find. I remember men patrolling the fields on horseback with their rifles ready. I remember the orange sky at night, smell of burnt sugar and the fields on fire. I learned about corporate exploitation, political manipulation, and ambiguous religious redemption. I knew that on the good days I could do little more than be a friend and a witness, and that on the bad days my presence was the barrier and the harm, the lie that change would come from the outside. A documentary I saw years later depicted these communities falling into despair and investigated the people who profited from their oppression. I saw that the documentary reported these facts truthfully, uncovering the difficult details of families living undocumented and afraid of deportation, but something felt fictitious. Instead of the music that I knew was flowing from every home and

store and backpack – reggaetón, bachata, Madonna – they had overlaid somber and dissonant tones. Because how could they tell a sad story to happy music? But without the real music, I caught the lie: the dangerous untruth that the people had no joy, that their spirits were quiet, that they had been defeated. Had I done any better at telling the story when family and friends wanted to know what I had seen? Probably not. I struggled to find a middle ground between the false cliché of "They're poor but happy" and hand-picked sensationalism, a few outlying examples of people reaching their limit.

This story is also inspired by my work with children and youth in urban centres that people describe as "under-resourced," "low socio-economic status" and "diverse." It is inspired by my work in Northern regions and on reserves with First Nations children and youth. I am an educator and a collaborator, a practitioner and programmer in informal, intergenerational and community-based settings. I like the word practitioner because it indicates that the work is incomplete and iterative, that practising something will allow you to improve, but that you may always be compelled to listen, learn, and try again. I love that work and I love many people who do that work because there is nowhere to hide your heart when you are creating something with young people. They can see you, they can see right through you, and in that is the great gift of being whole and incredibly vulnerable. Out of that communion can come the desire to open the world up for them, and the courage and the doubt and the knowledge that it could never be enough. Especially if you comply with systems that are causing great harm, systems that do not value life or love or difference. Especially if you have blue eyes and have been taught to work hard and to fear failure, especially if you live inside the logic of a culture that requires you to find and keep and make a name for yourself.

I decided to pursue doctoral studies because I thought it would give me more to offer when partnering with youth and their support networks, and because I thought it would give me better access to power that I could share. I also thought it would help me tell the kinds of stories that I have been unable to tell. And of course, in my way, I did it because I was afraid of not becoming. Doing a PhD took me very far away from the children, youth, practitioners and communities who have been my best teachers. Researching and writing this dissertation, I have tried to return to what I know is beautiful and true about working with young people. I have wondered if this kind of talk can fit amongst the explicit and implicit templates intended to make academic work credible. How can I use the tools that a Doctoral education has afforded me without getting distracted by the temptation of collecting and displaying them? How can this piece of writing keep up with the momentum of real lives, and feed back into those conversations and actions, knowing they can never be captured?

Many times, when I have been stuck, I have heard the right talk at the right time. I was wondering about the potential harm of labeling people when I heard a talk by Jessica Danforth, founder and Executive Director of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, at the First Nations House of Learning in Vancouver. She reminded us not to talk about youth as "at-risk", but that if we must, to talk about how it happened, and what they say they need to get out of that situation. She also introduced us to the thought that for many young people, the real risk is not being in culturally safe, culturally sustaining spaces. I was wondering about false dichotomies when my friend, professor Krista Craven, recommended that I read the work of Eve Tuck, whose desire-based theory of change opens up alternatives to binary thinking about resisting or reproducing oppressive systems. I still read Eve Tuck's *Suspending Damage* whenever I need to remind myself to seek honesty when it comes to longing, renewal and complexity in social justice work.

These ideas came together for me at an event for the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture where I heard many individuals and organizations use the term "equity-seeking." In keeping with what Eve Tuck and Jessica Danforth had given me to think about, the term, "equity-seeking" has allowed me to focus on the positive, active processes of young people pursuing imagined futures without downplaying the injustice they encounter along the way.

These ideas helped me to access other related theories and develop a good set of tools to think with. I still wondered how I could do research that got back to the people who could benefit from it. Would the knowledge get trapped in clouds of academic conversation, just "trickle-down," or worse, would it be used to make decisions on behalf of the people the research was about? My friend Douglas Guilbeault suggested I might be a pragmatist and my friend Dr. Sara Davidson suggested I might connect with grounded theory. They helped me find a community of scholars who also strive to link theory and practice and place authority in the lived experiences of research participants. When I wondered how I could write without being loyal to some people over others, my friend Janice Valdez told me that good writing is always an act of betrayal. This is something like what playwright Tetsuro Shigetmatsu had told her, which she thinks may have been in reference to something Anne Lamott said once. We were eating lunch with the windows open and the rain blowing in and I felt a thrill because I knew she was right. The inevitable treachery of expression.

I would rather write for everyone I have known and for myself at the same time, but each audience requires a different assurance of truth, a different sign of allegiance. I am going to write some parts of my dissertation as a scholar for other people who consider themselves to be scholars. I will prioritize those things that make academic scholarship beautiful and true; thoroughness, clarity, convention, rationality, disciplinary thinking, and recognition and

extension of scholarly ideas that precede my own. I am going to write other parts of my dissertation for people who consider themselves to be practitioners. I mean this in a broad sense because people committed to the practice of supporting equity-seeking youth may be other youth leaders, family, friends, Elders, reflective youth workers, dedicated teachers, renegade bureaucrats, good cops, community artists, trauma counselors, podcast journalists and soccer coaches. For everyone who can be a resource to young people, I will prioritize ideas that are useful and actionable and write in plain language using terms like "strategy" and "promising practice." At other times, I will write for myself to bring coherence to my own experiences. I will embrace ambiguity with creativity and courage, and I will let you see right through me.

I may change from scholar to practitioner to creative self, but I will always stay grounded by the real reason we are here. This is for the laughter and the playfulness, this is for the music that does not stop, this is for the chance to begin again.

Rationale

The beginning of the 21st century has been characterized by major changes in economic and social systems, including the rise of global capitalism, technological innovation, urbanization, environmental degradation, and increasing transnationalism and migration (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Doucet, 2007; Jorgenson, 2004; Özden & Schiff, 2007). These shifts are prompting questions about what kinds of skills students will need to thrive now and in their professional, civic and personal futures. Whereas scholars and practitioners have often considered text-based literacy an essential skill in the pursuit of individual and collective economic success (e.g., Green & Riddell, 2007), many are now working to conceive of literacy more broadly. Firstly, some scholars have expanded the definition of literacy to include many modes of communication and how people practise and apply these in different social contexts. Under the banner of "New

Literacy Studies," researchers study this concept of literacy as the text-based, digital, multimodal, cross-cultural, and multilingual practices people use in the circumstances of their lives (e.g., Coiro, 2008; Cope and Kalantzis, 2009; Street, 2008). Secondly, many scholars are now using a critical social justice lens to challenge the predominantly economic focus and include personal, political and cultural benefits of literacy practices, along with questions of equitable access to these benefits (e.g., Greene, 2008; Luke, 2012; Luke, Dooley, & Woods, 2011) These changes in discourse have prompted many scholars and practitioners to redefine what counts as literacy and to emphasize access and equity in literacy practices and purposes.

Despite the complexity of discourse on this topic, response to the perceived urgency of increasing literacy attainment is not always nuanced. Educational reforms tend towards standardization, scripted instruction, and testing (Volante, 2012). In the United States, a history of designing education according to concepts of industrial efficiency continues under the new rhetoric of accountability with legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (Waldow, 2014). In the 1990s Ontario returned to large-scale assessments after decades without them, a trend that continues across all Canadian provinces and territories today (Després, 2013; Klinger & Saab, 2012). These moves to standardize and measure learning in order to improve it have been shown to disadvantage learners from non-dominant linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Moll, 2004; Ryan, 2004; Schwab, 2012). Additionally, school literacy practices do not match the home literacy practices of all students, and frequently exclude diverse ways of knowing. This disjuncture makes it difficult for youth from non-dominant linguistic and cultural backgrounds to make in-progress learning visible so that educators can recognize and develop emergent skills (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Dyson, 2004; Heath, 1982, 1983). Finally, school systems often ignore or reinforce barriers such as racism and deficit perspectives, trauma

and ongoing stressors, and inequitable funding and opportunities (Kirkland, 2011; Ruglis, 2011; Stewart, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2014). While education and literacy are often seen as essential for youth to overcome these barriers and seek equity, positive impact depends on how that education is designed, including which literacy practices are used and valued, and to what ends.

For researchers and practitioners who do approach literacy education with a nuanced social justice, situated practice lens, questions of how to best serve equity-seeking youth are still unresolved. An ongoing debate weighs the extent to which teaching dominant language and literacy practices to equity-seeking students is liberating or oppressive for them and how much schools should include and extend their home language and literacy practices. Some scholars focus on making education more inclusive by building on the diverse ways that students interpret and communicate knowledge (e.g., Dyson, 2004; Street, 2006). Others have extended this approach and argued that learning the literacy of dominant systems, or "codes of power" is also essential for non-dominant students who are not socialized into them (e.g., Delpit, 1992, 2006) and that they can master academic and professional genres through critical engagement with them (e.g., White, Mammone, & Caldwell, 2015). These critical perspectives echo the work of Freire, who advocated for dialogue between students and teachers and with the contextual challenges of the world as the basis for building awareness of oppressive systems (Freire, 1970). Further research is needed to better understand the teaching and learning processes that work for equity-seeking youth, including how practitioners and young people negotiate the value of different communicative repertoires with each other and with society at large. Central to this issue is understanding the relationships that youth have with each other, to their formal and informal teachers, and to broader communities and institutions. Given the dynamics of discourse on this topic, the following section summarizes the purpose of this research.

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation study is to understand the kinds of learning processes that equity-seeking youth and practitioners want to create together, and what relational strategies they use to move towards their vision. Through a series of situated qualitative studies, I document the work that educators do to understand and develop the distinct sociocultural processes that youth already use to interpret the world and express themselves. At the same time, I learn from youth and their support networks about how dominant systems influence what they feel capable of imagining, communicating, and doing. Ultimately, this research engages with practitioners and equity-seeking youth to consider desired elements of a pedagogy based in meaningful relationships and communication. I refer to this as a "relational literacy pedagogy" and explore it through the lenses of relational support networks and social interactions, and how communicative repertoires are drawn on and extended. Through this research I explore (a) the values and desires of youth and practitioners, (b) the principles and strategies they use to design learning experiences, and (c) what works well and how it can be nurtured. In the next section, I outline the research contexts that informed my data generation and analysis.

Research Contexts and Participants

Throughout this dissertation I focus on the experiences of equity-seeking youth and the educators who work with them in formal and informal spaces. I conducted a series of situated qualitative studies to explore how practitioners and youth envision and enact relational learning in these spaces, and how their connections facilitate or are facilitated by attention to communicative practices. For the first study I interviewed 12 experienced practitioners from across Canada who work with Aboriginal and newcomer youth. I also conducted two qualitative studies that draw on elements of design research; one with youth and educators at a First Nations high school, and

one with newcomer youth and facilitators in a creative arts program run by a settlement organization. For the purposes of this study, I have used the term "Aboriginal" when referring to First Nations, Metis and Inuit people in Canada. I use more specific language whenever possible. I use the term "newcomer" youth as inclusive of people from immigrant and refugee backgrounds who have recently arrived in Canada. I have sometimes differentiated between immigrant and refugee populations to understand their specific educational and settlement needs, and I explain this further in the literature review.

Significance

While education and literacy can improve the life circumstances of equity-seeking youth, this endeavour is not straightforward. Educational designs that exclude youth's communicative repertoires and ways of knowing may fragment their sense of identity and undermine community and family learning systems. Educational designs that do not engage with the specific and dynamic realities of young people's lives risk devaluing their existing literacy skill sets without successfully teaching them to use dominant alternatives (Knobel, 2001). As many scholars have argued, youth should be able to sustain their cultural ways of learning and communicating alongside explicit and critical instruction in dominant genres (e.g., Luke, Dooley, & Woods, 2011). This topic has been explored through a variety of lenses. For instance, there is a longstanding and renewed interest in studying home and community literacy practices, and how these compare to the student's school environments (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Cremin, 2015; Li, 2002; Song, 2016). Additionally, a rich body of work explores the literacy practices of youth across all contexts and domains of their lives (e.g., Jocson & Rosa, 2015; Molle, 2015; Sanford, Rogers, & Kendrick, 2014). Further, a number of studies look at training and professional development to increase the awareness and competency of teachers working with

equity-seeking students (e.g., Dion, 2007; Glazier, 2003; Lazar & Offenberg, 2011). Finally, a substantial body of research critically analyzes the ways young people are pushed out of formal learning spaces because of their linguistic, cultural and racialized differences (e.g., Fine, 1991; Parks, Wallace, Edmin, & Levy, 2016; Reyes & Villarreal, 2016) This work lays an important foundation by recognizing youth strengths and community assets, identifying problematic elements of current systems, and envisioning what literacy and learning could look like. However, much of this work originates in the United States (Kelly, 2015) and/or focuses on younger children rather than youth (Campbell, Glover, & Laryea, 2016). Research is lacking about how equity-seeking youth in Canada learn best, and how systems and strategies can be adapted to better serve them, particularly Aboriginal youth (National Aboriginal Design Committee, 2002) and newcomer youth (Chuang, 2010). In particular, insufficient research has been conducted about how educators design and enact relational pedagogy, and how these interactions might intersect with work towards extending communicative repertoires. Through this study I work to increase understanding of learning relationships between youth and with adults, and how they negotiate what counts as knowledge and communication. We can learn from what youth and educators desire and envision, from the losses and failures they experience working towards those goals, and from their everyday processes of trying again and sometimes succeeding in intended and unintended ways.

Scope and Organization

This dissertation focuses on educator strategies for sustaining culture and extending the communicative repertoires of equity-seeking youth in formal and informal learning contexts across Canada. For the purposes of this study, “youth” includes people aged 12 to 24. I indicate where educators refer to experiences they have had with other age categories/overlapping age

categories. Equity-seeking youth, as I have mentioned, refers to young people engaged in the work of overcoming injustice in the pursuit of individual and collective imagined futures. This dissertation focuses particularly on the strategies of educators working with Aboriginal youth and newcomer youth. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework and literature review focusing on sociocultural/sociocritical literacy, culturally sustaining pedagogy and extending the communicative repertoires of equity-seeking youth. It also provides a summary of literature relevant to working with Aboriginal and newcomer youth. Chapter 3 provides a description of methodological intentions and decisions, including an overview of strategies for conducting situated qualitative studies and drawing on selected aspects of design research to adapt to each research context.

Chapter 4, titled, "Designing deep learning with equity-seeking youth: Practitioner strategies," is based on data generated through 12 expert interviews. It focuses on strategies for facilitating meaningful learning through attention to relationships and communication, including through partnerships with artists, Elders, and counsellors. Chapter 5, titled, "'That's when I don't mind the talking': Designing hands-on learning with First Nations high school students," is based on data generated through a research partnership with a First Nations high school and university mentorship program. It focuses on the process of planning, designing, implementing and adapting culturally sustaining pedagogy with First Nations youth. Chapter 6, titled, "'We do art but at the same time we talk': Designing creative programming with newcomer youth," is based on data generated through a research partnership with a settlement organization and professional artist. It focuses on how creative projects with newcomer youth can catalyze engagement, learning and relationships. All three data chapters explore how youth can draw from their

communicative repertoires and supportive relationships as resources for learning while challenging/overcoming structural barriers.

Chapter 7 explores theoretical and practical implications with reference to each specific population of youth, and with a view to how findings might be broadly applicable to/adaptable for other similar contexts. In particular, I synthesize key elements of a relational literacy pedagogy as identified by research participants, including ideas for valuing people as central to learning, accessing diversity within culturally distinct groups, and accessing culturally safe relationships across the whole learning ecology. I also outline ways relationships can influence and be influenced by communicative practices, including through creating cycles of acceptance and expression. In Chapter 8 I reflect on my learning as a researcher including through arts-based inquiry demonstrating sustained engagement with specific themes and motifs that are important to my life and work.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY WITHIN EXISTING LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation tells the stories of practitioners and young people endeavouring to mediate between youth knowledge and dominant knowledge systems in productive ways. I draw from sociocultural frameworks that foreground context, culture, and relationships in literacy and learning (e.g., Heath, 1982; Street, 1994, 2006) and sociocritical frameworks that examine how learning and literacy can challenge or reinforce power structures and cultural norms (e.g., Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gutiérrez, 2008; Luke, 2012). Three specific constructs from within sociocultural/sociocritical theory guide my analysis and retelling of the research story. The first idea is culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) as a "remix" of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014) that considers how the cultural identities of youth are dynamic and political. The second idea is "expansive literacies" as an umbrella term I have created to describe ideas that move beyond framing equity-seeking youth and dominant systems as opposing realities that need bridging. Instead, these expansive literacies show how different knowledge systems can be extended, reimagined, and redesigned despite and because of conflict with oppressive systems. These expansive literacies include multimodal design (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; New London Group (NLG), 1996), syncretism (Souto-Manning, 2013; Volk, 2013), and collective sociocritical literacy in the Third Space (see below), which operates at the boundaries of informal and formal discourse to create opportunities for reimagining "the social organization of learning" (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 152). The third construct is youth equity, with particular attention to where communication and literacy practices intersect with questions of resistance, wellness, and space (e.g., Luke, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Engaging with questions

of social context and power from sociocultural/sociocritical theory, these constructs each offer a specific lens through which to think about culture, communication, and equity.

Sociocultural and sociocritical literacies.

The work of sociocultural and sociocritical literacy theorists has helped to reframe what counts as literacy and where and when it happens. These scholars have complicated the discourse, challenging individualistic conceptions of literacy learning and focusing instead on relationships, context, power structures, and purpose.

The work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) has influenced many scholars in a range of fields, including social learning and literacy. Vygotsky challenged many previous ways of thinking about language and cognition. He focused on analyzing relationships between humans and their physical and social environments, demonstrating through experiments that language plays an organizing function that produces new forms of behaviour. He also observed and described that, with challenging tasks, children seek to verbalize their thought processes and interact with the researcher to find solutions. Vygotsky applied these observations to a concept that he called the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). This construct challenged the idea of testing children in isolation, promoting instead the perspective that children who receive some assistance in solving a problem can demonstrate cycles of maturation that are in progress, rather than only those that are completely mastered. Vygotsky also suggested that play creates a ZPD for young children, allowing them to temporarily extend outside of the roles and developmental capacities of their realities. Finally, Vygotsky promoted the idea that children are naturally symbolists interested in communicating what is important rather than what is exact, and he argued that writing lessons for children should focus on meaning rather than mechanics. These themes of social learning, growth through play, and meaningful symbolism have since been elaborated on by many

scholars in a variety of fields, including those working to understand relationships and communicative interactions in youth studies (e.g., Gutiérrez, 2008; Vellos, 2009).

Heath explored and supported the sociocultural theory of literacy with her extensive ethnographic fieldwork. In her ground-breaking work *Ways With Words* (1983), Heath looked at how communicative practices in classrooms compare to those in students' homes, including the use of questions as a standard way that teachers judge student engagement and competence. She found that students with different sociocultural and/or economic backgrounds were usually learning through immersion in their family and community practices rather than through explicit instruction and were not socialized into the question-answer patterns of school. Similarly, in *What No Bedtime Story Means: Narrative Skill at Home and School* (1982) Heath challenged the dichotomy between oral and written cultures, emphasizing instead different "ways of taking" from books that children are taught in their early years (p. 49). She describes that through different "literacy events" such as bedtime stories, children are socialized into different ways of interacting with texts. These differences leave some children less prepared for the routines of classroom literacy than others. Heath's study uses "literacy events" as a unit of analysis to compare across contexts focusing on "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (Heath, 1982, p. 93). Heath's work has inspired further scholarship that challenges deficit perspectives, recognizes the distinct literacy practices of homes and communities, and problematizes the idea of classrooms as culturally neutral.

Scholars writing about sociocultural literacy in the last few decades have often done so under the umbrella of New Literacy Studies (NLS) (e.g., Gee, 1992; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Street, 1994, 2006), in which literacy is "a repertoire of changing practices for communicating

purposefully in multiple social and cultural contexts" (Mills, 2010, p. 247). For instance, Street explored how language and literacy are given meaning by social contexts, and how literacy practices are learned, shaped and adapted through social interaction. Street (1994) originally challenged what he called the autonomous model of literacy, which focused on technical skill development of the individual. Instead he proposed an ideological model of literacy that is always politically influenced and situated in social contexts.

In his fieldwork in Iran, Street examined how texts were actually used and what meaning different people attributed to this process. In particular, he looked at literacy as a practice through which power is negotiated and "personhood" is established or withheld. He advocated for the study of literacy practices across different cultures and explored broad application of his theories in educational practice and policy (2006, 2008). NLS has been critiqued for emphasizing local literacy practices without enough consideration of outside influences and requirements (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Street has replied that the intention of NLS scholarship is to document how interactions between local and global influences result in hybrid literacy practices (Street, 2003). These themes of power and personhood continue to influence other contemporary literacy studies, including through the lens of critical literacy as described below.

The field of critical literacy deals explicitly with power structures, foregrounding critical capacity and the transformation of material and social realities as the focus of literacy learning. Allan Luke (2012) explains how contemporary work in critical literacy has built on many other influences including poststructuralist models of discourse (e.g., Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1972), learner-centred literacy (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1978) and the public pedagogy of Freire and Macedo (1987). Luke, drawing from his earlier (2004) work, defines critical literacy as the "use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique and transform the

norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life" (Luke, 2012, p. 5). This builds on the idea that literacy skills are not inherently emancipatory, but that they can be used with the intention of understanding and challenging oppressive systems. However, others have pointed out the limits of systems critique and personal affirmation, arguing instead that access to and mastery of languages of power will position young people to make meaningful change (e.g., Delpit, 1992; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). Throughout this dissertation I consider the pressure on young people to both excel within existing systems and challenge them. I endeavour to listen to where they want to begin their learning and change-making amidst the contradictions.

This dissertation is situated within the work of sociocultural and critical literacies and engages with literacy practices as contextual, ideological, and influenced by/influencing power structures. For the purposes of this research, I define literacy as a repertoire of changing practices that young people and their support networks use to interpret and represent ideas and feelings, always through relationships with others and with the world. As previously explained in Chapter 1, I use the term "relational literacy pedagogy" to describe teaching and learning that emphasizes collaborative social processes and communication. I also use the term *communicative repertoires* to emphasize the multiple modes of communication that young people cultivate, draw from, and extend as they learn in formal and informal settings across their lives. These communicative repertoires can include multiple languages, multiple modes of expression, and culturally informed ways of engaging with the self and others (D'warte, 2014; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Pahl, 2008; Rymes, 2018). In my research interactions with youth and practitioners, I often use practical terms such as communication, expression, language, creativity, culture, community, connection, understanding, skills, knowledge, and ways of learning. Some guiding principles I have chosen to emphasize from within sociocultural and critical literacy theory include that

learning is social, growth can be extended through play, children and youth use meaningful symbolism, homes and communities have distinct literacy practices, literacy is tied to questions of power and personhood, and literacy learning can be both about having access to and challenging dominant forms of communication. The following section explores how other scholars have taken up these themes in different ways to understand youth learning and literacy, including through the lenses of culturally sustaining pedagogy, "expansive literacies," and youth equity and resistance.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Prescriptive educational models focusing on individual skill acquisition do not connect with the material, cultural, and intellectual realities of diverse and economically marginalized students (Dyson, 2004; Luke, Dooley, & Woods, 2011). Instead, scholars are advocating for "cultural and sociocultural models that begin from an engagement of student prior knowledge, community knowledge, epistemological stance and cultural resources" (Luke et al., 2011). This is particularly relevant for culturally non-dominant students, who have often been socialized into distinct processes of knowledge generation and exchange that impact how they "mediate, negotiate, and respond to curriculum materials, instructional strategies, learning tasks, and communication patterns in the classroom" (Kanu, 2002, p. 1). Current work in this field is influenced by Ladson-Billings' model of culturally relevant pedagogy (1995), which advocates for multipurpose pedagogies that will help students to "achieve academically," "demonstrate cultural competence," and "understand and critique the existing social order" (p. 474). Importantly, Ladson-Billings describes how exemplary teachers can support this kind of learning through positive conceptions of themselves and their students, through fostering social

connectedness and collaboration, and through scaffolded, critical, and passionate approaches by which teachers and students construct knowledge together.

More recently, Paris (2012) has put forward the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* to build on this previous work while re-emphasizing cultural and critical components that are often neglected. In Paris' view, "culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 95). This reaffirmation is offered in part to counteract the misinterpretation and partial application of culturally relevant pedagogy whereby relatable content is used as a hook to engage students in mainstream practices without valuing students' own cultural resources or critical capacities. Further, in envisioning culture as dynamic, Paris draws on the work of previous scholars such as Irizarry (2007, 2011), who proposes that successful teachers enact *cultural connectedness* by engaging with students' cultural fluidity. Irizarry recognizes student identities as "complex because of the experiences and relationships they create with others" (2007, p. 22). He explains that "it is extremely difficult to pre-package one set of academic strategies that are likely to work with all members of a cultural group (2007, p. 23)." Irizarry gives the example of an African American teacher, Mr. Talbert, who built his pedagogy through understanding his own culture in relationship to his Latino and multi-ethnic students, active participation in the lives of their communities, and social construction and negotiation of the classroom culture together. Accordingly, Paris' culturally sustaining pedagogy urges practitioners to sustain cultures in "both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used by contemporary young people" (p. 95). Ladson-Billings (2014) has recently lauded culturally sustaining pedagogy as a "remix" of her original theory, celebrating work under this umbrella for advancing social justice and complex conceptions of culture as she had originally intended. For the

purposes of this dissertation, the term culturally sustaining pedagogy will be used to recognize renewed commitment to sustaining dynamic cultures and sociopolitical consciousness while building on culturally relevant pedagogy and the foundational scholarship it has inspired. I also work with the belief, established by Ladson-Billings (1995) and Irizarry (2007), that culturally sustaining pedagogy is brought to life by relational pedagogies that allow for meaningful connection, collaboration, and co-construction of knowledge and learning and literacy practices.

Expansive literacies.

As previously described, I have created the umbrella term "expansive literacies" to examine how equity-seeking youth extend and renew their communicative practices. I use this metaphor of expansion in contrast with the imagery of bridging or mixing binary cultural realities. I also explore the concept of expansion as an alternative to leveraging one set of communicative practices to achieve according to another set. I have gathered together three different approaches to expansive literacy, including multimodal design, syncretic practice, and sociocritical literacy in the Third Space. While each approach is distinct, they are all oriented towards co-construction and innovation that counter reductive, static definitions of culture.

Rhetoric of cultural fusion can, of course, be used to hide ideologies of discrimination and erasure, so I must clarify that I seek within expansive literacies a pathway towards uncovering and challenging such ideologies. Grobman (2007) argues that synthesizing serves to dissolve distinct identities according to the agenda of dominant systems, "reproducing the hegemony of the colonizing language or form" (p. 32). Ochieng' Nyongó (2009) critiques the expectation that the "hybrid child" will offer redemption from deeply entrenched racism (p. 179). Palmié (2013) considers whether ideas of hybridity reinforce the very labels they attempt to circumvent, and he proposes, "it is not what is a hybrid [languages, cultures] . . . but when.

Under what socially and historically specifiable conditions do any of them emerge, become ratified or contested, eventually normalized, suppressed, or transformed, with all the potential violence any of these options may imply?" (p. 472).

Indeed, how can educators release themselves from the pressures of categorization and control to engage with the ways their students can/may/could manifest cultural complexity in particular educational spaces, at particular moments in time? I have used the term "expansive literacies" to bring together constructs from the fields of language, literacy, and communication that might be used to serve these goals of culturally sustaining pedagogy. That is, these are tools that might extend communicative practices within educational spaces working to nourish cultural fluidity through relationships, sustain that which is culturally distinct, and engage with questions of power and personhood.

Multimodal design.

The New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; NLG, 1996) envisions a new approach to literacy pedagogy that invites communication in multiple modes. This pedagogy also explores how to enrich meaning-making through the unique *affordances*, or communicative potential, of each mode, the process of transduction from one mode to another, and the transformative work of design. In this view, the modalities of meaning-making include written language, oral language, visual representation, audio representation, tactile representation, gestural representation, and spatial representation. Modes have different affordances, and people select and combine modes that best serve their purposes and contexts. Rich learning happens through transduction as people consciously switch between modes and move meaning across modes, to discover new layers of meaning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).

In this interpretation, design draws from Fairclough's idea of hybridity as the creative process of transforming and reproducing conventions, and intertextuality as the way meanings are created in reference to other texts, discourses, genres, narratives, and modes (Fairclough, 1989, 1992a, 1992b as cited in NLG, 1996). Recontextualized representations grow from one another, so that one person's design work provides new material for others to use in their designs: "The moment of design is a moment of transformation, of remaking the world by representing the world afresh. Creativity, innovation, dynamism and divergence are normal semiotic states" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 177). The scholars of the New London Group also draw on Fairclough (1992b) to recognize that neither overt instruction nor immersion in situated practices will necessarily create the conditions for students to critique how their practices are culturally situated. They propose a process of *critical framing* through which students are encouraged to stand back to get a better view of how meaning is designed in ideological and value-laden contexts before extending and applying their learning (NLG, 1996).

Syncretic practice.

In a similar vein, syncretic practice affirms learner agency in creating innovative forms from what is available to them: "syncretism entails the active creation of new practices – not just blended ones – as people live in multiple worlds, drawing on the resources of these worlds without obliterating them, making sense and creating cohesion while crossing borders" (Gregory, Volk, & Long, 2013, p. 311). Syncretism seeks to differentiate itself from other similar theories by emphasizing creativity, process, and agency. It also prioritizes layered analysis of contextual influences, such as the role of mediators who play an active role in the learner's life (Volk, 2013). Interpretations of syncretism have focused on reconciliation of divergent practices (Stewart & Shaw, 1994), how hegemonic and subversive practices influence one another (Apter,

1991), and how children invent new literacy practices by rejecting normative binaries (Souto-Manning, 2013). Responding to critiques that syncretism can be used to justify the romanticizing and erasure of distinct cultural practices (e.g., Grobman, 2007), syncretism has shifted to foreground questions of power and privilege. Drawing on the concept of border crossing (Giroux, 1996, 2005; González, 2001), Volk (2013) proposes a critical syncretism that affirms agency and also "accounts explicitly for the realities of oppression and subordination that are played out in cross-cultural or border crossing encounters" (p. 240). Critical syncretic literacy, then, would seek to understand learner agency in creating new literacy practices while contending with oppressive systems.

Sociocritical literacy in the Third Space.

Gutiérrez (2008) explores how sociocritical literacy can cultivate and be sustained by a collective *Third Space*, where deep cycles of learning occur. Gutiérrez argues that bringing attention to historical context, contradiction, and sociocultural practices at the boundaries of informal and formal discourse can create opportunities for "authentic interaction and a shift in the social organization of learning and what counts as knowledge" (p. 152). This collective Third Space reworks Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and critiques recent interpretations that emphasize the adult's role in "scaffolding" knowledge towards predetermined outcomes. Gutiérrez revisits and expands ZPD to reclaim language and play as catalysts in social learning ecologies that help students "reconceive who they are and what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond" (p. 148). For Gutiérrez, this means prioritizing reciprocal collective learning that embraces metaphor, imagination, dialogue, and embodied practice, allowing students to connect past realities and imagined futures while extending their repertoires of practice (2008). Gutiérrez draws on expansive learning theory (Engeström, 2001, 2015) to consider the interaction of

collective and individual sense-making as sites where robust cycles of learning can occur, and to study the intentional design of "opportunities to collectively generate new forms of joint activity to solve the double-binds that students encounter as immigrants, migrants, and adolescents" (2008, p. 160). In this sense, Gutiérrez is enriching ZPD by attending to the conditions that allow for expansive cycles of learning amongst equity-seeking youth.

Summary.

These examples that I have gathered under the umbrella of expansive literacies each offer possible approaches to extending communicative repertoires in ways that are culturally sustaining. Multimodal design, syncretic practice, and sociocultural literacy in the Third Space are all conceptual tools that might move scholars and educators past essentializing, bridging, and leveraging metaphors into imagery of renewal and relational co-construction. In this sense, expansive literacies hold promise for uplifting and sustaining meaningful aspects of each young person's identity and cultural practices even as youth are invited to elaborate upon them through relationships with their peers and supportive adults, and even as they consider which dominant modes and codes to master, reinvent, or challenge. I explore these questions of how power and personhood intersect with communicative practices in the following section, which connects studies on youth equity and youth literacies.

Connecting youth equity and youth literacies.

This dissertation considers links between youth equity and youth literacy, including how youth strategize to protect their well-being, where they can go, and how they feel they can move and express themselves within those spaces. I will also consider how these questions and concerns inform critical youth literacies as transformative practice in pedagogical settings and broader sociopolitical arenas. The study of youth and youth cultures is not value-neutral but is connected

to questions of power, ideal citizenship, and achievement according to dominant cultural norms. In her study of youth activism, Kwon (1973/2013) describes how interventions by the justice system and non-profit sector have established the idea of youth as "a special category in need of care and regulation" (p. 126). Kwon explores how youth of colour engage in social justice activism within, beyond, and despite the programs and systems that endeavour to enact "affirmative governmentality" by improving them as citizen-subjects (p. 126). Similarly, Tuck and Yang (2014) critique previous notions of youth as "underdeveloped" and in need of direction, explaining that "Youth is a legally, materially, and always raced/gendered/classed/ sexualized category around which social institutions are built, disciplinary sciences created, and legal apparatuses mounted" (p. 4).

Tuck and Yang also lay out three "moves" that guide their thinking about youth resistance as influenced by Willis' (1977) book, *Learning to Labour*. Firstly, they notice the "Pyrrhic victories of youth resistance," (p. 6) or the ways costs can outweigh benefits when youth fight for dignity. Secondly, they draw on Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987) to attend to "human agency within post-structural analysis," (p. 6) or the ways that agency and desire do not necessarily lead youth to confront oppression in the ways that researchers want them to. Thirdly, they refuse "tautologies that shut down feelings of responsibility and possibility" (p. 7); in other words, they warn against describing dominant systems in ways that make passivity seem reasonable. I will return to these ideas and draw in other aspects of youth resistance theory to consider the many ways that seeking equity can be imperfect and complex.

Inequity impacts the health and well-being of linguistically and culturally non-dominant youth and, by extension, their ability to learn and communicate. There is a growing body of evidence that discrimination influences mental health, physical health, and learning. Priest et al.

(2013), in a global systematic review of 121 studies, found significant associations between racial discrimination and negative mental health among children and youth. Body mapping exercises that Ruglis (2011) conducted with urban youth revealed severe and chronic physiological impacts of school stress. In cases where learning conditions are oppressive and unhealthy, she theorizes school drop-out as a form of life-saving "biopower" that youth exercise to protect themselves.

Similarly, David Kirkland has identified discrimination, violence, and trauma as barriers to learning for young black males in school systems that do not engage with their complexity (Kirkland, 2011). Drawing from this work, I will be looking at how trauma and daily stressors often accumulate along the lines of race, non-dominance, and difference, and how experiences of unremitting discrimination can make it difficult to heal and learn. I will explore, with particular attention to critical and cultural nuances, how youth and adult participants take up or reinvent theories of resilience, trauma-informed practice, and well-being.

Inequity impedes the trajectory of young people's days and expressions. It limits their access to spaces, and it limits their movements and communicative potential within them. For instance, Cruz (2011) draws on Lugones' ideas of tight spaces and resistant sociality (2003) to theorize how LGBTQ street youth create room to breathe and assert the value of their lives: "The spaces away from the scrutiny and examination of those in power, when queer street youth compare experiences and analyze power, become locations of creativity and possibility" (p. 209). Cruz attends to these acts of resistance, these spaces away, as a "fissure in the monolithic space of oppression" (p. 209). In response to these issues of safe space, Sutton and Kemp (2011) explore how youth can develop alongside their communities through programs that engage in critical place-making: "As young people make their places, they also make themselves – as

competent individuals, as members of a community, and as full participants in civic society" (p. 139). The current study will engage with the very concrete and consequential questions of where youth feel they can go and what they can communicate with others. It will also link this idea of space to broader ideas about land, belonging, dispossession, displacement, and power.

Understanding youth literacy practices often involves engaging with these questions of equity and resistance, including how youth from non-dominant linguistic and cultural backgrounds navigate systems designed to exclude or integrate them rather than extend their knowledge and communicative repertoires. The study of youth literacies draws from both sociocultural and critical perspectives to consider how young people engage with, interpret, and create texts. Scholars Sanford, Rogers, and Kendrick (2014) have defined youth literacy as the "ways young people engage in the world using a wide array of digital, multimodal media to connect with significant people and issues throughout the world" (p. 2). Youth literacy studies often explore identity formation, subversion of dominant literacies, affordances of digital and technological tools, transformation of learning processes, and sociopolitical agency (Morrell, 2008; Rogers, Winters, Perry, & LaMonde, 2015). All of these questions are relevant to this study, but particularly as they relate to the subversion/transformation of literacy and language learning, and the reaching for sociopolitical agency, which as Tuck and Yang (2014) remind us, does not always look the way we expect it to. To understand literacy practices in the lives of youth, I will also draw on Luke's extensive work theorizing critical shifts in adolescent literacy, including explicit consideration of linguistic and cultural difference. Luke (2012) examines changes in control of information in the digital age and suggests that these questions of "textual access, critique and interpretation" are also

> curriculum questions about whose version of culture, history and everyday life will count as official knowledge. They are questions about pedagogy and teaching: about which modes of information and cognitive scripts, which designs and genres, shall be deemed worth learning. (p. 5)

I also draw on Morrell's (2008) work, which extends the canon of critical literacy scholarship to include voices with "energy and urgency" (p. 82) that elucidate the ways that youth desire, search for, and enact critical literacy in their lives.

Summary.

This study engages with youth from non-dominant cultural and linguistic backgrounds who are seeking equitable learning experiences across various formal and informal spaces in their lives. Transforming literacy and learning practices with these youth means renegotiating and co-constructing how knowledge is generated, exchanged, and valued. The expansive literacy theories described in this chapter offer some alternatives to illustrating equity-seeking youth and dominant systems as binary realities that need bridging. Drawing from sociocultural and critical theories that recognize the learner as an active and social meaning-maker, these expansive literacies show how different knowledge systems can be extended, reimagined, and redesigned despite and because of conflict with oppressive systems. This study will build particularly on Gutiérrez' socio-critical literacy in the collective Third Space while drawing on other expansive literacy theories as needed. Gutiérrez' theory aligns with my study because it was conceived specifically through creative work with equity-seeking youth and because it focuses on how relational literacies can be designed.

Literature Review

As previously mentioned, this dissertation is guided by interest in how to productively engage with differences between youth literacies and dominant literacies so that communicative repertoires can be recognized and extended. This dissertation is also characterized by a pragmatic interest in educator strategies and the collaborative design of learning ecologies. In the following literature review, I explore existing research on expansive literacy practices with youth in formal school contexts and informal contexts. I also consider research on culturally sustaining pedagogy and program design with Aboriginal youth and with newcomer youth.

Expansive literacies with youth in schools.

Research with youth in schools includes exploring how multimodal instruction can allow academically marginalized students to challenge deficit perspectives by demonstrating competency (e.g., Anderson, Stewart, & Kachorsky, 2017), how multimodal instruction can increase learning motivation, collaboration, and sensitivity to semiotic affordances (e.g., Ho, Nelson, & Müeller-Wittig, 2011; Stein, 2008), and how multimodal instruction can be used to engage culturally and linguistically diverse students (e.g., Boyd & Brock, 2015; D'warte, 2014). There is also a move to challenge the idea of "leveraging" communicative repertoires, and instead frame "racialized and minoritized children and youth as producers of knowledge mediated by diverse, flexible, and robust communicative repertoires" (Martinez, Morales, & Aldana, 2017, p. 496). Others focus on improving the self-concept of non-dominant students through the "implementation of pedagogies that promote identity affirmation or what Manyak (2004) has called *identities of competence* in association with literacy and overall academic development" (Cummins, Hu, Markus, & Montero, 2015, p. 556). This is often conceived of through the lens of "identity texts" (Cummins, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011), "which can be

written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form. The identity text then holds a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light when students share identity texts with multiple audiences" (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 3).

A number of studies have found significant benefits to activities that allowed students and teachers to collaborate and reshape literacy practices according to student strengths. For instance, in her research with Aboriginal students at an alternative high school, Pirbhai-Illich (2010) found that student engagement in literacy projects required choice, undoing of classroom norms, and use of multiliteracies that drew on student interests and existing skills. Through researching their chosen topic of guns and gangs using their preferred forms of digital multimedia, youth became more invested, and attendance and literacy levels improved. Pirbhai-Illich found that the project succeeded because of flexibility and contingency planning and understanding that there are limits to what some students feel comfortable exploring in a school space.

Expansive literacies with youth in community contexts.

Research on expansive literacies in informal contexts often focuses on affirming youth identity and voice, supporting socio-emotional well-being, and engaging in sociopolitical critique. For instance, one study explores how non-linguistic modes such as digital storytelling can help newcomer and refugee youth explore difficult knowledge and represent themselves on their own terms (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017). Similarly, in her work creating autobiographies with youth from migrant farming backgrounds, Gutiérrez (2008) looks at how meaningful learning is heightened in a Third Space when facilitators focus on the use of hybrid language and embodied practice to link past and present realities.

In their work supporting the critical literacy and artistic practice of adolescents, Rogers, Winters, Perry, and LaMonde (2015) observe how youth "achieve power through multimodal intertextuality – the mix of genres, forms and modes that functioned as discursive resources for creating counter-narratives" (p. 102). They consider how these tools are used by youth to reimagine and reposition themselves and how their practice of "juxtaposing, hybridizing and remixing" allows them to play with and contest cultural materials and messages that do not represent or include them (p. 102).

These scholars are considering diverse ways that youth use expansive literacy practices in asserting their identities, producing counter-narratives, and engaging in system critique. Their research often uses a critical lens to investigate how these literacy practices are negotiated and valued, and how these can be reinvented in a Third Space between dominant systems and youth/community ways of being and learning.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy with Aboriginal youth.

As previously discussed, Aboriginal youth in Canada frequently have negative and incomplete educational experiences as a result of racism, deficit perspectives, inequitable funding, intergenerational trauma, and the exclusion of their ways of being and knowing (e.g., Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Kanu, 2002). Studies and collaborations over the last few decades have resulted in guidelines and recommendations for improving the educational experiences and attainment of Indigenous students. For instance, the Alaska Native Knowledge Network has put forward guidelines for supporting culturally responsive schools (1998), and teachers (1999), and for nurturing culturally healthy youth (2001), and school boards (2002). These Alaskan guidelines inspired the Hawai'i Guidelines for Culturally Healthy and Responsive Learning Environments developed with the understanding that "Hawaiian language and culture

is a fundamental prerequisite for nurturing culturally healthy and responsive citizens and contributes to the growth and harmony of the community" (Native Hawaiian Education Council & Ka Haka 'Ula O Keÿelikölani College of Hawaiian Language, 2002). In British Columbia, the First Peoples Principles of Learning were developed by the First Nations Education Steering Committee with an advisory committee of Elders, scholars and knowledge-keepers. These principles emphasize well-being, holism, relationships, Indigenous knowledge and identity, and generational roles and responsibilities, among other culturally informed principles (FNESC, 2008).

Promising practices synthesized in literature reviews for Australia (e.g., Lloyd, Lewthwaite, Osborne, & Boon, 2015), the United States (e.g., Castagno & Brayboy, 2008), and Canada (e.g., Kovacs, 2009) uncover many similar recurring strategies for teaching and learning with Indigenous students. I have grouped them here according to the themes of relationships, pedagogy, and communication/modes. Commonly identified recommendations for relational learning include fostering caring relationships with students, involving community members in the classroom, and providing opportunities for collaborative work. Recommendations for pedagogy include cultural relevance, real-world connections and purpose, high expectations, and direct and scaffolded instruction. Recommendations for communication/modes include traditional language learning, concrete materials and experiential tasks, opportunities for creativity and reflection, dialogic interaction, and multimodal forms of communication such as narrative and visuals. In terms of literacy pedagogy, research has found that students can leverage knowledge and skills from Indigenous literacy traditions for the learning of text-based literacies (Francis & Reyhner, 2002; Griffin, Hemphill, Camp, & Wolf, 2004; Hare, 2012; McKeough et al., 2008; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001; Zepeda, 1995). Other studies show

how classroom literacy norms can shift by drawing on cultural patterns of discourse, for example, through practising joint interpretations of stories (Au & Kawakami, 1985) or through asserting choices about Indigenous and English language use that "draw upon multiple semiotic systems for different purposes in specific contexts" (McCarty, Romero-Little, Warhol, & Zepeda, 2009).

Examples of research on culturally sustaining pedagogy in Canadian schools include a study with First Nations students in Saskatchewan (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997) that showed the benefits of immersion in a learning environment where healing is a central focus, culture and spirituality guide all actions, and ceremonies "bring communities together, resisting fragmentation, in ritual enactment of wholeness and connectedness with one another and with the world cosmos" (p. 36). Ives and Sinha (2016) show how community support networks outside of school are essential to the success of Inuit high school students, and they identify the desire for sharing roles and responsibilities between teachers and families. Another study with high school students and families from Yukon First Nations (Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan, & Renaud, 2013) found that the most important characteristic of effective teachers was their disposition towards the students, which influenced all other actions. Participants described good teachers who knew their students and believed they could succeed, particularly through recognizing their cultural foundations as strengths rather than liabilities.

Research in Canada has also explored how community networks support learning that happens outside of school. For instance, an Aboriginal advisory group with Canadian Heritage outlined how cultural learning and culturally safe spaces are nurtured by the work of Elders, artists, and storytellers (Canadian Heritage, 2008). Additionally, the Canadian Council on Learning (2009) found that "Informal learning and experiential learning – including participation

in social, cultural and recreational activities – helps foster a desire to learn among Aboriginal youth while helping with the acquisition of new skills" (CCL, 2009, p. 6). A study with the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (Patrick, Budach, & Muckpaloo, 2013) provides a good example of what culturally sustaining pedagogy can look like in a community program. This centre engages children, youth, and families in Inuit language and literacy from a funds of knowledge, multiliteracies perspective where these practices are "intergenerational and object- and interaction-based" (p. 49). For instance, through a photovoice activity, caregivers and children aged four to 14 collaborated to photograph and write (in English and Inuktitut) about important aspects of their lives including places and objects of cultural significance. Through the creation of these collective projects, memories and stories surfaced, fostering "Indigenous knowledge and social relationships co-constructed interdependently through dialogue and shared activity" (p. 56). Informal learning spaces can affirm culture and language through interactive, intergenerational, and hands-on experiences.

While these types of guidelines, recommendations, and examples can help orient non-Aboriginal educators to culturally sustaining pedagogy, without a more comprehensive foundation they risk a literal or fragmented application (Bartolomé, 2008; Ermine, 1995). For instance, given the risks of overgeneralization and misinterpretation, FNESC cautions educators to adapt the First Peoples Principles of Learning according to the knowledge and culture of the traditional territory where they are teaching (2008). Additionally, a study conducted by Kanu (2007) showed that although culturally responsive pedagogy and content positively influenced the achievement of many Aboriginal students, it did not significantly improve attendance or retention for Aboriginal students most impacted by macrostructural influences such as socioeconomic status. Similarly, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) question why decades of writing

and recommendations on culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous students have not more meaningfully changed teaching and learning. They draw on the work of Cleary and Peacock (1998) and Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) to suggest that guidelines are sometimes taken up in ways that essentialize students who may have just as many different learning styles among them as their white peers. Drawing on the work of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) and Deloria and Wildcat (2001), Castagno and Brayboy urge instead that changes must be systemic, that to catalyze collective empowerment in education, self-determination and sovereignty are needed. They also recommend that successful culturally responsive schooling would address racism, engage with Indigenous epistemologies, and connect with specific student learning needs and interests.

Meaningful change in educational practice with Indigenous students depends on addressing inequity, supporting self-determination, and embracing a relational epistemology. As previously discussed, Aboriginal youth in Canada do not currently have adequate access to equitable, culturally based education.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy with newcomer youth.

As discussed in the introduction, newcomer youth in Canada do not have adequate access to quality, culturally sustaining programs and schools. Despite Canada's reputation as a welcoming nation, "current limitations in settlement policies and services not only undermine the socioeconomic wellbeing of newcomer youth and their families but also pose multiple risks to their mental health" (Shakya, Khanlou, & Gonsalves, 2010). A study across three Canadian cities found that mainstream youth services and educational spaces exclude and fail newcomer youth through a lack of cultural competence, while alternative spaces such as those run by settlement organizations are underfunded (Van Ngo, 2009). Canadian policies introduced over the last few

decades limit the autonomy of settlement organizations and often force them to compete against each other for short term contracts that align with government priorities, restricting their ability to consistently and responsively serve newcomer populations according to their specific needs (Mukhtar, Dean, Wilson, Ghassemi, & Wilson, 2016; Sadiq, 2004). In many instances, settlement organizations have to scale back advocacy and participate in narratives about themselves as "a rational, dispensable instrument in the production of public services" in order to survive (Acheson & Laforest, 2013, p. 612). Understanding how systemic inequities impact newcomer youth is essential to addressing the injustice and exclusion occurring in Canadian institutions, communities, and schools. Youth and practitioners are also innovating despite these oppressive systems, and their promising pedagogical designs offer narratives of possibility. This section explores research into culturally sustaining pedagogy with newcomer youth.

Research in the area of culturally sustaining pedagogy with newcomer youth considers how educators and other supportive adults can affirm and extend dynamic cultural and linguistic repertoires that students bring with them. It also considers how students can be supported in their transition to a new community and educational system, and develop the skills and support networks necessary to flourish in a new environment. Here I will explore studies with newcomer youth in schools, as well as in community contexts.

Sustaining culture with newcomer youth is about welcoming their languages and ensuring that learning English does not diminish their linguistic capital or positive sense of self. At the same time, the desire to succeed academically and professionally requires that students develop a specific set of culturally nuanced capacities and English language skills. Jim Cummins (1991) differentiates between "basic interpersonal communicative skills" and "cognitive academic language proficiency," thereby helping educators understand how much additional

time and support students need to excel in the language of school. Building on this study and other research (e.g., Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000), Himelle and Himelle (2009) offer classroom teachers strategies for becoming "mediators of comprehension" so that all students can access and develop their academic language and content knowledge simultaneously. Among other academic learning strategies, they promote ways to encourage full participation and scaffolding so that students can leverage their existing cognitive and literacy skills.

Other research points to supporting engagement in school through multilingualism. García and Kleyn (2016) build on García's (2009) definition of *translanguaging* and Cummins' *interdependence hypothesis* to understand translanguaging as "the development of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire, which does not in any way correspond to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages" (p. 14). Their study shows how a translanguaging lens disrupts pedagogical and political assumptions and opens up a generative space, for instance, where students can "use their full oral linguistic repertories to deepen conversations, reflect, and make connections." Similarly, Creese and Blackledge (2010) draw on the earlier work of Cummins (2005) and García, Skutnabb-Kangas, and Torres-Guzman (2006) to further explore multilingual teaching as a practice of sustaining, rather than just tolerating, the language and literacy practices of all students. They also consider how translanguaging (García, 2007) and heteroglossia (Bailey, 2007; Bakhtin, 1984, 1986) can allow bilingual students and teachers to move fluidly between languages as needed.

Studies have also explored how multimodality can change the dynamic between students and teachers and engage the learning strengths of newcomer youth. For instance, Chappell, Faltis, and Cahnmann-Taylor (2013) investigate the ways that artistic practice can help teachers move past their own discomfort to engage with emerging bilinguals and the complexities of

teaching in a multilingual context. Schultz and Coleman-King (2012) investigate how teachers used multimodal storytelling to engage immigrant students in an urban Grade 5 classroom, and the ways that this allowed them to participate fully and demonstrate competence by centering on narratives and modes of significance to them. For instance, through the "buildings speak" project, students identified buildings that hold family and community stories and documented them through photography, writing, and audio recordings.

Summary

Through this theoretical framework and literature review, I have situated my study within a growing body of knowledge on sociocultural/critical literacies, expansive literacies, and youth equity. In schools, expansive literacies have been found to create opportunities for linguistically and culturally non-dominant youth to demonstrate competence and to counter deficit perspectives. In community contexts, expansive literacies have been shown to facilitate the reclaiming of well-being, the assertion of complex identities, and the production of counter-narratives. Scholarship on culturally sustaining pedagogy with Indigenous students has focused on relational learning, pedagogy that prioritizes purpose, and the use of a variety of traditional and contemporary languages and modes. Scholars in this field have also recognized the shortcomings of narrow guidelines, and advocated for addressing macrostructural variables, supporting self-determination, and embracing Indigenous epistemologies. Culturally sustaining pedagogy with newcomer youth has focused on the value of multilingualism, translanguaging, and multimodality for extending dynamic cultural and linguistic repertoires while preparing students for academic success. To elaborate on this prior research through a relational lens, I have designed a series of three qualitative studies inspired by constructivist grounded theory and

drawing strategies from expert interviewing and design research. The details of my methodology are described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, research is lacking on how equity-seeking youth in Canada learn in ways that are culturally sustaining, and how systems and strategies can be adapted to better serve their needs. In particular, few studies explore how educators design learning experiences for and with equity-seeking youth through the lenses of relationship and communication. As previously mentioned, I intend to explore (a) the values and desires of youth and practitioners, (b) the principles and strategies they use to design learning experiences, and (c) how to nurture the approaches that work well. Data were generated through expert interviews with practitioners from across Canada, and through research partnerships with a First Nations high school and settlement organization. I begin this chapter with my research questions and a description of the contexts in which I conducted each of this dissertation's interlocking component studies. In the remainder of this chapter, I summarize my methodology using the phases of qualitative research outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2008) to explain my positionality, theoretical underpinnings, strategies, methods of data generation and analysis, and practices of interpretation and evaluation.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?"

2. “How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?”
3. “What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?”

I chose to conduct a series of three situated qualitative studies that allowed me to investigate these practical questions while also exploring the ways youth and practitioners understand their experiences. The following section describes the contexts in which the research took place.

Research Contexts

Context: Study 1, expert interviews.

This dissertation is informed by interviews conducted with 12 practitioners who have extensive experience working with equity-seeking youth in formal and informal learning environments. I reached out to potential participants through publicly available information and through my professional and personal networks. Through these conversations, I sought to understand the diverse lived experiences of practitioners, including the range of values and strategies they draw on to inform program design and implementation. The interviewees are from across Canada, including the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Atlantic Canada. They include practitioners with experience working with diverse populations, including Aboriginal youth, immigrant youth, and/or youth with refugee experience; and many practitioners belong to the cultural group that they serve. Four of these interviews were conducted in person, and the remaining eight were conducted remotely using either phone or

Skype. I have listed the interviews here according to the learning context each interviewee works within. To protect the identities of those who wish to keep their contributions confidential, I have not listed their regions. I have also used pseudonyms except in the cases of Shirley, Gilad, and Wendy, who opted to be identified. I conducted these interviews between January 2016 and June 2017.

Formal Contexts:

- Shirley, principal of K–12 Gwich'in school;
- Frances, high school English as a second language (ESL) teacher;
- Jackie, supervisor of school-based art therapy program;
- Taylor, newcomer education specialist;
- Yvonne, English as an additional language (EAL) specialist;
- Gloria, Aboriginal education specialist.

Informal Contexts:

- Amelia, counsellor and settlement worker;
- Alexander, counsellor and youth coordinator;
- Corinne, counsellor and settlement youth worker;
- Nora, coordinator of comic book and digital story program;
- Gilad, artist and founder of iAM photography program;
- Wendy, poet and founder of The Elder Project.

The interviewees' backgrounds and the contexts where they work are further elaborated in the expert interview data chapter.

Context: Study 2, First Nations high school.

I also conducted research with a high school for First Nations students located in an urban centre in a northern region of Central Canada. I visited the region during the fall of 2015, met with organizations to determine if my research could be a good fit for them, and was introduced to this school's administration through a mutual colleague. After multiple meetings and discussions, we decided to partner on a project to identify and develop promising pedagogical

practices at the school. I moved to the region to conduct research for four months from January 2016 through April 2016.

This research site is significant to the broader conversation about the learning desires of equity-seeking youth because education systems in Canada are not adequately meeting the needs of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal youth accounts of schooling reflect negative experiences that include racism and the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Kanu, 2002). In addition, Aboriginal students often face barriers to education that are linked to socio-economic inequities, underfunded schools, intergenerational impacts of the residential school system, and being labeled and constrained according to deficit models (Alberta School Boards Association, 2011; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013; National Aboriginal Design Committee, 2002; Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 2005). Negative and incomplete educational experiences markedly prevent Indigenous people from fully exercising their economic, social, cultural, and civil rights (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009).

Despite these challenges, Aboriginal people continue to uphold both academic and community-based learning, drawing from strong connections to extended family, Elders, and other community members (CCL, 2009). Significant gains in Aboriginal educational achievement in the last fifty years (Siggner & Costa, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2011) can be attributed to a range of initiatives within school systems and communities. For instance, in Nova Scotia, Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education has been cited as a key contributor to increased graduation rates for Mi'kmaw students (Mikmaw Kina'matnewey, 2013), while in British Columbia, partnerships between Aboriginal communities and school districts have been

foundational in the development of appropriate pedagogy, content, and student support (FNESC, 2015, 2017).

This research partnership took place at a small alternative school that serves First Nations students from remote reserves who do not have access to a high school where they live. The students are from remote First Nations communities, and most have a deep understanding of and established practice with their traditional knowledge and languages. The school hires both First Nations and settler staff and is designed so that students can work at their own pace on courses that they need to graduate, and work with whichever teacher(s) they prefer. However, staff have expressed that they cannot always adequately meet the needs of the students because they are under-resourced, particularly in the areas of mental health and hands-on learning. They are also limited by having to comply with the provincial curriculum, including ensuring that the students pass standardized tests. During my involvement, I worked with the collaborating educator and other staff to develop partnerships that would allow for the design and delivery of culturally sustaining pedagogical opportunities. We successfully established a partnership with a university mentorship program to offer hands-on workshops that were designed according to principles of Indigenous pedagogy. The 12 participants at this site included the collaborating educator, three additional staff members, a community partner, and seven youth.

Research at this site uncovers examples of the creative ways that practitioners and equity-seeking youth work to build momentum towards their ideal relational learning experiences despite the barriers they face.

Context: Study 3, newcomer youth program.

I also conducted research in partnership with a settlement organization in a large urban centre in Central Canada. This organization has been working in diverse neighbourhoods of the city for

over a hundred years and serves people from dozens of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. I volunteered with their newcomer youth program for almost a year before beginning the research partnership with them. After initial planning meetings with the organization through September 2017, I conducted research at this site from October 2017 until January 2018. The newcomer youth program provides a range of leadership and recreation programming, as well as the weekly creative arts program that is the focus of this research.

This research site is significant to the broader conversation about the learning desires of equity-seeking youth because newcomer youth in Canada do not currently have adequate access to culturally appropriate programs, supports, and learning environments (Shakya, Khanlou, & Gonsalves, 2010; Van Ngo, 2009). The psychological stresses of starting over during a pivotal time in their lives can be exacerbated by discrimination, isolation, economic stress, exclusion from mainstream systems, and identity challenges (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Rossiter, Hatami, Ripley, & Rossiter, 2015). Further, students learning English as an additional language lack support within or outside of school to help them gain the language skills to connect socially or succeed academically (Stewart, 2011). Although newcomer youth in Canada have been shown to benefit significantly from involvement in prosocial community activities (Van Ngo, 2009), their participation is often impeded by a lack of culturally appropriate opportunities and isolation from networks that would inform them or invite them in (Herlock, McCullagh, & Schissel, 2004).

Despite these challenges, newcomer youth and their support networks are advocating for systemic change in Canadian schools and successfully creating informal spaces where young people can communicate confidently, learn deeply, and connect meaningfully. For instance, the Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network advocates for change through arts-based storytelling and youth-led public education workshops. They promote “artistry, confidence, and

self-expression" among their membership (Canadian Council for Refugees, n.d.). Given that immigrants to Canada currently constitute over 20% of the population and are from an increasingly diverse range of countries and cultural and linguistic groups (Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Statistics Canada, 2013, 2016), it is imperative that the right of all young people to culturally safe learning spaces be prioritized at the national, provincial, and community levels.

This research partnership takes place within a program designed for newcomers, including refugee claimants and convention refugees, in a large Canadian urban centre. The organization provides weekly programs, workshops, and events to help youth build skills, form supportive relationships, and contribute to their communities. During my involvement, a volunteer professional artist taught knitting and painting, and staff led the youth in creating crafts for others. The program takes place in a small room full of supplies and decorated by the youth themselves, housed within a building on the main street of a historically low-income, newcomer neighbourhood. Participants in the creative arts program during my involvement were mostly from the Philippines, some also being from Tibet and South America. The cultural backgrounds of the staff also reflect this diversity. The seven participants at this site included the collaborating facilitator, the collaborating artist, an additional staff member, and four youth. Research at this site uncovers examples of the creative ways that practitioners and equity-seeking youth work to build momentum towards creating their ideal relational learning experiences in an informal space despite the barriers they face.

Researcher Positionality, Intentions, and Ethics

Positionality.

Maintaining balanced and thoughtful participation requires researcher reflexivity. I was aware of my position as a white woman and established settler Canadian with European ancestry, and of

being a representative of an academic institution. Although at times I wanted to distance myself from this identity, I found that participants were more comfortable receiving me when I was forthright about my affiliation with a colonial system and taking up my power in solidarity rather than denying it. For instance, I originally tried designing and pitching my research proposal based in Indigenous methodology and was met with some incredulity because these ideas originated neither in my own worldview, nor in the specific worldviews of the people I was sitting at the table with. Instead, I learned to position myself as an outsider researcher with an interest in educational equity and social justice for all children and youth. Throughout the process of research design, I was also aware of the historical and political landscape of research with equity-seeking youth and the need to establish new strategies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The following sections on intentions and ethics provide some insight into how I attempted to enact my values with awareness of these histories, and despite the constraints of representing academia.

Intentions.

As previously discussed, youth is a sociocultural category that has been constructed along with narratives about youth as dangerous and/or in danger. Framing youth as underdeveloped and "at-risk" can be used to undermine and manage them, particularly when they come from equity-seeking communities (e.g., Kwon, 1973/2013; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Youth benefit from mentorship and the guidance of caring adults and supportive peers, yet care can easily become a euphemism for control if those relationships are not grounded in mutual respect. Youth can also be conceptualized as an isolated and idealized category, for instance, by glorifying their independence and downplaying the relational sources of their strength. Many initiatives seek to celebrate youth voice and leadership as occurring in a vacuum outside the influence of adult

mentors, family, and community. At other times – and this is particularly true when the youth comes from an equity-seeking group – one adult or organization will cast themselves as a hero who empowered that young person to finally speak up. These attitudes ignore personal and collective histories, social support networks, and the diverse ways that equity-seeking youth already communicate and advocate in ways outsiders may not understand, often in those spaces where they are not watched, recorded, or evaluated.

Researchers often fall into these thought traps because the academic system encourages and even requires it of us. Research proposals and funding competitions expect a justification of the research as beneficial and urgent. Researchers often fulfill this expectation by claiming that there is a "dearth" or "paucity" of information concerning a particular topic (group of people) and that the research is essential to stopping a negative trend or lessening the likelihood of a feared outcome. This script can become problematic when it overestimates research as a tool for change and when it frames equity-seeking youth and their communities according to their deficits, reinforcing existing narratives that they are unable to survive or sustain themselves without outside intervention. This can be done using sensational statistics, so that the researcher does not have to say directly that they believe these young people and the places they come from to be badly broken. This can also be done using descriptive language, for instance, of shattered windows and second-hand clothes, so that the researcher does not have to say directly that they pity the youth or judge their families.

Research with youth can also tend towards an obsession with youth voice, and this is generally framed as an empowering opportunity for them to uncover injustice, share their ideas, and be taken seriously. While this type of participatory research can be experienced positively, it can also intrude on the lives of young people who are already dealing with a constant sense of

being questioned. Those who are managing the daily stressors of oppression and/or trauma may prefer to get through the school day or put their energy into their own forms of resistance that are not mediated through the perceptions/representations of a researcher. Finally, researchers often take credit for eliciting youth voice as it emerges, sometimes implying that they, the researchers, have created or freed the voice or gained access to it at the exact moment that it became noteworthy. These are colonial thought traps: that through finding something new and authentic, labouring upon it, or "saving" it, you can claim it as your own. Of course, that youth voice exists and often flourishes away from the research game of finding and keeping, in circles of care that the researcher cannot see. It has not been made, freed, or discovered in the moment that the researcher willed it to be.

To keep me focused with this research process, knowing that it is difficult not to fall into these thought traps, being who I am, I have outlined four intentions:

- to challenge deficit perspectives by taking up Tuck's (2009) *desire-based theory of change*;
- to have a flexible, participant-centred process that values rather than evaluates people;
- to use a trauma-informed, collaborative lens; and
- to use a relational model that involves both youth and their support networks (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; CCL, 2007; Settee, 2011; Stewart, 2011).

Challenging deficit perspectives.

The pursuit of change is often preceded by an inventory of unmet needs that can leave youth and their communities mired in deficit-oriented narratives (Chilisa, 2012). Researchers should not give power to disharmony by emphasizing the negative but focus on harmony that allows for growth and positive change (Wilson, 2008). A desire-based theory of change (Tuck, 2009) offers

an alternative way to move forward productively without glossing over the realities of oppressive systems. Drawing on the work of scholars Soja (1996) and Lefebvre (1991) who use *thirding* to deconstruct false binaries, Tuck uses thirding to interrupt the binary of reproduction versus resistance in discussions about power (2009). The resulting theory of change complicates and interweaves the possibilities of human agency and the realities of oppressive systems. Her conception of desire draws from the work of poststructuralist theorists Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who explain desire as complex, contradictory, engaged, and generative. While a desire-based theory of change intends to create questions and discomfort for researchers, it also provides footholds for seriously considering the implications of research.

> Firstly, the theory focuses on balancing past and future, negative and positive:
>
> Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities. Desire is involved with the not yet and, at times, the not anymore. . . . Desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future. (Tuck, 2009, p. 417)

Secondly, the theory adapts Gordon's (1997) concept of complex personhood for an Indigenous context in which the collective and the individual depend on one another. Tuck, drawing from Grande (2004), defines collective complex personhood in this way:

> Within collectivity, recognizing complex personhood involves making room for the contradictions, for the mis/re/cognitions, usually in an effort to sustain a sense of collective balance. . . . For tribal peoples, this can mean resisting characterizing one another in ways that tacitly reduce us to being either trapped in the irrelevant past or fouled up by modernity. . . . In sum, it is our work to afford the multiplicity of life's choices for one another. (Tuck, 2009, p. 421)

Thirdly, the desire-based theory of change upholds Vizenor's (1994) concept of *survivance* or "moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal" (as cited in Tuck, 2009, p. 422).

This study takes up a desire-based theory of change, seeking to acknowledge challenges while building on participants' generative visions and insights. It respects collective complex personhood, recognizing the many ways youth interpret and express their fluid identities as individuals and as relational beings whose connection to others informs their literacy and learning approaches. Finally, this research is meant to identify pedagogical strategies that move beyond reactive measures and standardized expectations, to explore renewing and re-energizing learning according to self-determined community values and priorities.

Valuing people.

In this study I endeavoured to use a flexible, participant-centred approach. This means listening and observing to notice when a plan is not fitting. This means building trust and opening lines of communication so that people feel they can let me know if something needs to stop or change. This means recognizing that most academic research methods, even when infused with "othered" perspectives, are still essentially Eurocentric in their abstraction and interest in controlling/guaranteeing certain acceptable processes and outcomes. I have tried to hold these contradictions in balance so that my research is always subverting itself to stay alive. It means adjusting speed when I am out of pace, recalibrating emotional tone when I am dissonant, and remaking the plan constantly to fit into the social and cultural lives of participants. Additionally, this research values people by not evaluating them. Youth and their support networks are already exhausted by constant evaluation, inspection, and reporting that are meant to guarantee quality but often impedes it. I have tried to understand participants and their decision-making given their

histories/contexts/identities, rather than according to predetermined standards. This research is critical of systems but not of people. It is interested in how people navigate difficult and contradictory environments to find moments of clarity, intention, and action. I have not found any villains or heroes, only people trying to make their way towards the best they have to offer.

Applying a trauma-informed lens.

This research also uses a trauma-informed lens in consideration of the adverse experiences that many youth and adults in my study have experienced. Trauma-informed approaches do not seek to treat the harm done but endeavour to interact with participants in ways that minimize the risk of re-traumatizing them and that make room for personal growth and healing by establishing a sense of safety and self-efficacy (Craig, 2008, 2016; Poole & Greaves, 2012). This often involves creating a culture of non-violence and collaboration so that trauma survivors experience choice and control (Bloom & Sreedhar, 2008; Harris & Fallot, 2001). Poole and Greaves (2012) have drawn on a number of existing frameworks to explore trauma-informed care, including these nine principles of sensitive practice established by primary care practitioners in Saskatchewan: respect, taking time, rapport, sharing information, respecting boundaries, fostering mutual learning, understanding non-linear healing, and demonstrating awareness and knowledge of interpersonal violence (Schachter, 2009). For me as a researcher, this means showing awareness of how some of the youth in my study are impacted by intergenerational trauma, childhood trauma, and ongoing experiences of oppression, discrimination, and loss. This means showing awareness of how some of the adults in my study are experiencing vicarious trauma through their empathic connection with young people, particularly when they are from the same equity-seeking groups. For me, taking up trauma-informed approaches in research means taking informed consent seriously, not asking questions that would push participants to

reveal painful stories, and building relationships of trust and mutual learning that uphold participant agency.

Embracing a relational model.

Lastly, I have taken a relational approach to research that looks at the learning connections youth have with supportive adults in their lives. I seek both youth and adult perspectives, and consider how those interactions impact learning and communicative potential. I am also interested in the relationships between adults within and beyond this circle of care. In conceptualizing my research, I have been influenced by Stewart's (2011) adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (i.e., Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In this model, nested environmental systems influence the individual over time, and the individual also impacts his or her environment. The microsystem is the immediate environment and the pattern of activities and relationships within it, the mesosystem considers the way different microsystems interact, the exosystem is removed but still has an indirect impact on the individual (i.e., institutions), and the macrosystem is the sociocultural and societal context. The chronosystem refers to changes that the person and environment undergo over time. In Stewart's adapted model, refugee youth also generate capacity and resilience through interaction within nanosystems, or relationships and networks where support is personalized and intimate (2011). Stewart's model is illustrated below in Figure 3.1.

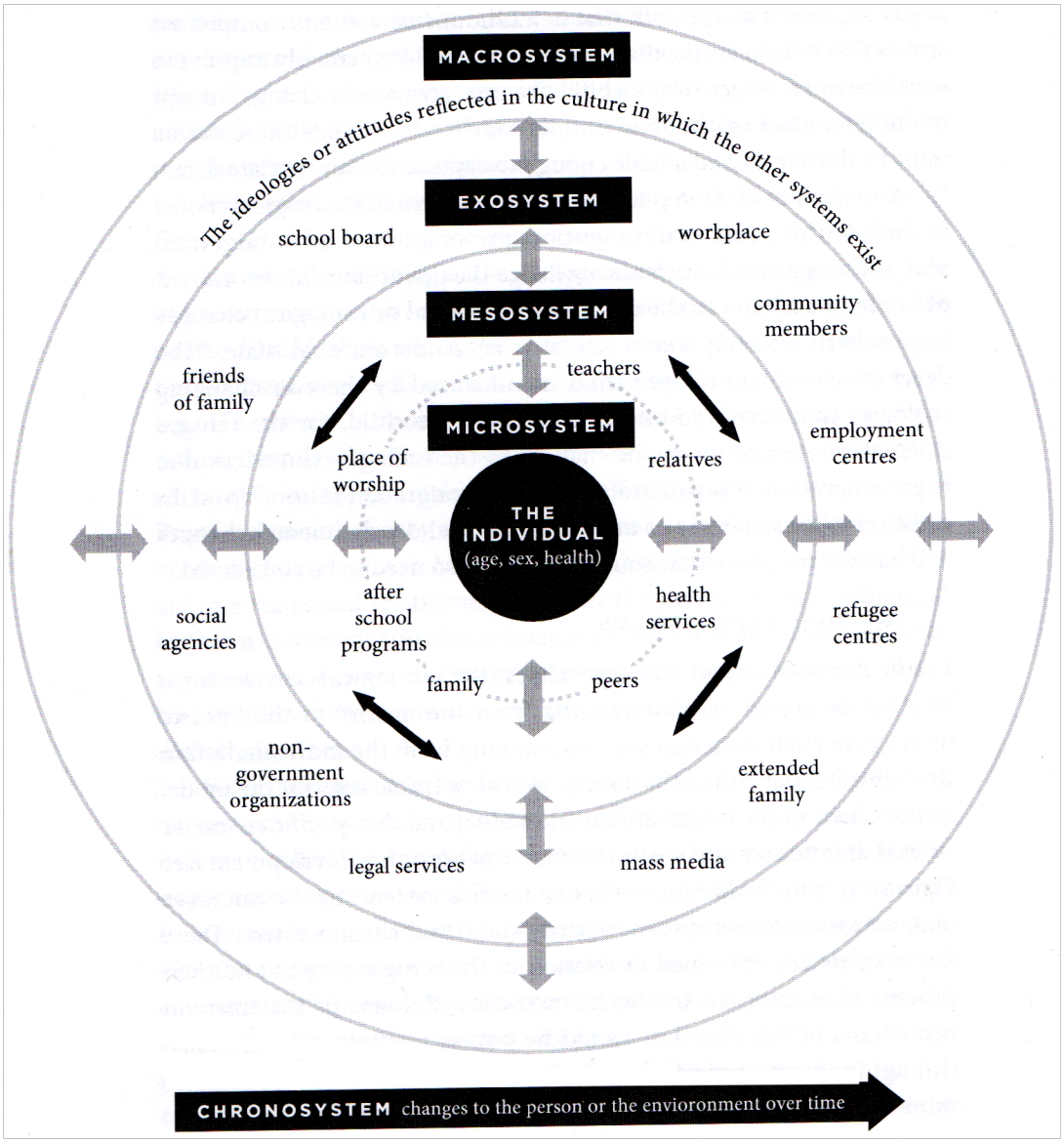


Figure 3.1 Stewart's adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model. Reprinted from Chapter 1, "Children and Armed Conflict" of *Supporting Refugee Children: Strategies for Educators*, by Jan Stewart © University of Toronto Press 2011. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

I have also been influenced by Indigenous models of relational pedagogy, including the First Nations Holistic Life Learning Model (CCL, 2007). The image of the model has been

removed because of copyright considerations, but can be found here: https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2007-CCL-FN-Holistic-Lifelong-Learning-Model.pdf. This model uses the image of a tree where the roots represent the many domains and sources of knowledge, the rings in the trunk represent different stages of formal and informal learning, the branches represent individual holistic well-being, and the leaves represent collective well-being. This is a regenerative and interconnected system where learning guides come from all areas of person's life:

> Just as leaves provide nourishment to the roots and support the tree's foundation, the community's collective well-being rejuvenates the individual's learning cycle. Learning guides – mentors, counsellors, parents, teachers, and Elders – provide additional support and opportunities for individuals to learn throughout their lifespan. (CCL, 2007, p. 2)

In many Indigenous worldviews, relationships are both a key source of knowledge and the purpose of attaining that knowledge, to create and sustain positive relationships within community (Settee, 2011). Katz and St. Denis (1991) apply this relational view to understanding the role of "teacher as healer," describing a spiritually informed educator as one who "seeks to respect and foster interconnections, between herself, her students and the subject matter; between the school, the community and the universe at large – while respecting each part of these interconnected webs" (p. 24). In these examples, Indigenous pedagogy is about working through relationships to affirm wholeness, nurture collective well-being, and feed into cycles of regeneration.

Referring to these models has helped me think about whom to involve in my research and with what intentions. Accordingly, much of the focus is on how different youth needs and desires for learning and communication are met by a range of people including teachers, principals,

after-school programmers, therapists, language teachers, and artists. I also look at systems that these support people work within, and how these systems ultimately impact the youth as well. Stewart's adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model and the First Nations Holistic Life Learning Model help me to recognize important learning guides in young people's lives, including those I have not included in my research.

Ethics.

The history of research in colonized, racialized, and displaced communities is one of human rights abuses and misrepresentation (Chilisa, 2012; Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007; McLaughlin & Alfaro-Velcamp, 2015; Pidgeon & Cox, 2002; Smith, 2012). Ongoing negative experiences with extractive and disrespectful research have prompted some communities and organizations to reject outsider researchers (Pittaway, Bartolomei, & Hugman, 2010; Smith, 2012). Given the negative connotations of research in equity-seeking communities, I endeavoured to proactively demonstrate my ethical commitments. In addition to receiving approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB), I worked with the leadership of partnering organizations to listen and be responsive to their particular concerns. Working with adults who cared about the youth was the first step; engaging ethically with the youth became an ongoing labour of reflection and courage. In all of my data generation, I followed the principles of relational accountability laid out by Weber-Pillwax (2001) to nurture healthy relationships in research through respect, responsibility, and reciprocity.

Respect.

Respectful, trusting relationships are the foundation of research work with equity-seeking youth and their support networks. To connect with the First Nations high school, I asked a mutual contact to introduce me so that they would know I was part of a trusted network. I had early

conversations to build understanding and address any concerns with the school leadership, staff, and education department, as well as representatives of the chiefs of each community served by the school. I also put in the time to develop trust with the students and staff by volunteering two to three times a week in the classroom and after-school programs. To connect with the settlement organization, I volunteered with them over the period of a year before beginning my research. I built trust over time and had many conversations with staff and leadership to organize the research with respect for the opportunities and barriers they experience as an organization.

With each expert interview, I was mindful of the participant's time and respectful of their deep knowledge. I also shared information about myself and the study that would open up a safe space for difficult topics. In all research contexts I was committed to developing an inclusive, flexible, and participatory process that allowed participants to suggest changes. This meant accepting when the organization wanted consent forms changed, understanding when participants preferred that I take notes rather than audio-record or preferred sharing written rather than oral responses. It also meant accepting when people requested having conversations off-record or asked to have sensitive information removed from transcripts. Finally, it meant not putting pressure on people to participate when they were not interested or had other priorities and stresses in their lives.

Responsibility.

Responsibility means transparent decision-making about ethics and an ongoing commitment to actualizing them through respectful relationships (Ermine, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Many organizations and communities have their own ethical guidelines for research, but in situations where they do not exist, it is appropriate to create them together (Ermine, 2005). Neither the First Nations high school or settlement organization had existing guidelines, so my guiding principles

came from our meetings and conversations. For instance, at the First Nations high school I met with chiefs' representatives who shared concerns about not wanting their youth to be researched on, but rather wanting the research to be about effective teaching and learning practices. They spoke particularly about the colonial history of research and recent negative experiences with researchers. The expectation coming out of this meeting was that the research would not cause harm, and that it would generate something useful. Leadership and staff at the settlement organization emphasized that they did not want the youth to feel pressured to reveal painful or personal stories, and that they did not want staff to feel evaluated or interfered with in their professional decision-making.

Through the expert interview process, I sometimes negotiated access and recommendations to exceptional professionals through formal or informal agreements with government agencies or school boards. In addition, every expert interviewee had their own needs and preferences for feeling safe in the interview process. These sometimes included prior knowledge of the research protocol, opting out of some questions, informal meeting(s) before agreeing to the research, a hands-on role in member-checking their transcript, and choosing whether to share confidentially or be credited for their ideas. Based on these exchanges at my three research sites, I committed to (a) do no harm/nurture well-being, (b) generate practical knowledge, (c) promote privacy and non-disclosure, (d) demonstrate supportive non-interference, and (e) share information and control.

Reciprocity.

The driving purpose of this research is to benefit equity-seeking youth and their communities by identifying, strengthening, and celebrating practices grounded in their own knowledge and communicative repertoires. Impact can be both ideological and material, supporting shifts in

thinking, behavior, opportunities, and resources at the personal, local, and structural levels (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). I chose a topic in order to generate information that equity-seeking youth and their support networks are asking for (e.g., Crowe, Beardy-Meekis, & Abara, 2014; Campbell, Glover, & Laryea, 2016). I chose a research design meant to generate practical insights and tools (Akker et al., 2006; Edelson, 2006). I have generated and shared accessible versions of our findings so that they can inspire educators, parents, Elders, youth, and other decision-makers. I also worked to make the research process itself beneficial to participants, creating opportunities for reflection, learning, and skill development.

However, much of my contribution to research sites was made through additional activities I did alongside the research. At the First Nations high school I (a) provided information to school staff on professional topics of interest, (b) contributed to brainstorming and planning for whole school projects and initiatives, (c) bridged relationships between the school and community partners, (d) created a contact list of resource people who had the skills that youth wanted to learn, and (e) trained teachers from across the region on skills and knowledge they had identified as necessary to their practice. With the settlement organization, I volunteered for almost a year before beginning my research. In addition to general support, I facilitated leadership workshops, gave a presentation on professional communication, and helped to redesign workshops on community engagement.

Theoretical Paradigms and Perspectives

As a qualitative researcher, I am particularly interested in the perceptions of learners and the meaning they attribute to their activities (Creswell, 1994). Within the multifaceted field of qualitative research, I consider myself to be a methodological "bricoleur" who can choose and adapt various interpretive paradigms or perspectives as the research context and questions

require (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). However, I am also aware that I need to be thoughtful about these choices because paradigms "represent belief systems that attach users to particular worldviews. Perspectives, in contrast, are less well-developed systems, and one can move between them more easily" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 8). I have therefore aligned my research most consistently with the constructivist paradigm, while also drawing on transformative, Indigenous, and appreciative perspectives. Rooting my study in a constructivist paradigm means that I am also taking up "a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 32). However, while a constructivist paradigm grounds my work, I am also deeply influenced by transformative perspectives through which researchers "prioritize the value of furthering social justice and human rights" and aim to uncover a "dialectical understanding aimed at critical praxis" (Chilisa, 2012, pp. 40–41). In other words, while I am interested in co-constructing situated knowledge, I am also interested in how that knowledge might be used to challenge systemic inequity. Additionally, scholars engaged in Indigenous methodology (e.g., Tuck, 2009; Wilson, 2008) and appreciative inquiry (e.g., Norum, 2008) have influenced me to view transformative research not just as an exercise in uncovering injustice but as a process of noticing and uplifting the strength and resilience within individuals, communities, and systems. With these philosophical underpinnings in mind, I next describe the core research strategies I have chosen and adapted to work according to my values and the needs and interests of my research participants.

Research Strategies

Research design.

Through my research questions, I have endeavoured to examine *what* youth and practitioners desire from their educational experiences through the lenses of relationship and communication, and *how* they are working to enact these values. I am also interested in how these promising practices can be sustained despite conflict with dominant systems. I chose to conduct a series of three situated qualitative studies, each exploring these same questions in different contexts. I opted to engage with this multiplicity of spaces and voices in order to find ideas that converge with one another and with existing theory, but also in hopes of uncovering contradictions and complexity. This is part of planning research towards the ultimate goal of constructing grounded theory: creating opportunities to find variation and to challenge preconceptions. The first study is a series of 12 expert interviews with practitioners from different organizations across Canada. The second and third studies are situated qualitative studies conducted in partnership with community organizations. The challenges and strategies for designing and adapting a relational literacy pedagogy were very different in each study, allowing for enriched comparative discussion. In this way I was grounded by the immersive experiences of being a research partner in two sequential studies with different organizations while simultaneously accessing the diverse knowledge and lived experience of respected professionals through the expert interviews.

In the following section I give my rationale for designing all three qualitative studies according to the guiding principles of constructivist grounded theory. I then provide a rationale for conducting expert interviews. Finally, I explain my reasoning for drawing on strategies from design research to inform my research partnerships and how these were influenced primarily by constructivist ideas while also drawing on Indigenous and appreciative perspectives.

Rationale for using constructivist grounded theory.

Constructivist grounded theory is an ideal frame for my study because it allows me to privilege the knowledge of practitioners and youth and to co-construct new understandings of what learning with equity-seeking youth should/does/could look like. It also provides guidance to help me fulfill some of my previously mentioned research intentions, including affirming participant agency (Craig, 2008, 2016; Poole & Greaves, 2012) and making room for complex personhood (Tuck, 2009). Glaser and Strauss defined some of the original elements of grounded theory, including that analysis is inductive and iterative and seeks to generate new theories rather than apply existing ones (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (2014) reaffirms these original intentions in her interpretation of constructivist grounded theory as a method that challenges objectivist interpretations and foregrounds flexibility and researcher reflexivity. Charmaz views the different approaches to grounded theory as a constellation of different standpoints but holds that all grounded theorists "begin with inductive logic, subject our data to rigorous comparative analysis, aim to develop theoretical analyses and value ground theory studies for informing policy and practice" (p. 15).

In keeping with constructivist grounded theory, my research questions identify broad areas of inquiry that seek to invite participant meanings without limiting them to preconceived ideas. At the same time, I have identified "sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 117), such as relational learning and expansive literacies, that guided data generation while making space for my participants to contradict/complicate existing theory and identify other convergent and divergent areas of importance to them. My process of analysis examined "actions and processes," sought to develop new conceptual and analytic categories, and made space for variation (Charmaz, 2014, p. 11).

Rationale for conducting expert interviews.

To develop a rich picture of what types of facilitation and learning could work well for equity-seeking youth, I conducted interviews with 12 practitioners from across Canada who have deep experience with relational pedagogy and/or expansive literacies. In keeping with a constructivist approach that allows for recursion, I conducted these expert interviews throughout the research process rather than just at the beginning. Each expert interview helped to broaden my understanding as I worked simultaneously through in-depth partnerships with two organizations that serve equity-seeking youth.

The method of expert interviews is a well-established way for researchers to access and learn from leaders and decision-makers within a specific field. It can lead to rich data by inviting the input of people who have experience distilling and articulating their knowledge and who are motivated to participate because of their professional commitment and belief in the social relevance of research. However, this method has also been challenged because of the potential problems of defining expertise, and the lack of reflexivity and critical analysis that can result when interviewees are designated as "experts" (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2009). In this study, I have sometimes used the term "experienced educator" in the place of expert. The experienced educators I have invited to participate in my study were selected on the basis of some or all of the following criteria: time spent in their field, leadership activity and/or leadership positions held, specialized education and training, and public recognition or the endorsement of colleagues. I also considered cultural knowledge, community connections, and advocacy work. Following the recommendations of Bogner, Littig, and Menz (2009), I have also considered that the goal of these qualitative interviews is not the gathering of facts but "the reconstruction of latent content of meaning" (p. 6). That is, I work with the interviewees to move beyond literal

reporting of information to access and explore less obvious meanings, motivations, feelings, and connections.

Through the interviews I focus on uncovering the expert educators' values, conceptual foundations, and strategic thinking, and understanding how these inform the design and adaptation of their pedagogical practice. In other words, I am interested in the underlying philosophies that influence what experienced educators desire, how they plan and refine the pursuit of those goals, and how they make sense of the process. As will be discussed in the section on methods, I used constructivist grounded theory to guide my process of conducting these expert interviews.

Rationale for drawing on educational design research.

Design research typically involves the researcher in an iterative process of designing and refining an idea over a significant period of time (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006; McKenney, Nieveen, & Akker, 2006). Due to unforeseeable limitations, my studies each lasted only four months and involved me partially in longer-term design processes. Despite these limitations, I found the tools of educational design research to be effective for examining my research questions in ways that responded to the needs and interests of my research participants. Educational design research typically draws from existing theory and literature to develop instructional interventions and document the process of adapting them in a cycle of iterative analysis and implementation. Design and iterative analysis are carried out jointly with the educator who is implementing the design (Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc, 2004). The goal is not to prove an idea or theory, but to document the choices that lead to improving an initial design, and ultimately to reconstruct and articulate the elements of what worked well (Akker, Gravemeijer, McKenney, & Nieveen, 2006). In addition to catalyzing the creation of new classroom resources and practices, this research

produces a theoretical design framework that provides "guidelines for achieving a particular set of goals in a particular context" (Edelson, 2006, p. 102). In this sense, design research is interventionist, iterative, and process-oriented. It seeks a balance between generating empirically grounded learning theory and producing relevant information for practice and policy decisions (Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc, 2004; Kelly, 2006). Design phases can include concept development, creating the design in context, iterative design and formative evaluation, and retrospective analysis (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006; McKenney, Nieveen, & Akker, 2006). Design research is more likely to lead to new and elaborated theories rather than proving or disproving existing ones, and it is equally invested in developing classroom materials, tools, or guides (Edelson, 2006).

I chose to adapt strategies from educational design research because they are geared to research questions that focus on how to best support the learning process by exploring what is possible (Akker et al., 2006; Reinking & Bradley, 2008). Design research considers questions such as "What alternatives are there to current educational practices?" and "How can these alternatives be established and sustained?" (Edelson, 2006, p. 103). This study draws on the strategies of design research to investigate how relational pedagogical strategies can be created with and/or for equity-seeking youth. As previously mentioned, a desire-based theory of change means that the work is grounded in the priorities and imagined futures laid out by equity-seeking youth and their support networks. Design research offers systematic and action-oriented strategies to support these goals. It can also readily be adapted according to principles of constructivist design and appreciative inquiry. I explain these context-specific adaptations in the following section.

Context-specific adaptations.

While design research fits this study well because of its pragmatism and emphasis on collaborative and iterative processes, I needed to interpret and adapt it for working with equity-seeking youth in ways that challenged deficit perspectives, valued people, applied a trauma-informed lens, and embraced a relational model. The needs and desires of the partnering organizations and participants in this study required flexibility in the research process. In my partnerships with both the First Nations high school and the newcomer arts program, my collaborators preferred that I focus on individual and system strengths and the relationships and conditions that help learners thrive. Leadership and staff at the First Nations high school emphasized that I should generate practical, positive knowledge about teaching and learning strategies that work, and avoid negative research *on* students. Leadership and staff at the settlement organization emphasized that they did not want the youth to feel pressured to reveal painful or personal stories, and that they did not want staff to feel evaluated or interfered with in their professional decision-making. Similarly, during the expert interviews I was able to help create better flow for my participants when I was flexible, positive and deferential to their lived experience.

Some versions of design research have been criticized for focusing on deficits and for linear orientations to inputs and outcomes (Norum, 2008). Design research is also largely based in North American and Scandinavian scholarship and can bring some of these cultural values with it, including belief in expertise, systematic control, and sequential processes (Willis, 2008). To align my methodology with participant priorities, I drew primarily from constructivist design to allow a recursive and collaborative process to unfold (Willis, 2008). I also called on appreciative instructional design (Norum, 2008), and Indigenous methodologies (e.g., Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012) as needed. Each of these approaches is different and has its own theoretical

and epistemological underpinnings, and each of them offered valuable tools to work with at different points in the design research process.

Constructivist instructional design.

Although design research is cyclical, some have criticized it for being too linear and prescriptive within those cycles, emphasizing sequential activities and the attainment of predetermined learning goals (Lebow, 1993; Willis, 2008; You, 1993). Instead, Willis (2008) proposes a constructivist instructional design based on "social and cognitive constructivist theory and nonlinear systems theories" (p. 283). Although there are many different models of constructivist design such as Chaos Theory Instructional Design (You, 1993) and Layers of Negotiation Instructional Design (Cennamo, Abell, & Chung, 1996), Willis outlines three flexible guidelines that most models follow: Recursion, Reflection, and Participation. *Recursive design* means that the researcher/designer embraces a non-linear process in which objectives and outcomes cannot be predetermined: "It is chaotic in the sense that it does not prescribe or advance a specific pattern. It suggests instead that you let the project guide your decisions" (p. 298). Willis (2008) considers grounded theory to be an ideal complement to recursive design because it allows for and embraces unexpected learning and directions. *Reflective design* emphasizes deep understanding of the context and creating reflective opportunities through "problem framing, implementation, and improvisation" (p. 301). *Participatory design* is a collaborative process and "success must be based on a respect for the participants and the belief that they can make significant contributions" (p. 304).

I have drawn on these principles of constructivist instructional design to adapt my research process as needed, and to allow the different "phases" of educational design research to happen as they unfolded, often simultaneously rather than sequentially, and in ways that

informed new directions and possibilities. Embracing the principles of recursion, reflection, and participation has allowed me to engage meaningfully with the surprises involved in dynamic systems and real lives, and to represent these interactions authentically.

Indigenous methodologies.

At various times throughout the study I have also drawn from Indigenous methodologies that seek harmony rather than give weight to negative phenomena (Wilson, 2008), support ongoing benefits to participants and their communities through relational accountability (Ermine, 2005; Smith, 2012), and encourage learners/researchers to generate and exchange knowledge with purpose and awareness of consequences (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1998; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Chilisa, 2012). Many aspects of design research can be brought into synergy with core principles of Indigenous methodologies. Firstly, design research can be participatory and pragmatic (Akker et al., 2006) in ways that may allow it to fulfill the Indigenous research priorities of respectful relationships, impact, and responsibility (Smith, 2012; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008). Secondly, design research can be cyclical and iterative (Wang & Hannafin, 2005) in ways that are compatible with Indigenous relational epistemologies that build incrementally on shared understandings (Chilisa, 2012). Thirdly, design research aims to provide a working model of local instructional theory, while leaving readers to take ownership of interpreting and deliberating "adjustments to other situations" (Akker et al., 2006, p. 45). This can be compatible with the Indigenous principle of allowing readers or listeners to make their own connections and take responsibility for their own learning and actions/reactions (Archibald, 2008; Hampton, 1995). I looked to Indigenous methodologies to enrich constructivist design strategy through emphasis on harmony, relationality, and contextually rich/impactful knowledge.

Appreciative instructional Design.

I also turned to *Appreciative instructional Design* to challenge deficit-based models of research in which change is sought through identifying problems: "we design the training or instruction to eliminate what we do not want rather than to give us more of what we do want" (Norum, 2008, p. 425). Instead, this study takes up desire-based theory of change (Tuck, 2009) and aspects of Appreciative instructional Design (AiD) that focus on what "gives 'life' to the system" (Norum, 2008, p. 426). AiD draws on the appreciative inquiry cycle created by Cooperrider and Whitney (1999): Discover, Dream, Design, Destiny. In AiD, the discovery phase focuses on identifying elements of positive learning experiences, the dream phase focuses on envisioning further ideals and desires, the design phase focuses on creating an experience to amplify what is working well, and the destiny phase focuses on learning from/adjusting the design for sustainability. Most importantly, "The design takes place around generative factors" (p. 428). Additionally, AiD follows Cooperrider and Whitney's (2000) Core Appreciative Inquiry Principles to nurture a process that is constructionist, simultaneous, poetic, anticipatory, and positive. The constructionist principle requires researchers and participants to re-examine the mental models that shape the organization, the principle of simultaneity recognizes the power of the kinds of questions we pose, the poetic principle emphasizes that organizations are constructed and can be creatively reinterpreted and retold, the anticipatory principle suggests that organizations are inspired by a positive but flexible image of the future, and the principle of positivity guides the change process through "hope, inspiration, caring and commitment" (p. 431). I have drawn on the principles of Appreciative instructional Design when I need to refocus this research on generative elements of the learning ecologies I am working within. This has been particularly useful in allowing me to focus on system and individual youth strengths and helping me to be collaborative rather than evaluative.

Researcher role.

During the expert interviews I listened, clarified statements, and encouraged participants while offering gentle guidance to refocus the conversation as needed. I sought to balance responsiveness and control by beginning with questions that are relevant to my study and the participant's experience but moving with their interpretations and priorities. I describe this in greater detail in the methods section. During the partnerships drawing on design research, I used collaborative approaches that emphasize joint design and iterative analysis with the collaborating educator, generally in the form of planning meetings and debriefs where we worked to make sense of our observations together (McKenney, Nieveen, & Akker, 2006). Reinking and Bradley suggest using Cole and Knowles' (1993) concept of "teacher development partnership," which focuses on how the experience can be enriching for both parties. They do not call for "equal involvement in all aspects of the research; but, rather, for negotiated and mutually agreed upon involvement" (Cole & Knowles, 1993, p. 486). In this jointly determined arrangement, I took primary responsibility for articulating purpose, coordinating research activities, gathering mutually agreed-upon information, preparing a preliminary analysis, and writing up the account. However, the contributions of the educator guided each of these activities (Cole & Knowles, 1993). Additionally, design researchers are usually participant-observers (Hoadley, 2004; Reinking & Bradley, 2008). In taking up the participant-observer role, I assisted educators and other staff to deepen my understanding of the learning process and establish a good working relationship (Reinking & Bradley, 2008). While it was inevitable that the learning ecology would be affected by my involvement, I tried to balance my participation in such a way that I was not the primary reason for the intervention's success (Wang & Hannafin, 2005). This meant that I could not lead or teach the initiative.

Summary.

In this section on research strategies I have explained why framing my study according to the guiding principles of constructivist grounded theory has allowed me to privilege the knowledge of practitioners and youth and with them to co-construct new understandings. I have also outlined how conducting expert interviews has given me access to the input of experienced educators across Canada and allowed me to uncover the underlying philosophies that influence what they desire, how they plan and refine the pursuit of those goals, and how they make sense of the process. I then explained how my two research partnerships draw on strategies from design research adapted primarily through a constructivist lens. This allowed me to generate and analyze findings recursively, reflectively, and in relation to participants. I also gained insight from Indigenous methodologies that emphasize harmony, relationality, and contextually rich/impactful knowledge. This was particularly useful to think about during my partnership with the First Nations High School, whose leadership asked that I focus on strengths and practical possibilities. Finally, I drew on the principles of Appreciative instructional Design when I needed to refocus this research on generative elements of the learning ecologies I am working within. This was particularly useful during my partnership with the settlement organization, whose leadership asked for non-judgement and non-interference. My role as a researcher in the expert interviews was to listen, clarify, and encourage elaboration while refocusing the conversation as needed. My role during the partnerships was as a participant-observer and collaborator.

Methods of Data Generation and Analysis

Data generation: Study 1, expert interviews.

To develop a rich picture of what types of facilitation and learning could work well for equity-seeking youth, I conducted interviews with 12 practitioners from across Canada who have deep experience with culturally sustaining pedagogy and/or expansive literacies. I used purposive sampling to connect with potential interviewees in my existing networks and through publicly available contact information. These semi-structured interviews explored (a) the values, concepts, and strategies that educators bring to their relational practice, (b) the principles that guide their pedagogical decision-making, and (c) reflections on opportunities for individual and systemic growth and change. Each interview lasted up to one hour and was audio-recorded, transcribed, and member-checked. I also kept a journal reflecting on my experiences of seeking participants and interviewing them. I wrote memos throughout the process of analyzing the interviews. These memos and journal entries constituted an iterative process of analysis whereby I began to ask questions, make connections, and document my emergent meaning-making. The section on methods of analysis provides further detail on how I analyzed the interviews.

These interviews with experienced educators were conducted using the *intensive interviewing* method defined as "a gently guided, one-sided conversation that explores a person's substantial experience with the research topic" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56). The intensive interview is a type of semi-structured qualitative interview designed specifically to generate grounded theory and characterized by the following practices:

- selection of research participants who have first-hand experience that fits the research topic;
- in-depth exploration of participant's experiences and situations;
- reliance on open-ended questions;

- objective of obtaining detailed responses;
- emphasis on obtaining the research participant's perspective, meanings, and experience;
- practice of following up on unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints, and implicit views and accounts of actions (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56).

In keeping with this method, my interviews focused on eliciting detailed responses through open-ended questions that explored the participants' perspectives and meanings. I strove to balance flexibility and control by beginning with questions that were relevant to my study and the participant's experience. These opened up an interactional space where unanticipated statements emerged according to the participant's understanding and priorities. I stayed responsive to my research participants and let their sense of what was significant guide immediate follow-up questions. At the same time, I was able to use the questions in my research protocol to refocus the conversation when needed. Intensive interviews are an ideal way to build towards grounded theory because they allow both the participant and researcher to learn through discourse that goes beyond preconceived understandings and expectations (Charmaz, 2014).

Table 3.1 summarizes the how data generation methods in this study responded to each research question, and what I focused on within the context of expert interviews.

Table 3.1 Data Generation Methods: Expert Interviews

Question	Method and Frequency	Focus
Question 1: "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?"	**Individual expert interviews (Appendix A)** with 12 different experienced educators from across Canada. One hour, one time only, in-person or over the phone/Skype	1. The values, concepts and principles that guide their pedagogical decision-making

Question 2: "How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?"	**Individual expert interviews**	2. The strategies they bring to their relational practice
Question 3: "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?	**Individual expert interviews**	3. Reflections on opportunities for growth and change individually and systemically

Data generation: Research partnerships.

As previously mentioned, each of my research partnerships draws from design research strategies. Interviews conducted in these studies also followed the *intensive interview* method for constructing grounded theory laid out by Charmaz (2014). Grounded theory has been identified as complementary to constructivist design research because it allows for and embraces unexpected learning (Willis, 2008).

At each site I generated data through my involvement in designing learning experiences with a collaborating educator and community partner and engaging in a recursive process of reflection and planning. However, each of the research partnerships was very different in terms of my role and whether the partnering educators were in more of a design or implementation phase. At the First Nations high school I was invited to collaborate with a specific educator to design a series of workshops that would be culturally sustaining. This was a more difficult project than we had anticipated and involved a longer process of asking for contributions and guidance from others within and outside the school. The bulk of the data for that research site were generated through planning the design in context. By contrast, the settlement organization already had its pedagogical goals and design mostly formed and invited me to learn from its

process of creating and refining their creative arts program. The majority of my data with that research site were generated throughout the implementation process through the lens of iterative design and reflection. Additionally, although I wanted to formally request youth input into the pedagogical design at the beginning, this was not possible at either site. I will discuss this further in the concluding chapter in the section on limitations. In the following sections, I describe the specific methods of data generation that I used in each research partnership. Although each method was originally intended to target a specific question, during my analysis I found that methods aimed at addressing one research question sometimes revealed answers to others. I have therefore listed my data generation methods according to the questions they actually helped answer.

Study 2: First Nations high school.

In this section I explain the data generation methods I used in my research partnership with the First Nations high school. Although each method was intended to address one or more specific research questions, there was some overlap during the research process, and particularly during my analysis phase. Participants often responded in ways that drew connections between my intentionally broad areas of inquiry.

Question 1: "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?"

Data that helped to answer this question were generated through informal observation and relationship building, notes taken at planning meetings, and audio-recorded interviews with three additional staff members. I reflected on my informal observation and relationship building through journaling. These entries focused on the strengths, interests, and needs of specific youth

in context, and they noted relationships and dynamics in the learning ecology. I used the journal entries to document details about the research context and keep track of key observations and ideas I wanted to bring up during the iterative analysis process with the collaborating facilitators and artist (meetings and debriefs). I participated approximately two to three times a week at the First Nations high school over a period of four months.

I also generated data through planning meetings with collaborators, which were documented through note-taking or audio-recording. These were transcribed and member-checked. I focused on uncovering the pedagogical ideals and desires of partnering practitioners and understanding strategies for developing the pedagogical designs in context, including through collaboration and partnership building. I took notes at five planning meetings with the collaborating educator (10–20 minutes each); the planning meeting with the community partner and collaborating educator (30 minutes); and a staff meeting about a related initiative (60 minutes). I also audio-recorded interviews with three additional staff members (45–60 minutes each). Additionally, youth surveys and interviews originally intended to answer Question 2 were also used to explore Question 1.

Question 2: "How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?"

Data that helped to answer this question were generated through debrief notes during implementation and through surveys and interviews with youth. The debrief meetings were held with the collaborating educator and community partner directly after both hands-on workshops, and each lasted 20 minutes. The focus of these debriefs was to engage in immediate analysis of how the relational literacy pedagogy was working and how it could be refined, including

reflecting on how pedagogical decisions were implemented and adjusted, identifying ways the pedagogy had influenced intended and unintended learning goals, and identifying effective relational and communicative strategies for supporting learning in this context.

I also received feedback from the youth about their experiences in the workshops. Two youth participated in interviews, and seven participated in brief surveys. The interviews with the youth each lasted about 10 minutes and focused on their responses to the workshops and how this might inform/inspire other learning experiences at the school. One interview was transcribed, and the other was recorded through note-taking as was the preference of the participant. These interviews were not member-checked, as I felt that attempting to contact participants again might breach the confidentiality we had agreed on. Due to other limitations that I will discuss further in the section on researcher role, I was not able to interview as many youth as I had hoped. Instead, seven youth agreed to provide their feedback and ideas through a written survey. Some of the responses are fairly short, but together with the interviews they help to fill out a picture of the different experiences youth had with the workshops and the diversity of their needs and interests. The surveys focused on reactions to the workshops, other types of activities the youth would like to engage in, and what communicative practices allow them to learn best (Appendix B). Data generation with the youth used questions about the workshops (related to Question 2) as a starting point to also address what else they want out of their learning experiences (Question 1).

Question 3: "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?"

Data that helped to answer this question were generated through closing interviews and a closing meeting. I conducted separate closing interviews, each lasting 45–60 minutes, with the collaborating educator and community partner. This was a chance to engage them in a process of reflection and analysis to identify key learning from the experience and consider how promising practices might be sustained (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006). I also took notes at a staff meeting where I shared my preliminary findings. While these methods were intended to focus on Question 3, they necessarily involved revisiting and elaborating on ideas related to the first two questions.

Table 3.2 summarizes the data generation methods at this research site organized by research question and focus. I also indicate whether the data generation was generally taking place during the initial development or iterative implementation phase of the educational design process.

Table 3.2 Data Generation Methods: Partnership with First Nations High School

Question	Method and Frequency	Focus
Developing the design in context		
Question 1: "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-	**Informal observation, relationship building, journaling** Two to three times per week for three hours over a four-month period.	1. Strengths, interests and needs of specific youth in context 2. Relationships and dynamics in the learning ecology

Question	Method and Frequency	Focus
construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?"	**Interviews/meetings notes from planning sessions** Notes taken at five planning meetings with the collaborating educator (10–20 minutes each), notes taken during the planning meeting with the community partner (30 minutes), audio-recorded interviews with three additional staff members (45–60 minutes), notes taken during staff meeting 1	1. Practitioners' pedagogical ideals and desires 2. Strategies for developing the pedagogical designs in context, including through collaboration and partnership building
	Youth interviews/surveys (Appendix B) Interviews with two youth, 10–20 minutes each, written surveys from seven youth	1. Youth experiences of the pedagogical design – strengths to build on 2. **Exploring what else they desire/dream of for their learning experiences**

Question	Method and Frequency	Focus
Iterative implementation and analysis		
Question 2: "How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?"	**Debrief notes during implementation** Notes taken during two collective debriefs with educator and community partner (20 minutes each)	1. Reflecting on how pedagogical decisions were implemented and adjusted in the learning ecology 2. Identifying ways the pedagogy influenced intended and unintended learning goals 3. Identifying effective relational and communicative strategies for supporting learning in this context
	Youth interviews/surveys Interviews with two youth, 10–20 minutes each, written surveys from seven youth	1. Youth experiences of the pedagogical design – strengths to build on
Question 3: "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?	**Closing meetings and interviews** Separate interviews with collaborating educator and community partner, 45–60 minutes each, notes taken at staff meeting 2	1. Practitioner experiences designing and implementing the pedagogical design 2. Practitioner learning, insights, and questions they will carry forward 3. How elements of what works might be sustained

Study 3: Newcomer art program.

In this section I explain the data generation methods I used in my research partnership with the settlement organization's newcomer art program. I outline how each data generation method or methods addressed one or more specific research questions (Table 3.3). Again, there was some overlap during the research process because participants tended to respond in ways that drew connections between my intentionally broad areas of inquiry.

Question 1: “What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?”

Informal observation and relationship building, which I reflected on through journaling, yielded data that helped to answer this question. These entries focused on the strengths, interests, and needs of specific youth in context, and noted relationships and dynamics in the learning ecology. I participated approximately once a week over a period of 4 months. I used the journal entries to document details about the research context and keep track of key observations and ideas I wanted to bring up during the iterative analysis process with the collaborating facilitators and artist (meetings and debriefs).

I also conducted one initial planning interview with the program manager but was unable to continue when she left the organization and withdrew from the research. Additionally, the organization had a fairly well-established set of goals and practices for their program. Despite limited involvement in planning, I was able to adapt by including aspects of Research Question 1 in all data generation activities throughout the implementation process that followed including facilitator and artist debriefs and closing interviews and youth interviews. Planning is an ideal time to find out what people want, but the implementation and reflection phase can also offer grounded examples from which to explore what is valued and hoped for.

Question 2: “How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?”

Data that helped to answer this question were generated through debrief meetings held directly after each session with the collaborating facilitators and artist. Again, the focus of these

debriefs was to engage in immediate reflection of how pedagogical decisions were implemented and adjusted, identify ways the pedagogy influenced intended and unintended learning goals, and identify effective relational and communicative strategies for supporting learning in this context. I took notes during five debriefs with program facilitators (5–10 minutes), and five separate debriefs with collaborating artist (5–10 minutes). These were sent to participants to be member-checked.

Additionally, I drew on data generated through interviews with youth about their experiences with the art program. This data generation focused on youth experiences of art-making and relationships in the space (Question 2) and worked from these examples to help them identify their ideals and preferences for learning more generally (Question 1). I conducted interviews with four youth each lasting approximately 20–30 minutes. These were transcribed and member-checked. Again, due to limitations at the site these were the only youth who agreed to research and returned signed consent forms.

Question 3: "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?

Data that helped to answer this question were generated through closing meetings and interviews with the program manager and artist and closing interviews with four youth. I conducted individual interviews with the program manager and collaborating artist each lasting 45–60 minutes. These interviews were transcribed and member-checked. These interviews helped us to think reflectively and holistically about existing and future directions for the pedagogical design and how it might be sustained (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006). I also drew marginally from debriefs during implementation.

Table 3.3 Data Generation Methods: Partnership with Newcomer Art Program

Question	Method and Frequency	Focus
Developing the design in context		
Question 1: "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?"	**Informal observation, relationship building, journaling** Once a week for three hours over a four-month period	1. Strengths, interests and needs of specific youth in context 2. Relationships and dynamics in the learning ecology
	Youth interviews Interviews with four youth	1. Youth experiences of the pedagogical design – strengths to build on **2. Exploring what else they desire/dream of for their learning experiences**
	Debrief notes during implementation Notes taken during five debriefs with program facilitators (5–10 minutes), notes taken during five separate debriefs with collaborating artist (5–10 minutes)	1. Practitioner values and desires for the program
	Closing interviews Separate interviews with program manager and collaborating artist 45–60 minutes each	1. Practitioner values and desires for the program

Question	Method and Frequency	Focus
Iterative implementation and analysis		
Question 2: "How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?"	**Debrief notes during implementation** Notes taken during five debriefs with program facilitators (5–10 minutes), notes taken during five separate debriefs with collaborating artist (5–10 minutes)	1. Reflecting on how pedagogical decisions were implemented and adjusted in the learning ecology 2. Identifying ways the pedagogy influenced intended and unintended learning goals 3. Identifying effective relational and communicative strategies for supporting learning in this context
	Youth interviews Interviews with four youth	**1. Youth experiences of the pedagogical design – strengths to build on** 2. Exploring what else they desire/dream of for their learning experiences
Question 3: "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?"	**Closing interviews** Separate interviews with program manager and collaborating artist 45–60 minutes each	1. Practitioner experiences designing and implementing the pedagogical design 2. Practitioner learning, insights and questions they will carry forward 3. How elements of what works might be sustained
	Youth interviews Interviews with four youth	1. Youth experiences of the pedagogical design – strengths to build on 2. **Exploring what else they desire/dream of for their learning experiences**
	Debrief notes during implementation Notes taken during five debriefs with program facilitators (5–10 minutes), notes taken during five separate debriefs with collaborating artist (5–10 minutes)	1. Understanding how the process of designing and refining influences sustainability

Methods of analysis.

To ensure a systematic and transparent approach to data analysis while affirming participant authority, I followed guidelines for generating constructivist grounded theory including initial coding, focused coding, theory building, and memo writing. I used the software program MAXQDA to organize my codes and insights throughout the process, which includes these steps:

1. My initial coding was line-by-line coding that named each line by spontaneously responding to the data and identifying actions rather than topics. Although I was careful not to rely on existing theories, I tried to be aware of the "sensitizing concepts" that are guiding my inquiry while resisting attachment to them (Charmaz, 2014, p. 117). I also used Glaser and Strauss' (1967) *constant comparative methods* to consider similarities and differences within the same data sources and between them. Further, I was open to using *in vivo* codes that use participant terms to capture the specificity of their experience and meaning (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134). See Appendix C for an example of line-by-line coding.
2. I then engaged in focused coding by creating broader conceptual categories around my most salient initial codes or elevating initial codes that had "more theoretical reach, direction, and centrality" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 141). For both research partnerships with the First Nations high school and settlement organization, I used MAXQDA software. For the expert interviews, I did this manually. I then checked focused codes against existing data to consider the extent to which they fit or required rethinking. Part of my focused coding also involved organizing initial codes according to which research question they related to (*what* participants desire and value for their program/pedagogy, *how* they design and implement, and *insights* for growing/sustaining their work). This

was important because data generation methods aimed at addressing one research question sometimes revealed answers to others. I also had a category for relevant contextual information. I cut data that were extraneous to these core areas of inquiry. See Appendix D for an example of focused coding.

3. I then generated theoretical codes by looking for relationships between focused codes, returning to the emergent meaning-making of my journals and memos and referring back to my sensitizing concepts. According to Charmaz (2014), theoretical codes emerge from the focused codes and "show relationships between them, rather than replace the substantive codes with ones constituting [my theory]" (2014, p. 150). My journal entries and memos substantially guided my theoretical coding as described below. I avoided forcing data into pre-existing categories but also sought to be transparent about how sensitizing concepts shaped my analysis. As previously mentioned, the sensitizing concepts that guide my theoretical analysis are culturally sustaining pedagogy/relational pedagogy, expansive literacies, and youth equity. However, as Charmaz (2014) advises, "earlier theoretical concepts may provide starting points for looking *at* your data but they do not offer automatic codes *for* analyzing these data" [emphasis in original] (p. 159). I referred back to these concepts to see if they helped me to understand what the data indicated, but I was equally free to move beyond them to stay close to participant meanings.

4. Finally, grounded theory requires that researchers seek out and confront their own preconceived ideas and bring attention to their decision-making. Throughout the coding of data, I wrote memos or "informal analytic notes" to engage in critical reflexivity and document my own emergent meaning-making (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162). I also journaled

throughout the data generation and transcription, noting patterns and interesting moments as well as my own emotional, physical, and intellectual responses. I referred back to these memos and journals to find worthwhile concepts to further investigate in conversation with my data and sensitizing concepts, aware of myself as the primary research tool.

I used these methods of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) to analyze data from the expert interviews and both research partnerships. Grounded theory complements constructivist design research in that the former allows for and embraces unexpected learning (Willis, 2008). In design research, retrospective analysis involves going back through all of the meeting notes that documented iterative/participatory analysis (Level 2 data) and going back through all data (Level 1 data) to look for outlying details or patterns. I used constructivist grounded theory to guide my retrospective analysis with the aim of identifying effective practices in each context and theorizing to connect with a broader set of phenomena (Akker, Gravemeijer, McKenney, & Nieveen, 2006; Reinking & Bradley, 2008; Willis, 2008).

Methods of Interpretation and Evaluation

Interpretation.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), "Qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive. The researcher does not just leave the field with mountains of empirical materials and then easily write up his or her findings. Qualitative interpretations are constructed" (p. 34). They then go on to describe assembling a "field text" consisting of all data and how the researcher works from there to create a new interpretive text, in my case made up of line-by-line coding, focused coding, theoretical coding, and memos. The text is then recreated by writing and revising until salient ideas are synthesized into a coherent public text. My writing has been recursive and generative in that I have had to grapple with the gaps between the study I intended

and the study I conducted, between my vision of myself as a creative collaborator and my daily experience of analyzing and writing alone, between my belief that change can come through cultural shifts initiated by language and idea, and the fear that structural inequity is indifferent to these abstractions as "non-performatives" that replace action (Ahmed, 2006). Writing has also involved relating vulnerably and hopefully with an imagined public audience who might read this work someday, and with that a deep sense of responsibility to represent the youth and practitioners in my study in ways that they can be heard. Mitchell (2017) stresses audience response to research that engages youth voice:

> It is one thing to produce media texts, but how can they reach the audiences who need to see them, and how can the audiences (including policy makers) be responsive to what the producers are saying? In essence, how can we understand the processes of meaningfully engaging young people without considering as well ways of meaningfully engaging policy makers as audiences in relation to young people? (p. 2)

This desire to engage audiences with official decision-making power comes alongside the need to imagine my participants and their communities/collaborators as an audience who can also influence the structures they work within. I have sometimes written this dissertation with a scholarly structure and measured tone that muffle the high-frequency emotionality of the actual research experience. I understand this as a part of speaking to power and coming into the power I cannot deny I have. I have also worked to let the practical, emotional, and aesthetic emerge, as I describe further in the section on resonance below.

Trustworthiness and authenticity.

The criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness and authenticity of grounded theory studies can include credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. These qualities combined with

"aesthetic merit and analytic impact" can help the research to achieve broader influence (Charmaz, 2010, p. 338). Here I have outlined how my study addresses these criteria.

Credibility.

Thick description, member-checking, triangulation, skepticism, and systematic analysis support the credibility of design research (Akker et al., 2006; Reinking & Bradley, 2008). I kept a reflexive journal to ensure that I could provide rich contextual details of each research site, characterizing the learning ecology and the relationships within it, including my own roles and responsibilities. This was made possible through my consistent and meaningful participation in each space over the period of four months. I also engaged participants in member-checking notes and transcriptions so that they could make corrections or changes to the raw data. All notes and transcriptions were member-checked except, for the sake of confidentiality, as mentioned previously, the two youth interviews at the First Nations high school.

Triangulation was achieved by looking for patterns across multiple data sources including informal observation, interviews, and meetings/debrief notes. Triangulation was also achieved through considering the multiple perspectives and ideas of different participants reflecting on the same events or phenomena over a period of time. Finally, triangulation was achieved through deep engagement with participants at two very different research sites, and 12 experienced educators, all from different formal and informal learning contexts. This allowed me to understand components of relational literacy pedagogy that are consistently desired/possible and which are context-dependent (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006). Further, I also engage in healthy skepticism, so that credibility is not compromised by fidelity to certain theories and a "preconceived notion of how the intervention *should* be implemented" (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 61). Finally, data analysis was both systematic and thorough, with frameworks of

interpretation made explicit (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006), in this case through constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Originality.

Educational design research does not attempt to isolate variables or achieve replicability but strives for ecological validity through detailed descriptions that could allow others to adapt new learning for other contexts. Exact replicability is not possible or desirable as educators are professionals who will constantly adjust an idea in response to their own observations and assessments (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006; Reinking & Bradley, 2008). Instead, I have tried to generate new insights that "challenge, extend or refine current ideas, concepts and practices" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 337). Originality has been made possible through openness to surprises and new meaning in the data, fresh analysis and categorization, and a keen awareness of relevant existing work in this area within and across disciplines (Charmaz, 2014).

Resonance.

Resonance portrays the fullness of participant experiences, offering meaningful insights to "participants or people who share their circumstances" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 338). Resonance is achieved by making the research relevant and the writing accessible and compelling. I have addressed the question of writing with resonance in my introductory section "Disclaimer and invitation," where I outlined the tension between writing in scholarly, practical, and artistic/poetic ways. I have written these first three chapters to resonate with those who consider themselves to be scholars. I have written the findings (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) as much as possible in plain language to resonate with anyone who wants to support and collaborate with equity-seeking youth. I have written Chapter 8 as an aesthetic experiment, intentionally deviating to invite my readers to engage with complexity through artistic rendering. Scarry (2000) has argued

that working with literature and art can help people to overcome impediments to their duty to justice; these impediments include "The difficulty of seeing an injury, the sense of futility in one's own small efforts, the shame or embarrassment of acting, and the special difficulty of lifting complex ideas into the public space" (p. 26). For instance, Burtinsky's photography of industrial obscenity holds viewers at the "threshold of anxiety and exhilaration" so they may enter the space where "beauty renews our search for truth and our concern for justice" (Pazienza, 2018, pp. 3–4, drawing on Scarry, 1999). It is my hope that my artful interpretations of my research experience will invite sustained and open engagement with difficult themes and foreground the "interactive and emergent" nature of constructivist data generation and analysis (Charmaz, 2014, p. 339).

Usefulness.

Usefulness is achieved through analysis that sparks further research and through practical interpretations. Usefulness answers the questions "How does your work contribute to knowledge? How does it contribute to making a better world?" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 338). This criterion is important to me as a pragmatic scholar and led me to choose a research design that I believed could be impactful. As previously mentioned, educational design research is equally invested in creating new and elaborated theories and developing practical materials to support improvements to teaching and learning (Edelson, 2006). However, as I have mentioned, it is also important not to overstate the power of research in social justice work, or to assume that I can control my study towards predetermined outcomes. I have managed the uncertainty of usefulness in three ways: to look for ways that the research process can offer immediate gains to participants; to prioritize the relevance of my data for multiple audiences and get it to them in

accessible forms; and to explore the limits of usefulness in research and imagine alternatives, as I have done in Chapter 8.

Summary

In this chapter I have explained the methodology of my proposed study. I have outlined my research questions and the research contexts that I learned from, including 12 interviews with experienced educators from across Canada, and research partnerships with a First Nations high school and a settlement organization. I have discussed my positioning within a historical and political landscape of academic colonialism and the intentions and ethics that I take up in response. I have identified my primary alignment with a constructivist paradigm, while acknowledging the influences of transformative, Indigenous, and appreciative scholars on my work. I have also outlined my research strategies and provided rationales for using constructivist grounded theory, expert interviews, and adapted elements of design research. Finally, I have described in detail my data generation, analysis, and interpretation and outlined how these fulfill criteria for trustworthiness and authenticity. In the next chapter, I discuss findings with regard to the 12 interviews I conducted with experienced educators.

CHAPTER 4: PRACTITIONER STRATEGIES FOR DESIGNING DEEP LEARNING WITH EQUITY-SEEKING YOUTH

Introduction

Each of the 12 experienced educators I interviewed comes from a unique professional and personal background that informs their insights about learning with youth. Again, following a constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014), I analyzed participant narratives by grouping initial codes into focused codes according to how they answered each research question (See Appendix C for an example of initial coding of an expert interview). I begin this chapter by providing a sketch of each experienced educator to give a sense of the specific nature of their work and ideas. These portraits focus on the context and content of their work, and how their values and desires inform their pedagogy. This addresses Research Question 1, "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?" I also provide a brief comparative summary of participant views pertaining to Question 1. Next, I have analyzed the interviews according to practitioner strategies for engaging with young people seeking cultural and linguistic equity, such as through attention to communicative repertoires and relationships. This analysis explores Research Question 2, "How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?" Finally, I examine how the educators work to grow and sustain their work, including their processes of designing and refining, their visions and next steps, and their understandings of systemic factors that limit or propel them. This inquiry answers Research Question 3: "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?"

Throughout this chapter I have included some longer quotations because each experienced educator is speaking about a specific context from a unique perspective, and narrative detail is required to access the nuances of their observations and understand the connections they draw.

Research Question 1: Desired and Valued Pedagogies

Introduction.

The following section addresses Research Question 1: "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?" By sketching a portrait of each educator and the context in which they work, I uncover the values and desires that inform their pedagogy, and what practices they believe to be effective and worthwhile. Their stories provide insight into the cultural, personal, and professional influences that have shaped their beliefs about what characterizes good pedagogy and illustrate the ways they establish and work towards this vision with youth. In my analysis I looked for actions and processes that related to this research question, first within each expert interview, and then comparing across all expert interviews. Although this revealed similarities between participant values and principles, I chose to reconnect individual interviewees with their own interrelated narrative excerpts to emphasize the situated nature of their work and anchor the chapter in their individual stories and desires. After presenting these portraits, I also briefly summarize the conceptual categories generated through comparative analysis regarding Question 1.

Portraits of experienced educators in schools.

Shirley, principal of K–12 school.

Shirley Snowshoe is the principal at Chief Julius School in the Gwich'in community of Fort McPherson (Teetl'it Zheh), Northwest Territories. The school serves approximately 150 students

from kindergarten through to Grade 12. Shirley is deeply influenced by Elders and her mother to promote a balance between traditional knowledge and academic knowledge in her school:

> I often hear my mom say we were scientists long before science books and TV and anything else ever was created. . . . We look at the Northern Lights, and we can tell the weather; we look at the stars, and I know if we're going to have a lot of caribou or not this winter. So, helping our students to understand the traditional knowledge, and what they learn in the school system are important, both are very, very important, and that our Elders come with all of this traditional knowledge that they've had for hundreds and hundreds of years. And a lot of what they share with us and a lot of what they teach us is so accurate. . . . you do need to have both, you want to go to college and university, but you also need to make sure that you know who you are as a Gwich'in person and you need to know your own culture and your language and how those will benefit and help you.

She works with a culture committee created at her school to ensure that traditional education is coordinated across all grades, throughout the school year:

> We ask ourselves what do the Gwich'in people do throughout the whole year, starting off with just something as simple as cranberry picking in September, fall fishing, ice fishing. . . . we have the Dene Kede curriculum here in the Northwest Territories so we look at that as well and we plan at each grade level what each of the grades are going to be doing with culture, language, on the land, and how do we fit our Elders into each of the programs. Because some Elders are storytellers, and some like to just do demonstrations for how to set a trap or how to set a net or. . . . while others will do traditional cooking or some will do traditional medicines, and some will mentor our

> language teacher, and help with the language. Nonetheless, each Elder will come in and they will talk about the Gwich'in values – respecting others, respecting the land – sharing, storytelling, lessons that need to be learned . . . just to keep our culture and our language and our way of life alive. . . .

Frances, high school ESL teacher.

Frances has been teaching ESL for 25 years and has been the curriculum leader at her high school for the last 12 years. She describes her school as

> a downtown inner-city school. . . . It's a large school, we have all the academic subjects, we have technical subjects like auto mechanics, we have a hospitality program, plumbing, electricity, architecture, fashion design, we have an amazing art program, and we have a fairly large ESL program.

Frances works to teach language, culture, academic, and life skills towards integration in mainstream courses and better access to other opportunities. She believes in explicitly teaching cultural norms to help students adapt to new classroom dynamics, and she works with the guidance department and external agencies to find additional supports:

> You have to teach them some of the cultural norms here because they might not know. . . . behaviour that might be normal in their culture might be different here, so we have a lot of discussions about that. . . . And then there's also teaching them about the Canadian education system, because everything's new. And . . . try to make them aware of different opportunities that are open to them, whether it's different courses that they can take, or different programs they might want to enter, or scholarships and awards. . . . we have settlement workers in the school, we connect a lot with outside agencies. . . and

some of the shelters. We make a lot of connections to support students outside of school as well, with refugee issues, with housing.

The ESL program at the school is shrinking because newcomers and families are looking for affordable housing outside of the city, and Frances worries about the impact on all students: "the ESL really brought a nice tone to the school. I think the mixture of student body was really important. Now it's a struggle to get them [the administration] to understand why the students need the supports that we want to offer."

Frances draws on her years of teaching and leadership, her ESL training, and her master's in teaching French as a foreign language.

Jackie, supervisor of school-based art therapy program.

Jackie is an expressive art therapist who leads an expressive art therapy program in her area schools. The project began as a pilot and built on the positive response to expand to 13 different schools: "there are seven . . . expressive arts therapists, working in the various schools. So, our mandate primarily is to work with refugee kids, but we also work with generational poverty kids, and we've worked with Aboriginal kids too through associations with other areas." Jackie saw a need for the program because of a lack of counselling services, particularly for refugee students: "So, it was found that they just don't have opportunities to be able to share some of their experiences and stories and to really get the help they need to integrate into school." She uses all modalities and forms of art to support exploration of identity and "to give the kids a forum and a platform for expression. . . . that sense of connection, belonging, and real integration, through being visible, into the school environment." She describes drawing from various different philosophies including "a humanist, client centred philosophy" and "really allowing the themes, the ideas, to come from the kids themselves and to trust their intelligence." Jackie draws on her

years of experience as an expressive art therapist and her work co-creating an expressive art therapy training program at her local college.

Taylor, newcomer education specialist.

Taylor leads the programs and services for newcomers in her area schools. She provides "professional development to the staff members that work directly with families and students" and cultural proficiency training to all school staff. She works to offer proactive services that allow students to be "actively healthy," and a tiered model of support ranging from inclusion in mainstream programs to newcomer-specific programs and/or one-on-one support. She believes that the diversity of her area schools benefits all students because they "become more open minded and . . . able to navigate those different relationships later on, as opposed to someone that's never really exposed to anything outside of their world." Taking on her relatively new position has allowed her to "carve out some of the vision of what the project might look like" and "use research across the board to figure out what ways work best in the work that's already done. . . . [and] how to go about doing things in the most efficient and effective way for our families and students." Her philosophy is to "have the student at the centre of the work that we do," including responding to each "student's socio-emotional and cultural and other needs" and working to "educate and/or provide other supports to the whole child and the family." She also focuses on putting people at the centre in her management style, so that programs are run by "a healthy, safe, supported staff" and programs are informed by the "voices of the students, the families, and the staff." She draws from a background in social work, including 10 years in similar roles and two years in her current position.

Yvonne, EAL specialist.

Yvonne is the only English as an Additional Language Consultant for her area schools. She has been in the school system for 29 years, including 22 working directly with newcomers and seven years in her current role. She helps schools adapt to the different needs of "families who are settling through various urban, suburban, and rural areas. Especially with our Syrian arrivals, private sponsorship tended to go out to the more rural areas – where we never had newcomers before, we now do." She describes how her own experiences growing up in a newcomer, multilingual household influenced her "attitude and the understanding of how to acquire a language." She illustrates this personal connection to linguistic diversity:

> I would be considered first generation. My father actually came through Pier 21 in Halifax. . . . And so, part of that was in my own personal life. . . . [I] grew up in a home that did not speak English. . . . my parents were very specific on having to acquire . . . the [heritage] language at home. My dad spoke four languages.

Drawing on her own experiences, Yvonne prioritizes helping students learn "to function in the language of school" while also

> valuing the cultural and linguistic capital that newcomer children and families arrive with and to ensure that the English education is not taking away what they already have upon arrival. If we do that, then we fail. So, we are adding to and supporting who they are becoming.

Yvonne works with her team to create a sense of belonging for all students, and especially for refugee families, because "their ultimate goal is safety."

Gloria, Aboriginal education specialist.

Gloria works with area schools in her province to help teachers and students understand the value of Aboriginal education and guide them as they take risks to learn and develop professionally. Gloria describes the sources of her inspiration and strength, and the principles that inform her work:

> I have been involved in education for 30 years. . . . I saw a need for a good quality of education for the First Nations students and a need for a change of attitude with the teachers. We need more awareness about who these children are, where they're from, what makes them unique. What do the teachers need to know so that they can do a good job? How can they teach to the students' strengths rather than their deficits? That's why I wanted to stay in education, to work to get the teachers to understand what Indian education is. I say Indian because I understand myself as Indian, that's how it was growing up, I knew I was Nehiyaw "Cree Person" "of the people." The terms have changed, but how we identify ourselves has not changed. Society is still trying to figure it out, but we have always known who we are. I am Cree. Some First Nations people are also trying to figure out how to interact with these changing terms in society.
>
> I saw the need to stay in education for the families and for the teachers to help them be the best teachers they can possibly be. The provincial curriculum . . . is good, but they needed something extra, they needed that human history, the influence of our Elders and our community knowledge. . . . our philosophy is more of a circle and in the middle of that circle is the child. Whatever influences are around that child impact them, we all have a responsibility to teach that child. . . . I am looking at a painting called "we are all treaty people." There are pictures of Elders, middle-aged people, children, and four people with missing faces – those yet unborn who deserve our attention even before

they're here. We need to make a good foundation for them. Clear the path for them so they don't have to walk such a rocky road. It's for my grandchildren, I have 18 of them. It's been a struggle. . . . who fills up the institutions [jails]? It's First Nations males – we were determined, my husband and I, come hell or high water, our children are not going in there. With our parents and our families, we taught them family values, stand taller, straighten your crown, have pride in your family. That's something that ultimately our Elders want to give back to the families – to give that pride back . . .

What I would love to see is the balance between the two styles of learning and teaching. The Western education and First Nations education. It's kind of like telling a story with the wampum belt, the story was always from both sides, the Iroquois or Mohawk side, the story would be told by both, the story would separate, then come back together, and it was okay. I would love to see Western and Indigenous education follow that way of the wampum, sometimes our knowledge needs to touch, to bridge, but we can still walk separately and be respected for our way, we can walk in two worlds, but also lean to the other side for help when we need it.

Portraits of experienced educators outside of schools.

Amelia, counsellor and settlement worker.

Amelia works as a counsellor and settlement worker for children and youth with refugee experience, particularly those who have survived war and trauma. She describes her job as "trauma-informed, anti-oppressive, supportive counselling. . . . and settlement work kind of integrated together from a really holistic community-based perspective." This includes facilitating after-school programming for children and youth such as homework help, arts activities, and field trips. She often provides training to other organizations about refugee mental

health and working with survivors of war. Amelia draws from her commitment to social justice and from learning on the job through "forming really meaningful relationships with young people and so closely witnessing the barriers that they're forced to overcome constantly . . . and all the small and big forms of violence . . . and just feeling that it's not okay. And feeling very humble about my ability to change that reality, but very committed to working from that place." She uses narrative in a lot of her one-on-one work to help youth "find pockets to feel power" by telling stories that are "more empowering and human and authentic." Her pedagogical strategies include working creatively around external constrains to base programs "on what seems meaningful to the youth." She helps youth cultivate friendships that increase their sense of belonging and their access to resources. She keeps the program flexible, open, and accessible, "Because I think for so many of the youth that we work with here, there's been such a loss of community, and such a loss of safe space through the process of exile. Re-providing space and comfortable collective space is a way of addressing that collective loss."

Alexander, counsellor and youth coordinator.

Alexander's roles include one-on-one counselling and advocacy, resource development and fundraising, and the development and coordination of a youth-led program. He supports youth through refugee processes, navigating the criminal justice system, accessing mental health support, exercising their right to education, and finding shelter when homeless or under-housed. He has designed the youth-led program to help youth build friendships, develop and showcase their skills, and voice their ideas: "[T]he way we work here is that we want youth to be involved in proposal writing, to facilitation, to implementation, to evaluation, to – we hire youth to work in reception. . . . And whenever things come up, to lead projects. . . . We want to really have a model of youth engagement, so the weekly drop-ins the content is all decided by them." Some of

the previous activities have included discussions and training to safely challenge oppressive systems, building activities around events like refugee rights day or birthdays, and arts workshops including theatre, dance, spoken word/poetry, singing, beat-boxing, murals, photography, and photovoice. Alexander's strategies as a facilitator focus on creating a loose structure that allows the youth to organically initiate activities and discussions, referring back to the youth-generated anti-oppression policy, and managing and intervening in external partnerships according to youth priorities.

Corinne, counsellor and settlement youth worker.

Corinne is a settlement youth worker who provides counselling, programming, and leadership training to youth with refugee experience. She uses "trauma-informed care" and works towards "the objective of creating safe spaces and sense of belonging and identity." She helps youth build their social capital and get exposure to aspects of Canadian culture so that they can successfully access other opportunities: "The key is to get them as situated as possible." She also describes her approach as "strength-based" and says she tries to "celebrate diversity." Another major goal for her is to build capacity in youth "for emotional regulation and for being aware of their own triggers and being aware of mental health stigmas." This includes introducing them to some therapeutic practices as a group, "so that if they did need further resources, it wouldn't be as scary and new." The program covers a variety of settlement topics as determined by their funder and adapted by her in response to youth needs. Activities have included employment training, wellness and mental health, and arts-based identity work. Additionally, through her leadership program she trains youth in social justice and project planning, and then supports them in delivering a community engagement project. Corinne believes in using experiential activities and pausing for questions or learning moments. She also relies on her close relationships with the

youth to know when they need a break from talking about grief and trauma. Corinne's facilitation work draws on 12 years of experience as a social worker, her love for coaching sports, and her own experiences as a refugee.

Nora, coordinator of comic book and digital story program.

Nora is a coordinator and facilitator for an arts-based program designed for youth with refugee experience. She describes her job as bringing together artists, translators, and volunteers to make comic books and digital stories with youth about their immigration experiences using "the ways they already know to communicate their identities and knowledge." She describes creating opportunities for full participation through activities that affirm "their cultural experiences, their personal experiences, their identities, what they know, and using all of those as a resource and a foundation upon which to participate in the program and develop other skills." She hopes to build positive identities and self-confidence, particularly through creating a democratic space and "opportunities for them to feel a lot of affirmation through sharing their work." Some of her pedagogical strategies include creating arrival routines and warm-ups to make sure the youth feel "comfortable in the space and comfortable with each and comfortable with the adult mentors." This includes "having the youth move around as much of the space as possible so that they basically feel a sense of ownership of their space, feel comfortable in that space, feel that it's their space and they belong there." She recognizes the value of being flexible within a set schedule, and the way her collaborators engage the youth in conversation and spontaneous group activities. Her program design draws on records from similar past programs, on 10 years' experience as an English language instructor, and on her master's degree focusing on literacy engagement with refugees, particularly the use of identity texts.

Gilad, artist and founder of iAM photography program.

Gilad is a photographer and designer, and the founder of JAYU, a non-profit that shares human rights stories through the arts. In addition to producing podcasts and an annual human rights film festival, he runs a youth program called iAM. Through iAM, he provides mentorship training to professional photographers and connects them with underserved youth. He strives to offer these barrier-free photography workshops "as a way of building community or building a safe space where the youth feel comfortable about themselves and expressing themselves." Through the program, youth explore new parts of the city, get a chance to exhibit their photographs and stories, and earn money from their artwork. Gilad encourages equal say from all participants and trains youth from previous years to lead alongside acclaimed photographers. His pedagogical strategies include making everything meaningful and fun and setting the tone by being personable and authentic. He also prioritizes emotional safety by creating a community contract, giving youth control over when they open up or step back, and partnering with mental health professionals. He draws on previous experience in international development and non-profit management, and over eight years of experience as a youth program facilitator in various capacities.

Wendy, poet and founder of The Elder Project.

Wendy is a poet and the founder of The Elder Project, an initiative that brings youth and elders together to share and represent the stories of their lives. Her process includes training the youth as poets, teaching them to interview elders and represent those stories through poetry, creating a book of the poems, and celebrating through a book launch. Wendy draws on her training as a poet and on her experiences at the Alberni Valley Museum writing poems inspired by stories and photos that were shared with her. The Elder Project has been carried out over a dozen times with

different school districts and communities, engaging Métis, First Nations, and Inuit participants, as well as diverse student groups: "It's a human impact. . . . It's different. It's understanding, not only of the historical event but of that person and that relationship. . . . To hear history first-hand, right, is one thing, to read it in a book is important but does not have the same emotional impact, you can't reach out and touch their hand. . . . So, I thought it was important for the young people to hear the Elders' stories. . . . you know, [in] this world, this tablet world, this iPhone world . . . to focus attention on another human being. . . . without distraction is a big deal." Wendy hopes that the process of representation through poetry will have positive impacts on both generations: "The main thing is this, I think, to give these students a sense of pride about what they can do and who they are is really the point. I think that's my main goal. And to honour the Elders. . . . their stories are in these books . . . and they are honoured for who they are and for the experience of their lives." She emphasizes the importance of her role as a trained artist who can bring poetry to life for young people, and her work building relationships with key collaborators.

Summary of desired and valued pedagogies.

In this section I addressed Question 1 by examining the desires and values that inform the pedagogical choices of 12 experienced educators from across Canada. I sketched a portrait of each interviewee to anchor their guiding principles in the specific contexts of their lives and work. I also compared focused codes about desires and values (Question 1) across different interviews. This process allowed me to group concepts related to desires and values into three action-oriented categories: developing confidence and agency, nurturing social connection, and valuing culture and language.

Interviewees spoke about the goal of enabling confidence and agency in the youth they work with. This can be understood through the lens of competence and various interpretations of

the adult role in enabling it. Interviewee comments ranged from focus on *developing competence* through training that welcomed prior knowledge (e.g., Yvonne "adding to and supporting who they are becoming") to *affirming competence* through formal and informal audience responses (e.g., Wendy's poetry writing and bookmaking "to give these students a sense of pride about what they can do and who they are"), to *deferring to competence* through opportunities for youth input, advocacy, and leadership (e.g., Alexander's dedication to making the program youth-led), and *clearing the way for competence* (e.g., Gloria's commitment to those yet unborn, "Clear the path for them so they don't have to walk such a rocky road"). Interviewees also spoke about the importance of nurturing social connection. This included the ideal of developing supportive relationships with youth and adults in the program/school space and sometimes helping students develop relationships in other spaces as well. Next, valuing culture and language was expressed in many ways on a spectrum: from cultural heritage as foundational to integrated diversity as the ultimate goal. To be clear, none of the interviewees or their programs/pedagogy can be placed along this continuum, as many of them are trying to accomplish several of these goals simultaneously. This range of goals included programming/pedagogy:

- based on relationships with people (e.g., through engaging with youth, family, community, Elders);
- based on cultural knowledge (e.g., language, ceremony, the Dene Kede curriculum);
- that invites diverse ways of being and knowing and responds through iterative adaptation (e.g., aspects of Nora's multimodal/multilingual comic book program);
- that prioritizes both cultural and academic knowledge (e.g., walking in two worlds as described by Gloria);

- that facilitates access to opportunities by explicitly teaching Canadian and academic cultural norms (e.g., learning the language of school as described by Yvonne and Frances); and
- that prioritizes integration into "Canadian culture" as an opportunity for mutual learning through diversity (e.g., Corinne's emphasis on getting the youth "situated," Taylor's emphasis on the value of diverse schools for all students).

These goals were supported by deeply held values that the interviewees have cultivated through lived experience, their own families and cultures, their education and training, and their ongoing search for inspiration and guidance through research, reflection, and networking. Frequently cited values for guiding program-design with equity-seeking youth included making it strength-based, accessible, trauma-informed, and relational.

Research Question 2: Strategies for Implementation and Adaptation

Introduction.

The following section addresses Research Question 2: "How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?" Here I focus on the strategies that educators use to actualize their vision of effective pedagogy with equity-seeking youth. Under the heading "Relational Pedagogy," I describe the ways that educators build strong relationships with youth, between youth, and with extended networks of learning and care. Under the heading "Languages and Modalities," I describe the ways that educators expand communicative possibilities to support cycles of acceptance and expression, skill-building and skill-sharing, healing, and deeper knowledge of the self and others. Again, this analysis draws

from the interviews I conducted with experienced educators. The interviewees are listed below for easier reference.

Formal Contexts:

- Shirley, principal of Chief Julius School (K–12)
- Frances, ESL teacher in inner-city technical high school
- Jackie, supervisor of school-based art therapy program
- Taylor, newcomer education specialist (consultant for regional schools)
- Yvonne, English as an Additional Language specialist (consultant for regional schools)
- Gloria, Aboriginal education specialist (consultant for regional schools)

Informal Contexts:

- Amelia, counsellor and settlement worker for trauma survivors
- Alexander, counsellor and youth-led program coordinator
- Corinne, counsellor and settlement youth worker, leadership program coordinator
- Nora, coordinator of comic book and digital story program
- Gilad, artist and founder of iAM photography program
- Wendy, poet and founder of the Elder Project

Relational pedagogy.

Cultivating safe space and a feeling of "family" among the youth.

Corinne (leadership/settlement) suggests that facilitating relationships is the goal from which all other successes flow: "We're really proud of the work we've done this last year. But it was a lot of relationship building and it was a lot of trust building and it was a lot of building a little family unit through facilitation . . . And then I think the rest of the outcomes just kind of happened." Similarly, Alexander (youth-led program) describes how youth reflecting on the program "talk about this idea of family that they didn't have before." He credits the youth for creating this for each other: "they've really shaped a space where they've felt welcomed." And he notes that "some of the youth have been attending regularly for years, and so they can take up more of a leadership role." He sees that the group acts as a "social net with the information that they need and the knowledge that they need. . . . And a lot of them make close friends in the group so that

social connection is there." Similarly, Amelia (counsellor trauma survivors) tries to keep the space open and avoid a rigid agenda so that members of the program can make friends and support each other through shared experience:

> Community and relationships are so important to rebuilding a sense of place, a sense of belonging, and it also facilitates access to other resources. . . . they face so many intersecting types of marginalization that can be so isolating and can be very hard to talk about. And for them to connect with a peer who they understand understands the immigration process and being away from family and all of that, I think, is really therapeutic.

Facilitators lay groundwork to create a feeling of safety. For instance, Gilad (photography project) and Alexander (youth-led program) both engage the youth in creating guidelines for how they will interact with each other in their space. Alexander explains, "the youth came up with their own anti-oppression policy and what it means in that space, and so we often use that as a tool and just hark back to it if we need to in a certain situation." In her role leading art therapy programs, Jackie considers, "how do you create safety in the context, in this group, for these kids, because they do reveal things that are painful." She makes sure her team works to train the youth to create a supportive environment, but she finds that the shared vulnerability of creating art together also inspires respect:

> There's a lot of training of the kids in the beginning too. . . . "How do you respond and react to each other?". . . . And in a lot of ways the art does it itself . . . we find that it's very rare that there will be some kind of comment or meanness in response to that really authentic kind of open expression.

Jackie helps create a foundation of safety for her group by talking about respectful interaction, engaging them in the shared vulnerability of making art, and helping them collaborate and share commonalities. These experienced educators are helping to create safe space through scaffolding and guidance that supports youth agency, and through direct instruction that addresses potential and emergent challenges.

Working to build relationships of trust with teachers and facilitators.

In addition to creating space for relationships to form between the youth, facilitators also recognized the importance of meaningful adult support. The value of reciprocity and mutual learning between adults and youth was a prominent theme, as was intentional vulnerability. Corinne (leadership/settlement) describes the youth she works with as "really relational. So, anything food-based, anything where they're teaching you something, any sort of reciprocation. It's a really great tool. They just really respond to it because there's a sense of vulnerability there, I think." Similarly, Gilad (photography) encourages the artist mentors to share personal details about their lives and be real with the youth: "we're setting the tone of being personable and being ourselves because that opens up the space for people to be the same sort of way." He notices that learning to find voice is a mutual endeavour and observed that the artist mentors "learned just by being there for the youth opening up about themselves and opening up about traumatic experiences. It taught them that it's also okay to open up. So, you would always have the youth in that sense leading the adults and showing them that it's okay to speak." Similarly, Wendy's whole poetry project is designed to generate intergenerational understanding, and she encourages anyone working with youth to "proceed with an open heart for them. It isn't just another exercise." This kind of real relational interaction helps youth understand that the activity

is a departure from their usual learning routines. It is not abstract or procedural; it is an impactful exchange where who they are matters.

In some cases, the facilitator was able to form a trusting relationship with the youth by fulfilling many different roles in their lives. As Alexander (youth-led program) points out, "the nature of the sector and social services is that we wear many hats." In addition to his formal work of counselling, advocacy, and programming, he sometimes finds youth just visiting his office: "sometimes [they] just need to come and sit there and exist in that space because it feels safe for them." Similarly, Amelia (counsellor – trauma survivors) describes how "with youth and especially youth who are here alone without any caregivers for the first time and navigating all these things you play, you can play a very big role, you can mean a lot of things. So, it's like counselling sessions, but then it also might be all sorts of other things." Amelia and Corinne recognized the value of being both the counsellor and facilitator so that their deep understanding of the youth could inform their program.

There is a similar drive to help youth form bonds with adults within a school environment, and this can be characterized by different challenges and opportunities.

Frances (ESL teacher) describes setting a friendly tone in her classroom, while also keeping in mind professional boundaries she is expected to observe:

> as a teacher, I'm opening up the world to them. Especially if you get them when they first arrive. Maybe they know very little English, and you see that you are their lifeline in many ways, explaining how to get around, you know, everything. . . . It's always interesting when they first arrive, and you ask them a question and they stand up to answer the question . . . And so I say we don't need to – that's not a part of our routine. And we play games, we can joke around, but there's also an expectation, so it's friendly

> and informal, but I'm the teacher and we talk about mutual respect, and it always works well.

Jackie works with her art therapy team to provide non-authoritarian guidance so students can self-direct and make decisions: "It's always collaborative in some sense or other . . . even deciding on themes or the focus very often will come from the kids too. That's the real beauty in the art – it lends itself to that because it's the child who's creating, no one is directing or telling them what to do." Jackie also describes seeing a shift in teachers when they are able to learn about their students through their stories and art making: "The more the teachers here get the stories about these kids, it just develops a different understanding. So, it's not just the behaviour they're dealing with or the difficulties or struggles or frustrations about what they're learning. They grow a connection and an empathy."

Expanding safe networks.

Many practitioners spoke about how important it is to create a small safe group within the program/school space, but then to make the walls of that space permeable so that new people and influences can be introduced. Some also spoke about the importance of helping youth extend their feelings of mobility and safety and create new pathways of confidence. For instance, Gilad (photography) fosters relationships among youth but also with professional photographers who are established in Canada. He makes sure the program involves movement and exploration of urban spaces, as well as connecting with those who are the same and different:

> They get to see new parts of the city that they've never been to. Many of the youth in our program last year had never been on a bus or a streetcar or a subway. So, it's just exploring inner parts of the city. But it's also creating community amongst the participants in the program too, it's linking them to other people who have had a similar

> experience to them – which is also really important to trauma, being in a room with other people who might be able to understand you – while also connecting them to other people.

Similarly, Corinne (leadership/settlement) believes in bringing many different supportive adults into the program space: "with the guest facilitators it gives them another person in the community to kind of touch base with. So, we try to incorporate as many guest facilitators as possible into all of the programs or even other [this organization] staff that they might have already bonded with." At the same time, Corinne also encourages youth to go out into the community and make an impact through their leadership projects. After their public art project on Valentine's Day, one woman "came up to them and told them that when she woke up that morning she really didn't want to get up for the day . . . and that it was just really comforting for her to have it [their project]." Corinne believes that these interactions are empowering for the youth: "Hearing them talk about how good it made them feel, they felt a little bit more connected, I think, to the people around them."

Wendy's poetry program creates human connection between generations by blurring the line between classroom and community. She describes how students invite Elders into the classroom but also sometimes leave the school building to meet Elders where they are: "We were at Chemainus Secondary, but many of the students at Chemainus Secondary live on Penelakut Island . . . And so we went there, we took the ferry over there and got the kids hooked up with Elders . . . [in] the band office . . . and sometimes, you know, we went to people's houses, we went all over the place, we were roaming the island."

Building and managing partnerships.

With Elders and cultural resource people.

Shirley (principal of Chief Julius School) observes how Elders are integral to her students' education, saying, "They are the program." Shirley recognizes that Elders in the school do the work of sharing Gwich'in values and keeping the language and culture alive. She also describes how "The presence of just having an Elder sit in the classroom brings calmness, brings students to recognize that we have an Elder present and we need to show respect." Shirley shared a few of her practices with me, including consulting Elders about decisions she makes as a leader, noticing and accommodating the way different Elders need to be asked in, defining clear roles and matching them well, and paying them properly.

Shirley goes to ask for guidance from Elders all the time, and clarified that this is not just a strategy but a way of life: "coming from a family often we're looking to the Elders for guidance, us with children, we always go to our Elders to talk about. . . . How to teach them about respect and values, who we are and all of these kinds of things, so even in our own extended family we do that all the time. So when we come into the school, and we're thinking about all of these areas of – when you think about science and the science curriculum."

In addition to getting guidance from Elders about how to run the school, Shirley invites Elders in, according to their own preferences:

> Often when I'm on the radio and I'm talking about if you're an Elder and you would like to work within the school and with our programs, please call the school or – talk to them a bit about what we're doing – and some of the Elders say, "No, we sit at home, we wait for your phone call." "You call us," you know? And "We need to know when you need us to come in." So, it's really good that way.

She and her team give careful thought to inviting Elders to teach according to their specific skills and knowledge. She uses "our local radio station and being able to present to each of the Elders . . . what the programs are going to look like. . . . I think once the Elders know what specifically they're doing, it helps them so that they're on track with what their message is . . . they have clear direction as to what their role is going to be that day." Shirley also emphasizes the importance of paying Elders properly and recognizing that different types of work need to be compensated differently: "working on those protocols and policies and payments, it takes some collaboration to do." Shirley describes how many of the children in the school already know the Elders who come in, and so those relationships and learning span across different spaces in young people's lives.

Gloria (Aboriginal education specialist) works with Elders in similar and different ways. She has strong relationships with two Elders who are able to connect the schools with the right people to do teachings. She also helps teachers understand how to pay Elders properly because it took them all their lives to learn their knowledge, and "People think that tobacco is payment enough. But you can't eat tobacco or put it in your gas tank." She coaches teachers to have the courage to reach out to Elders with sincerity and an open mind:

> Before the teachers go to a knowledge keeper, they need to sit down and think, "What do I need to know?" Not necessarily what do the children need to know, because I always think you need to create capacity with that teacher, because Elders and knowledge keepers come and go, but the teacher may stay longer – "What do I need to know and what do I want my students to know?" For instance, maybe it's the four phases of life from a First Nations perspective, the four directions from a First Nations perspective. Having some time once that thought and idea is there. Sit with the knowledge keeper, talk

> about where they want to start, the knowledge keeper will likely make some suggestions – like how to teach on the four colours, the different peoples of the earth and the gifts they each bring. Try to keep it as local as possible. . . . We need to be respectful that there are other Nations [First Nations] in the same place, it's like multicultural education in that way. There are some common values, though, like the tipi teachings, which are core values for all First Nations people and all people across the world, actually. Each one of those poles is a human value. . . . Have each of the teachers figure out whose territory they are in, which treaty area – and go from there.

With linguistic and cultural education consultants.

Some teachers have access to consultants at the school board/area level who can help them improve their pedagogical approaches with linguistically and culturally non-dominant students. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to these professionals either as specialists in a specific topic or by the term "school area consultants," so as not to give away their identity within a "board," "division," or "district," which are provincially specific terms. Gloria is available to partner with teachers who want to bring Aboriginal education into their classroom:

> At the beginning of my career within the public school system I did a lot of modeling, I would co-teach or model a lesson on how to do – for example, to explain the purpose of birch bark baskets, explain that they are beautiful but also functional. Some of the teachers wanted to know but they were really afraid to start, with encouragement and not being afraid to make mistakes, we pursued the lesson and debriefed after. So, using that same strategy, if there's someone who is a First Nations coach or consultant in the division or school. Building that relationship with them and using them as a resource.

Gloria also helps teachers learn new ways to interact with their students, including through the example of Elders who allow students patience and time to make sense of new knowledge:

> A lot of the Elders, when they share information, they don't tell you directly to your face, they talk around you, then you see something two days later, and it's like they're hitting you in the back of the head. They don't give you an answer, they make you think. That's just how Indian education is. That's really lacking in our schools – we're teaching to them and not allowing them to think. The Elders say, "you've got to give them time to think." It's always hurry up and know this, not hurry and learn it, learning comes from thinking, making sense of what you've learned, what makes sense to you, in your experiences and your life. That's what the Elders all said, the one common thing about how they taught, and how my parents taught too.

Similarly, Yvonne leads a team of EAL teachers who provide support in classrooms. She and her team build relationships to understand what is relevant to classroom teachers:

> What is the actual reality for teachers who are working with our newcomer students today as they start that process. . . . All the EAL teachers [in our school area] are master level teachers, they have a master's. So, they are able to collaborate and co-teach with the teachers in the classroom. They can either take the lead, or they can supplement, they can do whatever they need to do, what's the best fit. And it goes back to relationship building with the classroom teacher to ensure that the environment is the best, most conducive environment for their learners.

With families.

Family involvement is identified as a priority, particularly by those working in schools. Gloria (Aboriginal education specialist) emphasizes the importance of connecting with families to understand the cultural needs of students:

> A lot of First Nations children are struggling with their own identity, their families are struggling with it too, so don't assume that the child knows about a powwow or a sweat. Build that relationship and trust to be able to reach out to families and tell them about an opportunity, or an interest the child has.

She also describes how having families and community members in the school shifts the way First Nations students feel in the space:

> I've seen that having the Elders and resource people – even their families – in the school means that a lot of the kids are starting to see themselves in school. There are First Nations adults in the school, they're not the only First Nations people in there anymore. They know that "Auntie Charlotte does reading corner."

Yvonne (EAL specialist) involves families in maintaining the linguistic education of their children at home:

> I often will say to parents upon arrival to Canada, "Great, I'm so happy you're here, but you have a new job." And they're all looking at me, and I always say, you're a teacher. And they'll say, "I'm a teacher?" And I'll say, yes, "I'll be the teacher of English, and you're going to be the teacher of your language at home because we have to maintain that and keep it nice and strong so that we can then make sure that the English will grow and become equitably growing."

She also wants parents to feel welcome in the school and recognizes that that requires coordination by a "multitude of people that are going to be supporting and all being on that same page."

Taylor (newcomer education specialist) also prioritizes family involvement in the schools and in community spaces:

> That's probably one of the key factors in any child's education regardless of their background or socio-economic status, or circumstance, that we try to involve the parents in the child's education . . . and more involved can look like just understanding the different school system . . . volunteering in the child's school, more involved can look like attending all the community events and family events because they themselves need to make connections as well, right?

Taylor and her team offer volunteer opportunities to parents in the schools so they can be there with a specific purpose in an official capacity and build their skills. She also partnered with an external organization to set up EAL classes for adults within a school with childcare so that families could access those services together and learn together.

With external professionals and volunteers.

One of the ways facilitators worked to meet the multiple needs of youth was by partnering with other adults with different skill sets. For instance, in Nora's program (comic books), translators and volunteers sit among the youth and connect with them informally: "Adult mentors . . . get to know the youth through paying attention to what they're sharing about themselves through their drawings. How they understand their experiences, how they feel about their experiences, and asking them questions about their work." At the same time, the art instructors fill a different role

through their skill-building relationship to the youth, and Nora sets the tone and maintains safe space. She attributes program successes to having a "great team."

Gilad (photography) speaks about how he is able to deal with complex subject matter in his photography program by partnering with mental health professionals to make it safer:

> Last year also when we were working with some of the newcomers and having conversations around home, some of those conversations were very triggering for the youth when they were talking about their experiences of leaving Syria behind. Thankfully, when we were doing that, we had caseworkers from the camps that were with us, who could help them process through it. So, these challenges luckily were mitigated because the right people were there, and the right people weren't us.

Taylor (newcomer education specialist) talks about maintaining a strong network of connections so that information can be shared, and students and families can be referred to the services they need:

> When I walked into this position I . . . knew half the people that were doing some of the work in this field, and it didn't take too long after to really, really learn who else was involved in the intensive support that's provided straight across the board – everything from housing to health to mental health to disability. . . . and even when my staff have a difficult time . . . working with external staff or even internal staff. . . . We talk about the philosophy of . . . we have to foster relationships at all times, regardless of whose opinion or whose process needs to happen, we have to make sure that we're respecting and guiding our work based on making sure that those relationships continue to be fostered.

Just as Taylor describes knowing the people who work in her field and working to nourish those connections, other facilitators often partner with people they know from their

personal or professional networks, and do the work of initiating or maintaining those. Corinne (leadership/settlement) remembers that the drumming instructor was "actually just a local person that the therapist knew, happened to know." Amelia (counsellor – trauma survivors) notes that she partnered with a spoken word artist that she knew through work with another organization: "It was somebody that I had worked with before . . . it was someone I knew would be good at it." Wendy intentionally builds these networks of potential collaborators through her outgoing disposition, which makes her "dangerous in an elevator." She launched her Elder Program after striking up a conversation on an airplane with a teacher: "She said, 'You're a poet?!' 'Yeah!' And then I started telling her about this and my interest and how I got to be educated by the First Nations people in the Alberni Valley. . . . And she said, 'Come to my class.'"

Languages and modalities.

Many of the experienced educators I interviewed were aware of how their program designs were influenced by choices about language and communicative modes. Their implementation strategies are described here according to how they relate to the desire for inclusion, skill-building, healing, and knowing the self and others.

Creating cycles of acceptance and expression.

Awareness of modes and languages can contribute to creating inclusive spaces and nurturing authentic interaction, decompressing the sometimes-limited spaces in which youth can safely express themselves as themselves. As previously discussed in the relational pedagogy section, educators do considerable foundational work to prepare the youth and set a tone that invites full participation. Establishing enough comfort to take the first creative risk is essential to beginning a cycle of increasing confidence and communication among the youth, which can eventually extend to other spaces, audiences, and opportunities in their lives.

For instance, Gilad perceives how safe space in his photography program can nurture truthful expression and beautiful art:

> Real art thrives when it's created out of a safe environment, especially when it's collaborative, when you're working together to build something or to do things together. The purest form of art comes when the space is a safe one. People feel comfortable to explore, people feel comfortable to just do whatever is true to them. . . . They can be who they are, they can express in whichever way they want.

He sees art and the process of making art as an intermediary between people that can create safe spaces for stories to emerge and be respected:

> Imagine that I came up to the youth and asked them to share their story without engaging with the art piece first. If I just came in on day one and said, "Okay we're going to do storytelling, I want you to open up about yourselves." We would never have the foundation of trust without having gone through these arts workshops together. It's all about utilizing the power of art to create a safe space where people feel comfortable to share, and then using that power of art on the other side with the general public to create a safe space where they feel compelled to come and learn. Without art in the middle of both of those things, people aren't coming and people aren't opening up.

This generative interrelationship between safe space and expression can begin with establishing collective care and continue through the creation of increasingly honest creativity and communication.

In her role as settlement worker, Corinne has identified that "the language component was probably the biggest barrier last year" and describes her ongoing efforts to "create as safe a space as possible so that it's not a barrier for them." Corinne does this in part by learning the

language of the youth she is working with: “I got the kids to teach me certain things while we were out and about. Like if we were in programming, I would just give some time to learn some of the words they were using. . . . me asking for help kind of diminished a power differential.” She also encourages informal language learning between youth: “It was really interesting to see how the other kids were also really intentional learning each other’s languages, and it kind of built a sense of learning, of wanting to learn about each other.”

Similarly, Nora observes how multimodality and multilingualism in her comic book program contribute to “creating a democratic experience where everybody feels capable of participating.” She wants youth to be able to “share who they are in spite of any language barriers.” She tells the story of one boy who had just arrived from a refugee camp and “wrote his story in Swahili and recorded it in Swahili . . . it was very sweet for me to watch it because that is really one of the first times I actually heard his voice. . . . But he just really went to town and really took to the drawing, and just, you know, sat there and sort of drew his heart out.” Inclusiveness is facilitated in part through the participation of translators in all aspects of the program. Even when running warm-up activities, Nora is aware of modalities and language:

> I wanted to make sure I was choosing activities that everybody was able to participate in that didn’t require a lot of language – so of course gestures. . . . [and] having the youth move around as much of the space as possible so that they basically feel a sense of ownership of their space, feel comfortable in that space, feel that it’s their space and they belong there.”

Nora designs the program experience for full expression through explicitly engaging the youth through their languages, their drawing skills, and their bodies in motion.

Creating cycles of acceptance and expression was also important in schools. For instance, in her role as principal of a K–12 Gwich'in school, Shirley emphasizes the importance of creating meaningful connection between students and Elders where opportunities for mentorship and sharing of stories can emerge, "but it takes time to get to that with the Elders and the students and the school." She believes that on-the-land programs can help to create a sense of safety and allow that connection and communication to flow between the generations:

> But, I think, really just being able to build an environment where it's safe for the Elders and safe for the students, and that they feel that they can come in and be comfortable, because sometimes that is a hard thing. Especially for some who have gone through the residential school system, it can be difficult to come into a school and sit in front of a class. For some it's just a natural – it's just who they are and how they're able to make that connection. . . . the thing that builds our school in this way is the on-the-land programs. . . . there are no interruptions, everyone needs to work together, and the students really need to pay attention to what the Elders are saying when they're out there, so it kind of creates the environment for that and this whole thing of building trust and building relationships takes very quickly and makes for a very strong program.

In this case the safety and expression are catalyzed through shared experiences on the land that allow deep listening to occur. Land and the activities done in relationship with land, such as learning about "traditional medicines" or "how to set a net," can become an active, collective process of reaffirming safety and belonging together.

In her role as an EAL specialist, Yvonne encourages her staff and schools to welcome students by encouraging the use of their languages:

> What does welcome mean? . . . we acknowledge cultural variations and people will say "Oh yes, I understand." We do look at the very clear ones like food and music and things like that. I'm talking about things that are deeper, language being one of those because that's one thing that can be silenced and ignored. If we ignore a child's language, we're ignoring a child in essence.

Yvonne encourages schools to celebrate by displaying language trees that showcase their linguistic diversity. She also helps her team understand how important it is to work from existing literacy and language skills:

> It's very important to acknowledge that if someone is able to read and write in their own language, that this is of value, especially by the educational or school system . . . upon arrival, EAL teachers will ensure that we're getting the dual-language books . . . it shows again that we value who's coming, and the other children in the class, even if they only speak English, to see that value of two languages is huge.

She celebrates how one school took this activity to another level by inviting community members and families to come in and read a dual-language book: "What an experience! First of all, for the parents, for the children who were listening to the two languages, and then even for the children who only understood the English, but to hear the other language of the book being read aloud in a classroom environment."

In addition to promoting multilingualism in her area schools, Yvonne helps teachers to understand how a safe environment can be built through hands-on engagement that allows for full participation by all learners:

> They have to ensure that the students in front of them are feeling that they are a part of, and that they belong, and that they are safe. And that's not done through words, that's

> done with how we engage our learners, and it's done with how they're participating and how they're going to be interacting with one another – even without speaking, can you understand one another? Is that built in? . . . anything that's hands-on for a language learner, that they can interact and produce and understand, they're going to be very good at it while they're learning to do it.

Yvonne guides her area schools in updating their instructional practices to build safe spaces for newcomer students through engaging their full expressive potential.

In her role as a high school ESL teacher and curriculum leader, Frances supports language learning alongside the development of life skills, subject-area knowledge, and adapting to the Canadian school system. She builds a positive group dynamic that encourages students to speak and express themselves through different modalities:

> I try to mix whether there's a discussion part, a writing part. . . . I'm very aware that different students will have different strengths and preferences . . . sometimes I even will offer different options when it comes to a culminating activity – you know that they do a written piece with a visual or. . . . I try to do something that meets all of those different learning styles and also that meets the different language and cultural expectations.

She has also observed increased confidence through the ESL arts course they offer: "Some of them did little skits and little drama pieces, so it's good, it's nice seeing a different side of the students, where they can express themselves in a different way. . . . making them feel more comfortable in expressing themselves physically and tone of voice." Frances sees how all of this additional support allows students to practice speaking and expressing themselves in a safe space and builds their confidence and skills towards integration in mainstream courses: "I think it gives them a sense of confidence, and they're more likely to feel comfortable participating in an ESL

class than they are in a mainstream class where they might be a little bit hesitant about other students understanding them." Frances works to create a safe environment where her students can practice speaking and expressing themselves in different ways while building a range of complementary academic and social skills that will serve them in mainstream courses.

Extending and contributing skills.

Interviewees also described using multimodal and holistic approaches to recognize and extend skills with youth, helping them build their capacity and feelings of competence. For instance, in her role as principal, Shirley and her team consider the importance of skill development in keeping with Gwich'in values and practices across all grade levels, including a range of hands-on skills related to culture, language, and thriving on-the-land: "how are we going to look at the skill-building from kindergarten to Grade 12, and . . . how do we acknowledge each skill that they've completed and mastered?" Shirley explains the importance of having Elders involved in teaching these skills and gives the example of an Elder providing advice about how to distribute caribou meat:

> And we came to the conclusion that most of our Elders had meat, and that if I had put it on our local radio station if any families, any people out there are in need of some caribou meat and would like meat, they can just call us and we'll have it delivered to their house. So as a school it's a way of giving back to the community as well. Our students had the opportunity to go out hunting. They shot a lot of caribou, they cut up the caribou meat, packaged it and were ready to deliver it back to the community.

In this example, the students are able to refine a skill and put it to use with the guidance of an Elder. They are also involved in the whole process from beginning to end. This is a theme that

comes up elsewhere in the interview, where Shirley describes students sharing their skill-building projects with a group of Elders who have been invited to see their work:

> The first student got up, and she talked about how it was her first time to put a pair of shoes together. She did the embroidery work, and then she sewed the shoes together and who helped her and how long it took her to do it, what was the most difficult and . . . how she felt when she was done. And then the first Elder got up and she said, "I want to thank you for sharing that, because it's not always easy to learn to do something new from the beginning to the end."

Shirley and her team help their students to develop hands-on skills and have them recognized through certificates, celebrations, mentorship, and caring feedback. She also provides opportunities for them to be involved in the whole creative process from beginning to end and understand the value of what they can create and contribute.

In his role as a counsellor and youth-led program coordinator, Alexander works with youth to design creative projects and establish meaningful partnerships with artists so that they have "the space to work on their talents or skills . . . where they might not have that in other places and feel valued for it. A lot of them in their family or schools . . . didn't feel great. And so, to acknowledge that they do have talent and they are worth something." Wendy helps Aboriginal youth build skills and confidence towards writing by experimenting with different modes to "make poetry alive for these students. Make them feel that it's easy to do. And that they can write a poem." Her strategies include making the learning fun, experiential, and straightforward. She provides prototypes to go by and encourages students to practice by responding to photos and narratives using magnetic poetry. Wendy believes that her experience as a practised poet helps her make the skill-building meaningful and accessible for young people.

Nora's comic book program includes a structured introduction to "fundamental drawing skills like perspective, composition, basic anatomy, proportion" and chances to improve through "guided practice activities in class." She describes students as "quite focused" and "really excited to show the art instructor anything that they've done, so holding it up, 'Come look, come look!'" The program allows them to demonstrate competence and have those abilities developed under the guidance of a professional artist. Nora uses "different modes to basically get a sense of what they know, what they're good at, what they need help with." Through creating a comic book in a multilingual environment, they can make their learning visible and invite others into their process of continually improving their skills.

Similarly, Gilad's program provides youth with access to exceptional training opportunities with acclaimed photographers. He describes the joy of watching a young person excel at photography after just a few days of training:

> She grabs her phone and she crouches down and she starts going slowly up to these pigeons with her confidence and proceeds to take one of the most beautiful pictures I've ever seen in my life . . . she comes up to me after and she shows me the picture. And what made that moment special for me – and I have goose-bumps as I talk about it – it wasn't how beautiful the photo was, it was how that photo made her feel in that moment. It was as if in that moment she realized for the first time in her life that she was really, really good at something new. Those sorts of moments in life are rare.

In addition to creating a program that builds capacity and confidence with photography, Gilad also invites youth from previous years to come back as mentors and work alongside professional photographers to share their skills with other youth. This kind of leadership and teaching role further affirms the skills young people have developed, so that their growing

expertise can be claimed as part of their individual identity and part of their membership in a community of practising artists.

Healing through artistic process and materiality.

Interviewees also describe using immersion in artistic process to help young people address trauma and strengthen their mental health. In the following examples, this is done through inspiring freedom and play, meditative awareness, and emotional release.

In her role as supervisor of an art therapy program in schools, Jackie perceives the value of working across modes and engaging students through play and sensory engagement with materials: "How does a piece of paper feel? What is clay like in your hand? What are the properties, what does this material want to do?" She also puts a lot of thought into choosing the right materials to lend possibility to the themes that are coming up for the students: "What do you want to bring in? Is it going to be a 3D creation of what a safe place may look like or feel like?" For Jackie, the experience should be playful and exploratory because "It is really the language through which children speak, play and art." Although Jackie's focus is very much on letting a relationship emerge between the young person and their art, it is also about allowing them to release their emotions and be witnessed by their therapist and others:

> We work inter-modally because the idea is that imagination uses all the modalities to express itself . . . so a kid drew a person, it was actually beautiful, it was very big, with a very, very blue sky. And there's a person just walking, very small in relation to the environment . . . "If she could come alive, what would she say?" And there might be a poem that comes from that, or there might be like a play she comes into. "Do you want to be her?" And maybe you put on a hat or a scarf or whatever it is, and now you're her. "What do you see, what do you want to do, where are you going?" And so, you keep

> moving it between modalities so you get the full expression of whatever the image has to say . . . so, in this case . . . it was an enactment, she became this girl, and basically what came up was just how lonely she is. And she was looking for a friend, and she kept looking and she looked under the table and she looked around and she couldn't find anybody in this very vast big space . . . she wrote some words and then she wrote the poem and then she wrote the letter to the girl from her, and [said,] "I'll be your friend," and they had a correspondence. So, it's just that full experience so that the image gets to say its full piece to the artist and, as a witness, to the therapist that's there.

Jackie observes that the process is the most important thing, but that the students also experience healing through sharing and letting their stories out: "The kids get relief because it's out there, it's a little bit separate from them as well, so they get some relief."

In his role leading his photography program, Gilad is also aware of how the process of making art can also be a process of healing. He focuses on art as a way to uncover and release stories, and as a meditative tool. He understands the value of creating a safe space through art so that youth feel it is "okay to open up about things that they've been burying for a long time. . . . we use art as a tool to get to their stories . . . part of overcoming trauma and part of healing comes from opening up and knowing that it's okay to open and knowing that you are accepted when you open up." He also draws from his experience of using photography as meditation in his own healing and helps youth access those benefits:

> You have to be in the moment when you're shooting, which means that you have to be very aware of everything around you, like the sounds and the way the light is bouncing off of things and the speed at which things are coming at you, or the speed at which things are just still, that you're very much in the moment. You're not thinking about that

> thing that stressed you out earlier today, or the deadline you have tomorrow or whatever it is. You're very much in the moment . . . meditation, of course, and mindfulness, is very important to parts of mental health, so photography in this instance is a meditative tool that we use for those purposes.

Although healing through artistic process is not central to their programming, counsellors/youth workers Alexander, Corinne, and Amelia all mentioned it as a component of their work. Alexander comments, "a lot of them work through trauma and a lot of things through the arts . . . through dance and things like that . . . so they can communicate." Corinne has offered a lot of mental health programming that focuses on different coping skills, and one of them was through meditative drumming: "The meditative drumming was more meant to get them in touch with being aware of their own stress and their own bodies and having more emotional capacity to regulate their emotions and then having an outlet for it." Amelia partnered with a spoken word artist, which helped youth connect to their voices and maybe continue to use those tools in their self-care:

> We had a poet, a spoken word artist, come and do eight weeks of different types of writing and storytelling activities that was centred around connecting to your voice in different ways. . . . They really liked it . . . some people got to create things that they could put up in their space, like as sort of affirming things. And then also one of the participants I know still does a lot of creative writing as part of her practice of self-care.

Using artistic practice can help youth get grounded by allowing them to focus their senses and be in their bodies. They can connect to the texture and possibility of their art materials, concentrate through their camera on the light or the motion of birds in flight, or notice the feelings in their bodies as they release tension through drumming. They can create those opportunities for healing

through freedom and play, and through exploring and releasing those things that have been buried.

Knowing the self and others through stories.

Interviewees used stories and the representation of stories to help youth explore their identities and learn about and from others. Many of these examples focus on the process of helping youth author and present work about themselves, creating opportunities for them to receive positive affirmation. There are also examples of youth learning through the process of listening, exchanging, and reclaiming stories.

Authoring and presenting.

Jackie works with her team of art therapists to create opportunities for students to share their experiences within their small group program, but also more broadly with the rest of the school:

> This provides a forum for them to be visible and to have a voice, so they are able to share their experiences, the experiences of coming to Canada, the experiences of leaving their homeland, longings and fears, what they've left behind, and how it is for them to be in school. So, I think that's an important philosophy – is that sense of connection, belonging, and real integration, through being visible, into the school environment.

It is important to Jackie that students are gaining presence in the school through authoring and sharing their narratives so that they "really exist in a visible way and not just through our lens or perception." She makes sure that facilitators leave it up to the youth whether they want to share, but notes that they are usually really enthusiastic about bringing their stories to broader audiences: "So they decided, I asked them, who would they want to have look at and read this book – and they would want to share it in . . . the school library, and then they wanted it to go into a general public library . . . which they were very excited about too."

Gilad also works to help youth access their own stories through photography and then share them with broader audiences in a gallery. Their photos are displayed on the wall accompanied by headsets that connect to their audio stories: "This program culminates in something really big, which is this gallery . . . we try to put as much attention on the youth at that event as we possibly can, so they know that it's theirs. . . . And that way, I think they feel very valued." As previously discussed, Gilad helps youth access their stories through the process of making art, encouraging them to proceed at their own pace or take a step back, and working with mental health professionals to manage difficult aspects of the process of storying the self.

Nora's comic book program also culminates in a showcasing event to celebrate the process of making the comic books, and the digital stories that evolved from them:

> We held the showcasing event, where we invited the general public . . . to look at the art displays, we had it blown up and then displayed on foam boards, and then we had a display wall of photos that we took during the program, and then we screened the video a couple times. . . . I think that the part that sticks out to me most was them watching the audience watch their film and be very impressed by what they had done. It was very apparent on their faces – you could just see them sort of feeling shy but happy, smiling.

Nora felt that the showcasing event added meaning for the youth, but she was also aware of ways it could be improved. For instance, they did not have the time to involve the youth in the entire process of creating digital videos, and some of the youth encountered barriers that prevented them from attending the showcasing event.

Listening and exchanging.

In addition to these themes of affirmation through representing identity, interviewees also shared examples of young people listening to and exchanging stories. For instance, Shirley describes how Elders pass on their knowledge and history to the students at her K–12 school:

> You have to feel it. You have to really get the sense. Like when I have 70-, 80-year-old Elders saying to me that "I just want to offer to the students what I have because I won't be here for a long time. Once I'm gone, it's like this whole history's going to go with me. How do I share it today?" So, I have Elders who are very conscious of that and of timing . . . that always brings great sadness to my heart when an Elder passes because it's kind of like all the information, all the lessons, all the teachings . . . that passes on with them. But at some point, I bring myself to recognize that we have had Elders in our school for many years, that they have instilled in our students many of those teachings, and it's just to remind our students every day that it's important to be respectful, it's important to work hard, nothing comes easy and . . . my understanding of our people and our Elders is that we come from very strong, very skilled Elders with great expertise in many areas.

As previously described, Shirley and her team work to create a feeling of safety so that this listening and learning can occur, particularly through land-based programs. She also gives the example of students learning by listening to Elders through mentorship projects for their Northern Studies 10 course:

> One of the things at the end is for the students to do a "becoming capable" project in that part of the Northern Studies 10 class. And what they need to do is select a project that they're going to learn – for the first time kind of thing, and find a mentor, an Elder to help them do this project, and some of the kids decided to make fur mitts, some decided

> to do a language lesson, some decided to some traditional sewing and traditional dancing, and each of them went to find their Elder that was going to help them with their project and teach them how to do it.

Shirley also set up an event that allowed the students to share their projects with "an authentic audience" of 10 Elders who could provide feedback:

> I was a little bit nervous, I wasn't quite sure how it was going to go. . . . And every one of those Elders gave very positive and very supportive advice and feedback to each of the students, and by the time that they left you could see . . . how genuine and caring the advice was. No matter how the project was looking at the end, it was "you tried, you accomplished, continue to do that," . . . and even some of the Elders started to say, "You know, when I first started to sew . . ." Like as the stories unfolded through the whole presentation. . . .

Shirley creates opportunities for students to listen to Elders and receive their teachings, such as on the land and through mentorship projects. She also set up an opportunity for youth to demonstrate or showcase their projects and tell the story of their learning process. This allowed them to be recognized for their effort and accomplishments, and it created more opportunities for listening through an informal flow of stories with the Elders.

In her role facilitating poetry workshops with The Elder Project, Wendy emphasizes the importance of working towards the creation of a high-quality book: "The honouring, the process of honouring has to do with making a beautiful book." The books include photographs of the youth poets and Elders, work by local artists, and in one case writing in Inuktitut, Inuktitut syllabics, and French. She also notes the impact of launching the book through a community celebration that does recognize the youth, but not for authoring stories about themselves. It gives

them the opportunity to show how well they listened to the stories the Elders had shared, and how hard they worked to honor them through their poetry: "For the Elders . . . that honouring was something incredible, you know, for them, for the students to stand beside their Elders and read the poem. . . . So moving, and beautiful." Wendy has designed The Elder Project based on her understanding of poetry as a tool for learning about other people who are different from her:

> Connections are – for me, are the most important. I mean, what do we have if we don't have understanding and compassion for human beings and who they are? And how do we find out about who they are? I mean, I don't have time to spend time with everybody. I can't do that. But poetry is my way into it. Into the heart.

Wendy uses the process of creating poetry as a starting point to help youth and elders share stories and spend time together. They are able to connect through attention to a mutual creative project beyond themselves. Wendy describes these connections as "incredible" and gives the example of one student "asking the Elder about where he lived and what he did and everything, so he drew a picture of his house."

A few other interviewees mentioned listening and exchanging stories in their programs with youth. Taylor, newcomer education specialist, describes a number of activities her area schools did to celebrate diversity and human rights. One of the events is a storytelling project to help youth learn from people of all different backgrounds:

> We invited all types of newcomers and others to be able to tell stories to our students about their experiences, reflecting on their personal, cultural, global or . . . to be able to talk about their own identity and what that means. And this storytelling event took place four times this year, and then we're also doing a very specific Indigenous one, so that we're making sure that our mainstream students are connected with our Indigenous

> students, are connected with our newcomer students, and . . . that we're honouring the land that we're on when we're . . . having some of these practices take place.

Alexander, youth-led program coordinator, remarks on the way youth can sometimes share stories with each other through creating collective art:

> Arts is definitely a tool and it transcends difference. So, there's a mural outside – maybe you saw? They did the whole thing on a Saturday. An artist came in and did it with them. But they talked through their own experiences as refugee youth or precarious migrant youth, and that gave them a platform to do that or an avenue to do that.

Gloria, Aboriginal education specialist, witnesses how having Elders and resource people in the school creates a feeling of calm, and says that teachers can learn from how they help the students listen: "now we include resource people – for instance, through carving soap, stories can be told, teachings can be done as the students are doing something with their hands. I've seen some of the teachers learning from that, getting their students up to the smart board – I love it when I see that."

Reclaiming.

Some of the interviewees also described the power of reclaiming stories and language from oppressive systems. Throughout her interview, Gloria, Aboriginal education specialist, uncovers the impacts of assimilationist policies on Aboriginal learners. Here she describes the process of families revitalizing language through connection to land, and how that in turn strengthens connection to identity:

> When I talked about the balance between education systems – that is alive and well in some of our communities . . . What a difference it makes with the kids! You see them in school, then you see them on the lake – in school they're trying to look tough, like

> gangsters – out on the land it's different, the camp is hard to get to, all of a sudden they're speaking their language, laughing, helping each other, offering to go get water for kokum. They remember, and their parents are teaching them. That's what our urban kids are missing. Our language comes from the land, and so many First Nations languages are gone, they are no more. Without language you forget your connection to the land, that is our connection to who we are. The Elders always say, "pêyâhtak," watch out, you didn't teach them; they're going to be angry one day that you didn't teach them.

Both Alexander and Amelia describe refugee youth being constrained and exploited by systems that require their stories of pain. Amelia describes here how she helps youth restore the coherence of their own stories:

> A lot of work that I do one-on-one with youth is narrative-based. Part of the reason is because, going through the refugee process, you have to write out your story with a lawyer, and you sort of have to be trading that story always as a currency for access to services, access to status, access to safety, all of these things. But it's a story that really centres details of violence and disempowerment and all of these things, and then it's in legal language . . . and so youth are sort of pushed into this position by different systems to sort of relate to this thing as their story that they then are expected to just give to all these strangers . . . and you have to be constantly rehearsing this story because you have to present it in a hearing and all of these things, so I think it's very meaningful to work with youth around authoring other narratives or sharing stories of yourself, like fleshing out stories of yourself that centre more of your uniqueness and resilience and strength and empowerment . . . because the refugee story is all the ways that you can't fight back to protect yourself, which means that you have to leave . . . and there are so many things

> that youth do to resist violence, and so making more space for that is something that I try to do in our one-on-one work . . . in ways that are more empowering and human and authentic. . . . And also, I think it's a way of holding onto power . . . being a refugee claimant navigating the immigration system is so disempowering because you are literally at the mercy of a judge who has probably never been to your country of origin, or you might be worried about all the biases they might hold about your sexuality or your race or your cultural identity or your religious identity. . . . So, ways of finding pockets to feel power despite navigating such a disempowering process . . . you can think about like I'm playing this game, I'm learning how to do this, but it's not my whole self or my whole story.

Similarly, Alexander has had many negative experiences with academics and journalists wanting the youth to talk about the trauma of their pasts rather than focusing on their resiliency. He also notes that academics sometimes try to gain access to these stories under the pretense of volunteering and that this can feel like a breach of trust:

> At times "youth" is like this buzzword, like people want to work on youth stuff in their PhDs or whatever, so I get requests all the time from people whose initial thing is like, "I really want to volunteer, I see that you work with youth, I'd like to volunteer with youth." And I'm like, "hmmm, ok, we'll see –" And then it's often times it's, "Well, I'm doing this project – " And I'm like, "Well, we're not a grocery store." Right? So, we've had to filter out quite a bit of that kind of stuff – they get requests a lot to talk on the radio or do things like that, and sometimes it's . . . a bit too much, where they're like, "We just want to just *be* instead of always having to tell our stories." . . . They get media requests, and so many people focus on – and even academics do it too – focus on why they're here. So,

> they focus on the back home, and they reduce the refugee experience to the trauma and the violence instead of celebrating resilience and celebrating the future and where they are now. And for sure they've overcome things, and so a lot youth will be like, "I will talk, but I don't want to talk about that. I want to talk about here. I want to talk about the barriers that we're facing here and how Canada isn't meeting us where we're at."

Amelia and Alexander's examples show how requests for youth to share their stories are sometimes intrusive and manipulative, and how young people and their support networks are creating space to reclaim their stories and their wholeness in ways that are not performative and not asking for outside affirmation. Just as Gloria describes families getting away from the institution of school to do their reclamation of language and laughter, refugee youth sometimes need to reclaim their stories away from the gaze of academics, journalists, and judges. For racialized and colonized youth who are so often made to perform and speak in ways that are not true to them under scrutiny and duress, rebuilding language and story sometimes becomes most possible in private conversations and in those places that are hard to get to.

Summary of strategies for implementation.

In this section I addressed Question 2 by analyzing strategies that educators use to actualize their vision of effective pedagogy, including through ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology. Under the heading "Relational Pedagogy," I described the ways that educators cultivate safe space and feeling of "family" among the youth, work to build relationships of trust with teachers and facilitators, and expand relational networks beyond the program/school space. I also described how these relationships are established, enriched, and expanded through effective partnership building, for instance, with Elders, cultural consultants, families, and external professionals/volunteers. Under

the heading "Languages and Modalities," I described the ways that educators expand communicative possibilities including by creating cycles of acceptance and expression, facilitating the extension and contribution of skills, healing through artistic process and materiality, and encouraging deeper knowledge of the self and others through stories. I shared participant narratives about the value of guiding youth through authoring and presenting personal work and also looked at alternative/divergent processes of listening, exchanging, and reclaiming stories and language that are cultural and political processes in themselves.

Research Question 3: Insights Towards Growth and Sustainability

Introduction.

The following section answers Research Question 3: "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?" I examine how the experienced educators want to grow and sustain desirable pedagogies and effective strategies. This includes their insights towards systems change, consideration of their own design processes, and renewed visions of a future of rich learning opportunities with equity-seeking youth. Again, this analysis draws from interviews conducted with experienced educators. The interviewees are listed below for easier reference.

Formal Contexts:

- Shirley, principal of Chief Julius School (K–12)
- Frances, ESL teacher in inner-city technical high school
- Jackie, supervisor of school-based art therapy program
- Taylor, newcomer education specialist (consultant for regional schools)
- Yvonne, English as an Additional Language specialist (consultant for regional schools)
- Gloria, Aboriginal education specialist (consultant for regional schools)

Informal Contexts:

- Amelia, counsellor and settlement worker for trauma survivors
- Alexander, counsellor and youth-led program coordinator
- Corinne, counsellor and settlement youth worker, leadership program coordinator
- Nora, coordinator of comic book and digital story program
- Gilad, artist and founder of iAM photography program
- Wendy, poet and founder of the Elder Project

Desired system changes.

Preventing burnout and addressing funding structures.

Managing demanding workloads in under-resourced environments and feeling responsible to young people who are coping with/confronting trauma and oppression leaves many staff who run youth programming feeling burnt out. For instance, Nora describes how her funding for her comic book program is uncertain, and the program ended just as momentum with the youth was building: "They're sort of getting an idea of what this means to participate in something like this, and by the time you get to the end of the 10 weeks is when you really start to get rolling and then . . . you want the funding to just keep going." She spends a lot of her time trying to secure or maintain funding. Similarly, Gilad explains that challenges with funding his photography program means "Not having the resources to run the program as long as we feel it needs to run, not having the resources to hire the right amount of people to be there." Relationships with funders sometimes also interfered with program autonomy, as in the example of Alexander (youth-led program) only being able to successfully run his program when he stopped pressuring himself and the youth to fill the room and report numbers to funders. Corinne (leadership/settlement) describes planning according to what the funders want but "luckily" having some unrestricted funding to do small, responsive projects with the youth. Amelia (counsellor – trauma survivors) is also exhausted by the multi-tasking requirements of her job and sometimes working long hours and running complex events/programs alone. Some of the

ways facilitators are hoping to/working to overcome these challenges include better organizational systems for managing volunteers, feeling like they have allies, partnering with other staff and learning from each other, and getting inspiration and strength to continue from the youth themselves.

Burnout and funding also came up with the school-based professionals, but instability is slightly less of a concern where schools allow for consistent programs and staffed roles. Jackie explains of her art therapy program, "the program generally lasts for a full school year, and then if all goes well and we continue with the funding, they can continue into the next year . . . because it's long term I think what we notice is that the kids just – they get stronger, and they feel more connected with each other as a group, and they feel more connected in the context of the school." At the same time, Jackie never feels secure about their funding and wishes they could serve more schools.

Taylor, newcomer education specialist, observes how receiving a block of multi-year government funding can give them room to plan and provide a range of services "regardless of what year or what sort of benchmark they come in . . . it's really not a lot of money, but in a lump sum it allows us to do some extra things." The flexibility has allowed them to set up extra language and literacy programs and resources for "students who have no formal or interrupted schooling . . . often our refugees will fall into that category." Taylor also understands how vital it is for her to stay healthy and encourage the same in her team so that they can continue to serve students and families:

> We actually provided professional development to our staff . . . learning about mindfulness and . . . work-life balance . . . that's really important, to be a healthy staff member in order to just provide healthy services and supports to our families . . . even in

> my own practice, I always make sure there are people that I have that I respect that I can go to as mentors – I have a very good support system and network. And I myself try to maintain a healthy and balanced way of living. That is vital to the work that we do, but then that comes across in the delivery that we do.

For professionals in this field, funding structures often add an extra layer of stress and unpredictability and can make it difficult to provide a stable and responsive environment to youth who need exactly that. Block funding and unrestricted funding can help, as can being resourceful and collaborative, and training for/talking about well-being.

Building more awareness and changing attitudes.

Professionals in this field are also advocating alongside youth, so they witness and encounter many discriminatory systems and attitudes with them. For some people, system change would begin with society valuing the work they do with youth. Frances (ESL teacher) wants her administration to understand the value of providing extra support to English language learners, and the way they enrich the school for everyone. Jackie wants schools to value and understand art therapy as an essential component of the healing and learning that go together for refugee students, and not view it as an add-on or distraction. Others focused on how they would like to see youth identities respected and rights upheld. Corinne (leadership/settlement) would like to see more cultural awareness in attachment work with newcomers:

> A lot of the issues that they're coming across are differences in making social relationships. . . . So, what we would view as super unhealthy and codependent relationships would be considered standard, and I just don't want to create a notion of shame around how they build relationships . . . the Syrian population are quite intact in

> terms of family units, and extended family is really huge for them. So, providing the service with those kinds of things in mind would be noticeably more efficient.

Alexander (youth-led program) would like to see more meaningful youth engagement across the sector. He is concerned that "people are easy to talk about youth and what youth engagement is but they don't put it into practice." For Alexander, this means youth engagement in every aspect of program design and putting youth at the table for conversations about them. Sometimes that means driving the youth to a conference or meeting in a van and advocating for them to be there. He would also like to see more "intersectional analysis" and "an understanding that youth are coming from different situations and have different identities, and to make space for these identities." Similarly, Amelia (counsellor – trauma survivors) wants better-educated "gatekeepers" and better understanding of complex and intersecting identities. She describes "unnecessary triggering and exclusion and barriers . . . that I don't think are just and also aren't part of what's actually true in terms of our legal framework." She describes how these interactions with ignorant/discriminatory systems are painful and "intersect with trauma histories." Amelia wants more "attention and just tenderness towards the intersecting and complex identities that migrant youth hold" and for that understanding to influence interactions at the individual, community, and policy level.

Some interviewees also focused on how Canadians need to recognize we are on Indigenous land, and/or for the education of youth from all backgrounds to be informed by the full histories and cultures of the places we live. Wendy's work doing poetry with youth and Elders is partly inspired by her drive to have others hear their stories: "So there's the high-minded Truth and Reconciliation, but is there the dogged attempt, open-hearted attempt for First Nations and non-First Nations people to get to know each other as human beings? I don't know.

This is what I hope will happen." Taylor (newcomer education specialist) problematizes the ways the school system is Eurocentric and balances the push for integration with wanting to create "grey areas" where teaching can be student-centred for Indigenous and newcomer youth. Yvonne (EAL specialist) advocates for supporting the Indigenous and newcomer populations that are growing, and learning from the historic mistakes of residential schools. "We've set ourselves up within the system that we have English and French education. . . . But if you come from another language, the Allophone population . . . even an Indigenous language, you're kind of out of luck. So, what's happening with you? And yet that's the proportion of people that is growing." She emphasizes that the purpose of education is to build people up: "But if English education is taking away, we're not going to get there . . . we can just look back historically to our residential schools and the Indigenous language loss, and so people then lose identity and connection to who they are." Yvonne feels we need to have that conversation about who is Canadian, confront racism and discrimination against accents, and move beyond bilingualism to reconsider what we value in schools, communities, and work places.

In her role as an Aboriginal education specialist, Gloria describes how important it is for teachers to understand the reasons for bringing First Nations education into their classrooms, and how clarity about past relationships will help them understand the need for moving forward in a different way. As she puts it:

> Why do you need to provide an opportunity for First Nations learning in your classroom? Some people will say because it's the wave in education right now, but it's because we're on Turtle Island, and there have been so many events that have fractured the relationships between First Nations and non–First Nations – fractured by policies, government, attitudes of assimilation, these things have fractured our relationships. All that history

> happened, the residential schools, the smallpox, the taking of the land, the squeezing of First Nations people onto reserves. The feeling is "150 years ago you starved us onto reserves, now you're starving us off reserves into urban centres." We need to build the understanding that we needed each other, 250 years ago we needed each other for survival (well, white people needed us); now we need white people to survive in society as it is through "teaching the cunning of the white man." It is written in the treaties, "teaching the cunning of the white man." Many of us have received that education now, and it's time for us to give back to the communities.

Indeed, although there was a time that settlers could not survive without Indigenous knowledge, Eurocentric academic knowledge has been ruthlessly established as Canada's language of power through assimilationist policies. For Gloria, schools and teachers reaching out to bring First Nations education and First Nations families, teachers, Elders, and resource people into classrooms is about acknowledging and addressing the fractured relationships, the treaties, and the potential for us to finally fulfill the promise of helping one another.

Coordinating and improving systems.

Many of the facilitators I spoke with are intimately aware of the structural barriers that youth face and deeply involved in trying to coordinate systems to better serve them. Alexander (youth-led program) would like to see better referral systems and networks for youth regardless of their immigration status. Corinne (leadership/settlement) would like to see better supports for older youth and unaccompanied minors and to address lack of support/services in smaller cities. She would also like to address lack of alignment between schools and community-based organizations: "There's just a real gap between what the schools are doing and then what the community-based resources are doing. And the alignment of values . . . I can't just talk to anyone

on the phone about a certain kid." She compares this to working within systems in a larger city that has an "actual community-based organization that does all of the initial intake for refugees and immigrants in the school setting . . . it's all moved through them, so they support the teachers . . . it's like a real collaborative framework."

Frances (ESL teacher) would like to see the return of opportunities to pilot new programs and share information, and system level supports for responding to ESL students. Taylor (newcomer education specialist) would like to overcome difficult relationships and inefficiencies and to coordinate mandates and sharing. Yvonne (EAL specialist) would like teacher education to catch up to the multilingual reality, and for policy and government commitment to reflect multilingual values. As she emphasizes:

> You have classroom teachers who go to university to become a teacher, and the expectation is that the children will be speaking English upon arrival in school, and the reality is that's not going to happen in multicultural Canada as we go forward. . . . I've had these conversations with the local professors here at the universities, and I've said it can't just be the school board, it has to be the universities as well. How are we preparing our teachers in Canada to ensure that they understand that it's not going to be an EAL teacher quote unquote "fixing" them? . . . The goal is we need quality instruction for all our students in our classrooms.

Interviewees working in community and school contexts talked about the need to coordinate systems and services to better serve youth regardless of their immigration status, age, or linguistic background. They identified barriers that currently prevent professionals from collaborating and sharing information, and the need to think holistically and longer-term to

provide appropriate training and ongoing opportunities for sharing and professional development.

Designing, refining, and co-constructing.

Planning and adapting.

Some interviewees are able plan out their program/curriculum and pedagogy in detail. In her role as principal of a Gwich'in school, Shirley works to build a shared vision with her team to create a comprehensive plan for the whole K–12 school, for the whole year. Jackie elaborated on her art therapy programs in schools after a successful pilot that she could build on. Gilad prefers to engage in a full design process for his photography programs when the funding is available, including consulting, piloting, evaluating, and relaunching. However, many interviewees do the majority of their design work at the responding and adapting phase because that is where they have organizational influence, or because they are responding to dynamic, diverse youth needs in real time. For example, Corinne (leadership/settlement) is constantly adjusting the program based on her close relationships with youth and her work to understand their needs: "it really depends on the language and the dynamic and the demographic."

Barriers to the design process.

Structural influences can make it difficult for practitioners to engage fully with the design process. For instance, funding structures can make it difficult to engage in long-term planning or have creative/collaborative control over the design with youth. Breaks in funding interrupt relationships with youth just as momentum is building, disrupting the design process just as practitioners could learn from and refine their initial attempts. Constantly working in an under-resourced environment can also destabilize the imagination. For instance, Amelia (counsellor – trauma survivors) has trouble describing what her program would look like if she had more

capacity to design it differently. She describes her program as unstructured but acknowledges, "that's probably also a reflection of the resources of the centre, because I'm sure if my only role was the after-school program . . . I think I would have a similar philosophy but it would be structured differently, but it's sort of on top of a case load, so there's also sort of the capacity issues in terms of what we can structure." Similarly, Nora is so busy trying to get funding for her comic book program and wishes she had more time to engage in her own visioning process for upcoming programs, "at this point I'm not entirely sure what it would look like. I'm supposed to be putting together some notes on what it would look like."

A number of facilitators were at a loss to identify concrete impacts of their programs or expressed that they would want more opportunities to evaluate or follow up. For instance, Nora (comic books) used an interactive/multimodal poster method to gather feedback from the youth but still felt like she needed more: "Because of how short the program itself was, that's something that's disappointing to me is that I didn't have that follow-up with the youth after the showcase event, and that was the last time I saw many of them." There was also tension between following the mandate and following the process of co-construction with the youth. Amelia (counsellor-trauma survivors) explains, "Well, it's partly determined by funding requirements. . . . And then trying to be creative within that structure as much as possible based on what seems meaningful to the youth that I work with, within the constraints of what we're required to do. . . . I mean, ideally all of our programming would be really youth-driven and youth-led and meeting needs that they've expressed . . . so trying to listen for that and listen for patterns." Similarly, despite how constrained she is by funding requirements, Corinne (leadership/settlement) still prioritizes co-construction of learning with youth: "if they really

want to do something I know is not within our mandate or the resources we have, then I'll just adjust it so that we can do it in a different way for them."

Renewing the vision.

Educators/Facilitators.

Many of the educators had big dreams for how to grow their program. Gilad is dreaming of offering the youth a permanent space with a year-round program, where they can engage in a variety of art forms beyond photography and connect to a broader range of people. Nora would like to scale up the comic book program to include multiple modes and a drop-in space, improve the program through involvement of female liaison for Muslim girls, and invite more meaningful youth ownership/input. Wendy would like to build in more reciprocity, with Elders involved throughout the process and exchanging stories and poetry in both directions, and more intercultural exchange. Alexander would like to improve his capacity as counsellor/youth-led program coordinator by learning from the youth about emerging challenges/experiences and getting more information that can help them challenge inequitable systems. Taylor (newcomer educational specialist) would like to develop processes that are inclusive of student/family/staff voices so that listening and collaborating are built in and not just driven by a few leaders within the school system. Shirley (principal K–12 school) would like to continue her work of building relationships within the community and school to enhance cultural education:

> In a lot of ways, being Gwich'in, being from the community, being a principal, a leader in this school, a leader in the community, it kind of gives me that opportunity to build that between the school and the community. And I'm only planning to continue to do more of it and continue to build on that. But it's not just about me and the students and

the community and the Elders. It's the whole school as a team. We work together and we build that together.

Cultural and linguistic consultants.

Some of the interviewees were also involved in creating system change and developing and sharing promising practices. This was particularly true of school area consultants. These consultants are establishing and spreading best practices through observation, talking, and research. Taylor (newcomer education specialist) illustrates an example: "When I came into the role . . . I . . . just learned every possible thing I could learn about the process of how a newcomer comes to Canada. . . . 'What's currently happening now? Can you teach me everything about your programming? Can you talk to me about the way you approach this issue?'" Taylor used this information to identify best practices, adjust roles and responsibilities, and improve documentation and evaluation practices. Gloria and Yvonne both use research and resources in their work. Gloria recommends resources like *Elders and Teachers Are Cree-ative Collaborators!* Yvonne draws from resources like *Linguistically Appropriate Practice*, *The Language Rich Classroom* and the work of Jim Cummins and Margaret Early. She prioritizes connecting her teachers with "current research . . . articles on translanguaging, emerging bilinguals . . . And . . . student-appropriate resources to support language learning in the content areas."

Gloria (Aboriginal education specialist) describes supporting growth in her school by gently helping teachers shift their perspectives so that they come around to wanting the change. "A lot of teachers were not taught about First Nations people, history, effects from that history, from residential school and all the attempted assimilation methods . . . misconceptions are hard to change. They're adults already. All you can do is be patient. That's what the good Elders

always say too – they say, be patient." Gloria believes that the desire for positive change is building momentum: "Each of the classrooms, the schools and communities, they need to want to change, they need to want it, and it will happen. It is happening. It's like trying to hold back a river."

Taylor (newcomer education specialist) works to create strong systems and processes, rather than rely on heroes and individuals: "What I learned over time from some of my mentors was that we really can't change people . . . and you don't want to ever expect to be able to change people, but what you can do is you can hire character, and you can change processes." Taylor works to embed promising practices so that they become routine, for instance, by setting up a volunteer program for parents in the school or establishing systems that encourage staff collaboration. That way, "even if that administrator moves onto another building, that practice is already in place, those programs are already in place, and so then it just easily picks up and just becomes part of the standard of what happens in the building." Coming at things from a different perspective, Yvonne (EAL specialist) believes that change can be initiated by a small activity that shifts the way students, educators, or members of the public are thinking. She gives the examples of students participating in diversity and anti-racism training for one day, or the dual-language book project that was school-wide:

> It was not just that one half-hour block of reading to the class, it was what the residual was of that. It raised the awareness – we talk about relationships, and we talk about cultural responsiveness and talking about knowing who our learners are – this is a very good example and a good step forward from a classroom level, a school level, because it was everywhere across the school. I was also involving the community. And I think

acknowledging it at all three levels is what made the difference; everyone understood the importance and the value.

School area consultants are playing a substantial role in sustaining positive change through their unique positions as practitioner/scholars who are in touch with what professionals and youth are asking for.

Summary of insights towards growth and sustainability.

In this section I addressed Question 3 by analyzing insights that interviewees shared about how effective practices could be further developed or sustained. Under the heading "Desired System Changes," I examined ideas for improving sustainability, including by preventing burnout and addressing funding structures, building awareness and changing attitudes, and coordinating and improving systems. Under the heading "Designing, Refining, and Co-constructing," I considered how effective practices can be strengthened through full cycles of program design, and how practitioners are positioned to influence the process at the adapting and refining stage, where they can be responsive to youth. I also consider barriers to the design process and how practitioners navigate/overcome them. Finally, under the heading "Renewing the Vision," I engage with practitioner dreams for their programs and classrooms, and the theories of change put forward by cultural and linguistic consultants who work to improve schools. For Gloria (Aboriginal education specialist), change can come through creating the desire for change so that momentum builds and becomes unstoppable, "like trying to hold back a river." For Taylor (newcomer education specialist), change can come through identifying promising practices and establishing processes/programs that embed them as institutional routine. For Yvonne (EAL specialist), change can come through a small inspirational experience that has a "residual"

impact on the way culture and language are valued, particularly when it involves the whole school and community.

Summary and Discussion

In this section I summarize the findings gained from interviewing experienced educators and discuss how they extend existing theory and/or create new conceptual categories. Experienced educators identified desires and values that influence their pedagogy (Question 1), including the goals of working with young people to enable confidence and agency, nurture social connection and social capital, and promote heritage culture and language. Interviewees identified values that guide their work, including that programming/education with equity-seeking youth should be strength-based, accessible, trauma-informed, and relational. Educators moved towards their vision (Question 2) through strategies such as cultivating safe space and expanding relational networks beyond the program/school space. They also expand communicative possibilities by creating cycles of acceptance and expression, facilitating the extension and contribution of skills, healing through artistic process and materiality, and encouraging deeper knowledge of the self and others through stories. Addressing Question 3, I examined how experienced educators imagined growing and sustaining desirable pedagogies through systemic changes, effective program design, and dreams for the future.

I also sought to generate theoretical concepts that could link these findings to broader phenomena, drawing connections between focused codes by using my sensitizing concepts as touch points and referring back to my memos and journals. The key ideas I will cover here include enabling agency based on adult conceptions of youth competence, six overlapping goals of cultural pedagogy and what they might sustain, and examples of relational literacy pedagogy. I will also talk about theories of change and what they have to do with the design process.

Many interviewees spoke of working with youth to enable their agency, and did so through different orientations towards youth competence:

1. developing competence through engaging and building on prior knowledge,
2. affirming competence through formal or informal audience response,
3. deferring to competence through opportunities for leadership and advocacy, and
4. clearing the way for competence by removing structural barriers.

Again, while each experienced educator emphasized some of these goals over others, they often worked towards many of them simultaneously. For instance, Gilad's program builds on existing stories, perspectives, and artistic abilities through multimodal photography projects supported by professional artists (developing competence). He also provides a safe environment for ongoing supportive feedback and designs a culminating exhibit (affirming competence), values youth input in the process and trains previous participants as mentors (deferring to competence), and strives to make his program barrier-free (clearing the way for competence). In several of the examples of enabling agency offered by experienced educators, developing competence is a first step that then progresses towards affirming or deferring. For instance, in her leadership program, Corinne first trains the youth and then defers to their plans for community initiatives, which then allows their efforts to be affirmed on a broader scale. Stable, long-term programs also allow for some youth to develop ahead of others and naturally move into leadership roles.

Clearing the way for competence can be about removing barriers in the present, but introduction of the concept by Gloria (Aboriginal education specialist) takes a longer view to include our responsibility to future generations of young people. I appreciate Gloria's reminder to clear the path, which shifts the conversation away from "empowering" Indigenous youth, to

shine a light on the obstacles that impede their inherent power. For me, this is an important reminder to look away from the compelling stories of youth "struggle" and instead towards those who have blocked them or are passively watching or turning their backs. I am inspired by work on this theme by Gonzales-Day (2014), who conducted arts-based research into California's racially motivated vigilantism. In his series *Erased Lynching*, he used archival photos and postcards of lynchings and erased the victims and rope, symbolizing the historical erasure, and shifting the attention of the viewer to the perpetrators gathered to watch. Returning to Gloria's metaphor, I believe research about/with youth is also about those barriers that make straightforward tasks and reasonable goals difficult, barriers upheld by institutions and by those people who cannot see a way to be better than their institutions. This relates to Mitchell's (2017) inquiry into how powerful people take up or turn away from their listening role in response to youth research. Clearing the way for competence involves everyone. Experienced educators also revealed a variety of nuanced approaches to promoting culture and language in learning. This range of goals included designing pedagogy by

1. engaging with people: building relationships with youth, family, community, Elders, and other cultural resource people who can guide pedagogical design and implementation;
2. engaging with cultural knowledge: basing pedagogical design on the cultural values and epistemologies of participating youth, including through intersections of language, land/place, and stories;
3. inviting and adapting to cultural knowledge: making space for diverse ways of being and knowing through a pedagogy of choice/multiplicity that allows educators to adapt based on the preferences and capacities that emerge;

4. supporting balanced growth: nurturing both cultural and academic knowledge;
5. explicitly teaching dominant culture: facilitating access to opportunities by overtly teaching Canadian social and academic norms; and
6. situating youth in pluralistic society: integrating youth in "Canadian culture" as an opportunity for success, well-being, belonging, and mutual learning through diversity.

Again, many interviewees are trying to accomplish several of these goals simultaneously, so this list is not intended as continuum along which to locate particular programs/pedagogy. For instance, Shirley (principal at Chief Julius School) builds relationships with Elders who guide the design and implementation of her curriculum (engaging with people), builds pedagogy at the intersection of language, land-based traditions, and stories using the Dene Kede curriculum (engaging with cultural knowledge), and encourages students to develop reverence for traditional Gwich'in knowledge while pursuing academic knowledge towards post-secondary education (supporting balanced growth). In many cases, engaging with people and cultural knowledge go hand in hand so that the knowledge can be effectively interpreted or brought to life, as in the case of Gloria helping teachers bring Aboriginal content and pedagogy into their classrooms, Yvonne inviting community members to read dual-language books, or Taylor's team engaging newcomers and Indigenous community members in storytelling projects. Nora's comic book program is supported by translators who make multilingualism a foundation of the program (engaging cultural knowledge and people), and she creates multiple access points for expressing stories that are culturally and linguistically relevant, which her team then builds on with the youth (inviting and adapting to cultural knowledge). In these examples, culture is sustained in "both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used by contemporary young people" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). This is achieved because pedagogy is mediated and developed through

relationships with youth and community where educators learn to enact *cultural connectedness* (Irizarry, 2007).

However, things get more complicated when I consider not just how educators meaningfully connect with and sustain culture, but how they seek to balance that with teaching dominant codes or "integrating" youth into dominant culture. As previously mentioned, some scholars argue that learning the literacy of dominant systems, or "codes of power," is essential for non-dominant students who are not socialized into them (e.g., Delpit, 1992, 2006). Interviewees often wanted youth to access dominant skills/knowledge with the goal of "integration." I had reactions against this word, which I explored in the following journal entry (June 9, 2017):

> In many of these interviews the participants talk about integrating youth into Canadian culture even when they otherwise have a social justice lens and vocabulary. . . . They [practitioners] need to describe something as it is now, they need to inhabit that expansive space between what is and what should be.

I became aware that practitioners were not necessarily using the term integration in the same ways I do. I dug into the complexity of the uses of this term, for instance, by considering Corinne's views on getting the youth "situated."

> With the Syrian population that came in last year . . . we don't see them a whole lot in programs because they're playing sports, or they have friends or they're on school teams and things like that. So that's the whole point is to get them exposure and then integrated as soon as possible.

Corinne's version of integration sounds a lot like expanding access to safe space – in fact, I coded it this way and wrote the following in a memo (March 23, 2018): "This facilitator is very

clear that she is a stepping stone to a more diverse and lasting set of connections within multiple spaces and institutions." Taylor talks about integration as foundational to well-being, setting up programs that "provide a forum for students to be able to be engaged and/or make connections, be integrated into the school system, and do activities that will allow them to be actively healthy, as opposed to us reacting." Jackie describes integration as students belonging through being seen on their own terms, and Frances describes integration into mainstream courses as access to opportunity. Yvonne, Frances, and Taylor talk about the value of diversity in schools for allowing cultural exchange and awareness between students of all backgrounds. Practitioner interpretation of integration seems to focus on "situating" youth to belong, be well, learn from others, access opportunity/success, and expand safe space. In this bid to secure material and emotional benefits for youth, some practitioners see heritage culture and language as foundational, while others mention it peripherally. Paris' view of culturally sustaining pedagogy "seeks to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 95). I have tried to structure Goal 6 (situating youth in a pluralist society) in a way that recognizes the complexity of practitioner desire for youth integration while using culturally sustaining pedagogy as my own sensitizing concept. Certainly, in order to be culturally sustaining, the goal of situating youth in pluralistic society would need to be balanced with several other goals that prioritize their cultural and linguistic heritage. I also want to note that not all interviewees showed awareness of Aboriginal people and land when conceiving of Canada's pluralism, and that Aboriginal interviewees did not use the term "integration." The notion of pluralistic Canada is dissonant with historic and ongoing attempts at assimilation of Aboriginal people by Canada as a colonial settler state.

While many interviewees valued teaching dominant linguistic and cultural practices, some with the goal of integration, the nuances appeared in terms of their strategies for enacting this belief. In some cases, it was clear that dominant culture/skills were taught explicitly and/or with a critical lens (Luke, 2012; White, Mammone, & Caldwell, 2015). For instance, Alexander involves youth in proposal writing and evaluation so that they learn those advocacy skills and engages them in discussions about how to safely challenge oppressive systems. Some interviewees also balanced dominant and cultural learning in ways that created new practices. For instance, Wendy's poetry project combines the cultural practice of listening to Elders' stories with learning through multiple modes including photographs, magnetic poetry strips, writing, and oral presentation. Students develop academic literacy skills, but within a culturally sustaining practice that centres as much on listening as on producing. This could be seen as an example of syncretic practice: "the active creation of new practices – not just blended ones – as people live in multiple worlds, drawing on the resources of these worlds without obliterating them, making sense and creating cohesion while crossing borders" (Gregory, Volk, & Long, 2013, p. 311).

In some cases, emergence of new practices began to influence dominant institutions/processes, altering how literacy and learning are imagined and enacted. For instance, Gloria (Aboriginal education specialist) describes how teachers take up pedagogical strategies demonstrated by Elders and cultural resource people, "for instance, through carving soap, stories can be told, teachings can be done as the students are doing something with their hands. I've seen some of the teachers learning from that, getting their students up to the smart board – I love it when I see that." This is an example of subversion of dominant literacies and transformation of learning processes that are often the focus of critical youth literacies (Luke, 2012; Morrell, 2008;

Rogers, Winters, Perry, & LaMonde, 2015). In this example, deeper learning is also achieved through "authentic interaction and a shift in the social organization of learning and what counts as knowledge" (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 152). The dynamic between youth and facilitators/educators is important in this work, but so is understanding the effect of making institutional boundaries permeable. Community members and external partners can influence educator practice so that they reconsider "which modes of information and cognitive scripts, which designs and genres, shall be deemed worth learning" (Luke, 2012, p. 5). As Gloria points out, teachers can have a lasting influence on the students and on their school, and the change can continue through their leadership: "Before the teachers go to a knowledge keeper, they need to sit down and think, 'What do I need to know?' Not necessarily 'What do the children need to know?' because I always think you need to create capacity with that teacher."

CHAPTER 5: "THAT'S WHEN I DON'T MIND THE TALKING": DESIGNING HANDS-ON LEARNING WITH FIRST NATIONS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Introduction

This chapter analyzes and discusses data generated through a research partnership with a First Nations high school in a northern region of central Canada. The research focuses on the values and desires that inform the design of hands-on learning experiences with First Nations youth, strategies for implementing and refining the pedagogy, and insights into how to grow and sustain it. At this site, I was involved considerably in the process of conceptualizing and planning, and we were able to pilot two small workshops through which we also engaged in reflective learning.

The students are from remote First Nations communities, and most have a deep understanding of and established practice with their traditional knowledge and languages. The school hires both First Nations and settler staff and is designed so that students can work at their own pace on courses that they need to graduate, and work with whichever teacher(s) they prefer. During my involvement, I worked with the collaborating educator, Nolan,[1] a settler staff member with extensive experience working with First Nations students. At the outset of this study, we worked with other staff at the school to develop partnerships that would allow for the design and delivery of culturally sustaining pedagogical opportunities. We successfully established a partnership with a university mentorship program to offer hands-on workshops that were designed according to principles of Indigenous pedagogy. The 12 participants at this site included the collaborating educator Nolan, three additional staff members, a community partner, and seven youth. Data generation consisted of journaling, conducting a series of planning meetings and preliminary interviews with staff and the community partner, taking notes during

[1] All names in this chapter are pseudonyms.

workshop debriefs, and completing closing interviews with the collaborating educator, community partner, and two youth. Seven youth also filled out brief surveys. Although we wanted to get more youth input at the outset, this was not possible due to the suicide epidemic in the region and impacted many of the youth directly and indirectly. This issue is addressed at some points in this chapter and more fully in the Limitations section in Chapter 7.

The first section focuses on the desires and values that inform the way the workshops were designed, including youth and adult perspectives on what kind of learning is worth pursuing and upholding. This section answers Research Question 1, "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?" The second section focuses on strategies for implementing and adapting, including observations made by youth and adults about program dynamics and experiences. This section addresses Research Question 2, "How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?" The third section focuses on how participants are working to grow and sustain elements of the program that work well, taking into account their processes of designing and refining, identifying structural challenges, and renewing their vision. This section answers Research Question 3, "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?" This chapter uses shorter quotes and more paraphrasing than the last because the participants all share the same learning context and I am drawing connections and uncovering themes that emerged in this time and space. In keeping with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), I engaged in line-by-line and focused coding to identify

conceptual categories that elucidated participant meanings and processes. For each section/research question, I have indicated which data sources I analyzed to interpret findings.

Research Question 1: Desired and Valued Pedagogies

Introduction.

This section answers Research Question 1, "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?" I examine both adult and youth perspectives on what kind of pedagogy is worth designing. My analysis shows how adult educators are dealing with tensions between what is familiar and necessary, and what else might help youth extend their knowledge and opportunities. I also draw out learning priorities identified by youth, including their interest in both contemporary/Western and traditional First Nations skills and knowledge, learning that addresses practical and immediate needs, and communicating by combining modes. Data were generated through initial planning meetings with the collaborating educator and interviews with three other staff members, including Cameron, who is a settler staff member; and Logan and Roberta, who are First Nations staff members. We also had informal conversations with students throughout the planning process and documented formal input from a small group of seven students at the end of the project, including interviews with Rachel and Desmond.

Adult perspectives.

Staff suggestions for student learning emphasized hands-on activities that were "worthwhile and purposeful." Staff considered multiple purposes of learning such as building self-confidence and social skills, building life-skills that are connected to improving the quality of life in their communities, affirming First Nations identity and culture, supporting the exploration of new and

different knowledge and skills, facilitating students' transition to the city through supportive relationships, and building skills towards future careers. The following excerpts from interviews with staff during the planning stage illustrate three tensions that emerged about engaging with these goals in an urban environment: sustaining First Nations culture while engaging with new knowledge and experiences, the school as a safe space and also a limited/limiting space, and communication preferences compared to communication skills needed to fulfill expectations and dreams. I determined these as tensions through comparative methods of focused data coding that showed differences of opinion within and between interviews. I initially struggled to come up with a definitive picture of what people wanted, and then I dug into that complexity of desire (Tuck, 2009) as the guiding theme of my analysis for this section.

Sustaining First Nations culture while engaging with new knowledge and experiences.

Staff were clear that activities at the school should affirm the students' cultural identities while also introducing them to new opportunities. They confirmed that cultural programming is beneficial for the students and wanted to work on integrating it into student learning in more meaningful ways rather than as an add-on. For instance, Logan suggested, "it would be amazing if we had a regularly scheduled program for something that could be culturally oriented – we do some activities after school, but by then the students are tired. Something around lunch time or right after lunch would help break up the day." Staff suggested that continuing to collaborate with Elders was a promising approach because students have responded well to working with them in the past and they help students manage tragedy. Although Nolan felt students were already well-versed in traditional knowledge, he saw activities like snaring rabbits as "a way to show that they have skills, to be seen as capable by their teachers." Staff suggested that the school could offer more variety in cultural programming so that students with different interests

could be engaged in different ways. They also talked about connecting students to cultural events and programming outside of the school and finding mentors who could help them understand how to be Aboriginal in the city. For instance, Roberta wanted to facilitate dialogue and networking to enable student learning about "what our people are doing, how they're finding success," and Cameron wanted to connect them "to community members who are involved in powwow, ceremonies in town, drumming . . . attending programming where those people are." Logan recommended organizing or participating in a traditional fall fair, where students learn skills such as gathering wild rice or preparing fish: "I never had that – my parents were residential school survivors; I didn't have that because it was embedded in my parents' heads to take the culture out of them. If we could participate in this cultural programming, it could be very meaningful for the students."

While engaging with traditional culture was a priority, staff also wanted to see students gain new skills and knowledge. As Roberta pointed out, "Elders are very valuable, but these kids come from traditional communities and already know these things. . . . It's also important to broaden their horizons, show them what all kinds of people are doing, open all kinds of doors." Similarly, Nolan noted that "many of them have already had traditional teaching and on-the-land skills" and wondered if "something different would be more interesting for them?" Roberta also suggested that students needed to connect with non-Aboriginal people in the city to combat isolation and address racism that goes both ways: "If they could have a relationship with non-native kids, get introduced to other practices, traditions, or events, they could see the positive." Staff also talked about the possibility of connecting students with natural resource professionals, live theatre experiences, college programs, or recent graduates as role models. These relationships and opportunities for new learning were meant to complement and enhance the

traditional knowledge and community responsibilities students have already learned. As Roberta emphasizes, “The world is bigger than the boundaries of a First Nations reserve. Its ok to leave the rez and experience the world. . . . You can leave, you can also come back and share what you’ve learned with your people.”

School as safe but also limited/limiting.

Staff identified the school as a comfortable place for students where they get extra support and are surrounded by others having the same experience: as Nolan puts it, “One of the main reasons this program exists is for shy kids to be in a less overwhelming space. Here they’re with all other kids who are also away from their families. They’re all on a level playing field.” Staff also emphasized the importance of getting out of the school despite student fear and negative experiences. Logan advised that, for our workshops, “getting out of the classroom would probably be the best. The days are way too long. These are students who already can’t survive in mainstream high school. Giving them the regular hours is way too much for them. Breaking up the day by doing an outing would be great.” Cameron also wanted to get the students out of the school and help them “develop the ability to go into a new space, talk to new people, open their eyes to new and different things.” Staff suggested getting out and volunteering, going on a medicine walk, going down to the water, or finding an open field where the students could play lacrosse and learn the traditional teachings that go along with it.

Staff, however, were also aware of how uncomfortable the students were leaving the school. They wondered how to facilitate students’ movement into other spaces, given some negative past experiences. As Cameron commented, “It is really hard to get them to leave [the high school], put themselves out there.” Roberta expressed concern that “The students have a culture of fear, they are afraid of the city, of people – and that fear is crippling. I wish they would

develop in a way that they can break down what is scary for them." Cameron described how sometimes activities outside the school expose students to topics that are too retraumatizing for them, including a discussion about suicide that was "really triggering for all of them in different ways . . . maybe it was important for those things to come up, I don't know." Roberta observed that First Nations students are not always made to feel welcome in the city: "our students experience racism – they have feelings of being discriminated against, they have shared stories of feeling that way." Despite the potential risks and the reluctance of the students, staff generally felt that the best way to overcome their fear was by facing it. Roberta insisted, "I get it – I was 18 once, I didn't have the confidence to do any of the things I do now. It can be intimidating. But life and life experience will help instill confidence as they go. I would encourage them to go out and learn as much as they can beyond [the high school]." Cameron described how difficult it was to get students to leave the school but insisted, "I'm going to keep bringing them to spaces that inspire them, offering those opportunities, try to help them realize that they have the power to be change agents. They can make their time in the city really valuable."

Communication preferences compared to needed communication skills.

In terms of pedagogy, emphasis was on student preference for hands-on learning and modes that do not require oral communication. At the same time, staff wanted to see students working towards building other communication skills, sometimes with a view to career readiness or advocating for themselves and their communities. Staff often commented on how the students preferred not to speak to new people or in front of groups, and that activities should not put them on the spot. Roberta reflected that "So many of the students haven't found their voice yet, they are shy, they hear what you're saying, but very few will come forward and speak." Logan suggested "non-verbal options for expressing their preferences." Logan observed:

> They really like hands-on stuff, where they have to get out of their chairs and place an object/statement on the board. They really like visualizing too, doing illustrations to a poem, for example, where they have to draw what they are imagining and then what the subject of the poem really is.

Staff also emphasized that students were engaged and motivated by digital media such as video games, movies, and online media like YouTube and being encouraged to look things up online rather than in a textbook.

While the use of these multimodal and digital learning approaches was seen as effective, staff also wondered about helping the youth expand their communication skills. In particular they explored the importance of speaking aloud as part of developing confidence and social skills, and more rigorous, intentional use of technology for developing life-skills and career skills. Roberta acknowledged the discomfort with oral communication but insisted, "it's important to hear their voice . . . That art of articulation and speaking up is something that our kids need to develop." Cameron emphasized that activities should instill the confidence to communicate and interact with others:

> Confidence to speak, confidence to navigate the city and utilize resources, confidence to interact with each other, with others in the city, other educational institutions, programs, extra-curricular opportunities . . . Confidence to organize things on their own and advocate for what they want.

Roberta commented, "I would like to see them develop that self-confidence where they don't worry about what their peers are going to say and getting away from bringing a person down when they are putting themselves out there." She recommended that students need positive models of communication and social interaction around them and suggested developing oral

communication by inviting (but not forcing) discussion through sharing photos. Logan suggested having conversations little by little so that they have time to come to the idea they want to share and allowing them to "work in small groups and go at their own pace." In terms of technology, Roberta wanted to see youth get involved in film production, photography, and animating stories, saying, "the world is going digital and they already have some of those skills." Cameron suggested:

> Finding ways to engage them in digital technology in ways that are meaningful to them and in ways that can help them develop life-skills or career skills would be awesome. Like learning video editing, how to design web pages, photography, online business – teaching them to utilize technology in other ways besides Facebook – teaching them to be productive with it and inspired by it.

Staff identified ways that students could extend their communicative repertoires by incrementally developing oral communication skills and using technology in more impactful ways.

Youth perspectives.

Formally documented responses from a small group of seven students also illustrated what they desire from their learning experiences both in terms of content and pedagogy. Based on student interests and contacts we were building in the city, we provided them with a list of possible focus areas for hands-on learning experiences we felt we could follow through on providing. All but one of the students indicated an interest in both Western outdoor education such as survival and adventure skills (e.g., rock climbing), and traditional activities such as fishing and trapping. The strongest interests were for outdoor adventure, learning/practising their traditional language, and First Nations history and rights, and most students had a broad range of interests. Similarly, all but

one of the students, expressed enthusiasm for both Western and traditional arts activities. The strongest interests were for traditional crafts and mixing sound, and most students had a broad range of interests. In terms of pedagogy, most students indicated a preference for learning by listening to an explanation, but they liked that in combination with another mode or modes such as watching, doing, asking questions, or reading.

Through two interviews, students Rachel and Desmond described their learning preferences in more detail. Desmond thought the students could benefit from more activities that build life-skills for self-sufficiency, safety for self and family, and knowing their culture and history. He suggested:

> Teaching them how to adjust and live in such a busy environment like this . . . Because when I first came here . . . everything was really fast-paced for me and loud, and everything was moving at once . . . What helped me was like how someone took the time to explain about the city buses . . . which areas not to hang out in . . . I've had a couple of kind of close calls before.

He also wanted to see practical skills taught in school like how to build things for themselves, how to prevent house fires, and first aid so people could safely care for siblings, "especially for up North when they go home." He emphasized the importance of learning the history of Canada and Aboriginal people, including "everything, like right down to the bottom get-go. . . . A lot of people keep forgetting." He also said the school should help them "to keep their skills when they come out here" and noted that his grandfather had warned him that reliance on technology should never replace traditional skills. In addition to exercising those skills, he suggested giving students opportunities to write about their traditional knowledge and practices. He also suggested

that students should play an active role in addressing their own boredom and be encouraged to take initiative for themselves.

Rachel shared a desire to learn new things and practice existing skills: “Well, I circled most of the stuff on that sheet [the survey]. I would want to do it all. Some of it I already know how to do, like I already know the outdoor stuff from my Grandma, I know how to snare. . . . I would still want to use those skills, still want to do more of that.” She was open to new experiences too and emphasized that she would be open to learning from anyone “as long as they’re interesting and they want to do interesting stuff with us.” Student input from surveys and interviews helped us to better understand what their priorities are for content and pedagogy. Importantly, as will be discussed further, they are a diverse group with a range of interests and communication preferences.

Summary of desired and valued pedagogies.

Both staff and students shared their insights into what kind of learning opportunities and approaches would be most valuable at the school. Staff articulated multiple purposes of learning such as career readiness, life-skills and community wellness, affirming identity and culture, and transitioning to urban life. Staff generally agreed on making learning experiential and purposeful but offered more complex views on the following three desires: wanting to sustain First Nations culture while engaging with new knowledge, wanting to protect the students without limiting them, and wanting to adapt to student communication preferences while still challenging them. Themes that came up in the interviews and surveys with youth included wanting to maintain the balance between Western and First Nations skills and knowledge, wanting to develop self-sufficiency and take initiative, wanting to learn skills that address immediate needs and concerns,

wanting to build on existing interests, and wanting opportunities to combine modes for better comprehension and expression.

Research Question 2: Strategies for Implementation and Adaptation

Introduction.

This section answers Research Question 2: "How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?" Firstly, I describe the planning stage of the design process based on five meetings with Nolan, including how we navigated challenges and made decisions. Secondly, I examine our iterative process of implementing the workshops with our community partner, Jamie, and reflecting on what worked and what could be improved. This is based primarily on notes taken at our group planning meeting and debriefs, and marginally from individual closing interviews. Thirdly, I share feedback from the youth surveys and interviews regarding their learning experiences in the workshops. This section brings the ideal and the real into conversation by exploring how to implement elements of a desired relational pedagogy in this specific context.

Creating the design in context.

During the initial planning meeting with the collaborating educator, we brainstormed potential ideas for the project and discussed limitations. Nolan's strongest focus was on making learning meaningful for students, and particularly how they could begin to see a connection between current learning and future career goals. During subsequent meetings, we worked to refine our project idea while taking into account the fluctuating circumstances at the school and in the students' home communities. At the second meeting, Nolan was focused on student well-being because, as he said, "Some of the students are stalled and so blatantly reaching out for help." He

emphasized, “The most pressing issue is mental health,” and insisted that our activity needed to address this in some way. He described working with a student whose sister has tried 11 times to commit suicide, and said, “When these students come to us and we ask them to focus on school, it would be almost like if they walked into [a] clinic and someone asked them how math is going.” Nolan wondered whether we could build self-esteem while taking up the multimodal project ideas from our previous brainstorm, or whether a more direct intervention was needed, for instance, inviting a nurse with experience doing trauma work in the North.

At the third meeting, Nolan wanted to refocus on how the project could address aspects of well-being indirectly through a creative project. He responded to some of my complex multimodal project ideas by reminding me that we needed to keep things manageable for the students and that “sessions need to be self-contained in case students don’t come to all of them.” He suggested:

> It would be ideal if we could do a few sessions with different people and see what the students respond to. So much of what we do here is just trying things and seeing what works . . . I was skeptical when [the after-school program] started doing arts and crafts, but they did actually open up to that. If we try a few different things, we could get feedback from the students about which they like best. That would help for planning in the future.

During the fourth meeting, we discussed successes and challenges of trying to connect with potential community partners. We also discussed whether we should do the workshops right away or wait for more students to get back from attending funerals in their home communities.

At the fifth meeting, we discussed several promising leads from community members who would be willing to collaborate on teaching workshops such as traditional crafts,

photography, traditional medicines, powwow dancing, videography, painting, and outdoor sports. We also discussed our upcoming meeting with a university mentorship program that travels throughout the region to offer hands-on workshops in business, engineering, food science, and anthropology. We decided to partner with the mentorship program because it added to the variety of offerings already available at the school, built on student interests, and made curriculum connections. The program also addressed some of the desired content and pedagogy expressed by staff and students through the intentional use of multimodal, hands-on activities as part of an Indigenous pedagogy framework. Importantly, the program lead, Jamie, was responsive, willing to offer the workshops for free and open to partnering on research.

Although no implementation was attempted over the three months that these meetings took place, the process was iterative in that we were constantly reconsidering our goals and design in response to emergent challenges in student well-being. We moved from prioritizing engagement and career connections, to prioritizing mental health, to trying to address aspects of mental health through a hands-on multimodal experience. We worked simultaneously to build a connection with a partner who worked with Indigenous epistemologies and seemed ready to adapt with us as circumstances fluctuated.

Iterative design and reflection.

Adult insights.

At our first meeting with Jamie, she explained that their program is designed to build confidence in attending post-secondary by getting hands-on experiences with activities connected to course offerings. She described a variety of possible workshops for us to choose from and what materials and strategies she uses for each. Nolan emphasized that we needed to offer variety, and prioritized topics that students had expressed interest in or activities that complemented their

coursework. Nolan was also concerned that the community partner address student needs in her facilitation style, "These students are in an alternative program, some of them have had challenges in the mainstream schools, we have a flexible approach." He also wondered about whether the business and engineering workshops might involve "too much talking – they're pretty shy so you might not be able to get them talking about their ideas like that." Jamie reassured us, and we worked together to consider the content and pacing of the workshops and the set-up of the room.

We hosted Jamie at the school to run workshops on two separate afternoons for about three hours. As expressed during debriefs with the community partner and collaborating educator, student participants seemed very engaged in the first workshop, a series of science experiments. Students' reactions to the anthropology and business workshops were more varied. Below I lay out some of the conversations I had with Jamie and Nolan to analyze student responses to each workshop and consider strengths and challenges within our pedagogy that might be impacting their learning experience.

During our debrief after the first workshop, Jamie commented, "I thought the kids were really engaged," and Nolan responded, "And if you saw them on a day to day basis, you would see that this was really good in comparison. Sometimes they are that interactive, but not very often. It really got me thinking about trying to find ways to have more hands-on programming like this." Jamie commented that "I really expected them to be more shy than they were," and Nolan replied:

> I did too, and I work with them everyday. It's neat to see them like that. For this program to be accredited, we have to follow the curriculum, and all the students are on different courses – it's hard for us to have group activities like that because everyone's working on

> something separate. This really worked. It was different, it was hands-on. We had the food there at the beginning to set the tone. They were really outgoing and joking, more than usual.

We talked about the good feeling of having everyone gathered at the same table, and how Nolan relaxed the school rules a little bit because it was so nice to see them having fun. "Yeah, there were even some behaviours that you would usually put an end to that I didn't because it was so refreshing to see them chatting and joking. It was so nice to see them having fun that I didn't give them a hard time for not catching the instructions." Jamie agreed, "It was really nice to see them experimenting . . . it was neat to see them trying things out on their own."

After the second workshop, we discussed how student responses were more mixed, mostly because the activities were less hands-on and we had intentionally saved activities that were out of their comfort zone for the second workshop. Some students were enthusiastic about the workshop on traditional moose hunting, while others disengaged, particularly once the focus shifted away from hands-on activities to the PowerPoint and discussion. Nolan was initially really hopeful about including the workshop on moose hunting, and Jamie did think it engaged them through "that pride of talking about something they know and know how to do well." However, Nolan later noted that many of the students seemed reluctant to get involved in the discussion, "maybe because it was something they already know about, they have had so much learning in that area already." While there was some difference of opinion about the effectiveness of engaging prior knowledge, both Nolan and Jamie commented on how the hands-on tool exploration and bone-necklace making were the strongest parts of the workshop. Although the business workshop was too abstract for many students, some warmed to it, and one

student became enthusiastic and pitched his creative ideas to the group. I later wrote in a memo on June 10, 2016:

> We knew that this activity would be challenging for the students but tried it anyways, partly in the spirit of not limiting them or applying a deficit perspective. . . . A couple of students got really into it, and a few did slowly, but for those who never put anything down, it seemed like an embarrassing event. Was it worth it to offer the opportunity and see some students rise to the occasion, possibly even setting an example that others can work from in the future?

We built on our observations to brainstorm strategies for improving the pedagogical approach of this workshop. Here is an excerpt of us problem-solving on that aspect of the workshop:

> Jamie: I would normally put people in pairs, but I didn't want to force them. It could have been better to do that, to start conversations. Some of the kids we've worked with are shy about discussing their ideas, but one-on-one they have incredible ideas. Like they will make a backpack specifically for moose hunting.
>
> Nolan: Time is a factor as well: some of them could have thought it through all day and come up with something pretty incredible, but this was a really limited amount of time for them to come up with something.
>
> Anna: Yeah, I wondered if more examples might have helped clarify things for them, I mean you already gave some examples, but –
>
> Jamie: I thought about that, but I never want to give so many examples that it limits the students.
>
> Anna: Yeah, good point. I wondered too about the feeling that the drawing on the paper was going to be permanent and that fear of making a mistake. Maybe giving them hands-

on objects like yesterday, where they could continue to move things around, try different things, and not worry that they were permanent.

Nolan: Yeah, I've noticed that in the classroom too, that fear of making a mistake if it's going to be permanent.

Jamie: So maybe using whiteboards could work to take the pressure off, they can design and redesign. And maybe without giving specific examples of what the backpack should look like, we can give examples of uses, like for hiking or hunting, what would you change?

Through the process of implementing our design and reflecting on it, Nolan, Jamie, and I noticed high levels of engagement and interaction during hands-on collective activities and less during the discussions and individual projects. From these observations, we were able to identify effective pedagogical strategies and work to improve others.

Youth insights.

Student feedback also helped us to understand what aspects of the workshops they connected with. Some positive moments identified by students were when they got to work as a team, they could imagine a way to apply the new knowledge in their lives, they were having fun, a good explanation and clear instructions were given, the facilitator coached them and checked-in on them, there was more doing than talking, or the doing and talking were happening in combination. For instance, Rachel liked the hands-on science workshops but was less enthusiastic about the business and anthropology workshops: "I didn't pay attention to that one. She was just talking away. But I liked making the necklaces, scraping off the bone; that was cool. I just didn't like the talking part. . . . I like when they explain what we're doing, that's when I don't mind the talking." Desmond described what he liked about the science workshops: "I

liked how she explained it and how she took the time to really get down to detail about what you had to do, and I liked how she kept coaching everyone and kept checking on everybody and that." Anonymous responses on the surveys let us know that the workshops helped them "learn to have fun and how to make things fun" and gain new skills they felt were useful, particularly related to building the electrical circuit. As student 5 noted, "I learned to make a lightbulb, and I would use [it] in my future," and I enjoyed "doing some teamwork on making the lightbulb." Passive aspects of the workshop were less popular, and students disliked "when we had to listen. We want to 'do.'" Students also liked being surprised by new knowledge, as Desmond described, "Yeah, I never thought that pencil lead can do that, you know, seriously . . . I learned something new that day. . . . Like holy, man, I didn't even know that pencil lead could ignite. It's pretty crazy, actually. I was pretty surprised." Rachel also noticed that she really paid attention because she's already interested in the topic: "I'm really into science stuff, that's why I requested more of it at the school, that's why I liked that workshop." She said she enjoyed learning new things from making the silly putty and working with electricity, "Yeah, you get to feel like a kid again. We should do more stuff like that: get people to come in and do stuff with us."

Student feedback identified some strengths to build on in the workshops including teamwork, applicability/purpose, fun, clear instructions, ongoing coaching, hands-on learning, and talking in combination with doing. Students also liked that the workshops built on existing interests and/or surprised them with something new.

Summary of strategies for implementation and adaptation.

In the first workshop, a series of hands-on science experiments, we noted high levels of student engagement including participation, interaction, laughter, outgoing communication, and experimentation and initiative. Nolan commented that this was an improvement, likely

encouraged by the hands-on approach, the collaborative element, and the way we set the tone. The second workshop was less consistently engaging, perhaps because it was out of the students' comfort zone and less hands-on. For the anthropology workshop we agreed that hands-on elements were stronger than the group discussion portion and offered different perspectives on the values/drawbacks of engaging prior knowledge. We brainstormed the following improvements to the business workshop: working in pairs, reducing time pressure, using examples that created more context for their inventions, and using whiteboards to encourage experimentation. Youth feedback generally aligned with our observations, with particular emphasis on the importance of hands-on learning and teamwork. Youth also appreciated ongoing communication and support from the facilitator throughout the activities and highlighted the value of making the workshops fun and educational at the same time.

Research Question 3: Insights Towards Growth and Sustainability

Introduction.

This section answers Research Question 3: "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?" Through closing interviews with Nolan (the collaborating educator) and Jamie (the community partner), we identified insights towards building their professional practice and navigating systems.

Insights from Nolan, collaborating educator.

Nolan caught a glimpse of the students being more interactive and wanted to build on that momentum: "The dynamics amongst the students changed: I saw a lot more teamwork and cooperation. The structure in the school, where every student is on their own stream, means that sometimes the opportunity for group work is minimal. We saw a lot more teamwork happening

here." He also noticed the importance of staff getting engaged alongside the students: "During the science session, we had really good modeling from the teachers to get the students engaged. On the second day, were missing some staff and also missing a few outgoing students who set the tone. In those cases, when most of the students present are quiet, it's especially helpful to have staff participate."

Strategies we used to reach out to community partners included putting in the time to build trust and connection, engaging in informal networking, demonstrating reciprocity, clearly stating goals and intentions, and understanding the structures/expectations that others are working under. Nolan also emphasized the importance of being strategic by finding organizations that can make curriculum connections, so the students get credit for their work. He also reminded us to aim for focus and consistency:

> Honestly, this may not be what you want to hear, but sometimes I think our school has too many partnerships, and it gets hard to keep track of. We need relationships and community partnerships that fulfill the mandates of both agencies, and doing the work of maintaining those relationships is important. Sometimes we get offered opportunities for the students that are difficult to connect to curriculum. They take away from instructional time, so we can't do it, even when it might be good for them generally. For instance, we had an offer to do employment training with them that we couldn't take. There are also really complicated logistics around transportation and supervision to off-site opportunities.

Insights from Jamie, community partner.

Jamie is able to design her program according to principles of Indigenous education and by collaborating with faculty and finding ideas online. She then observes and adjusts based on how the students respond:

> We try to make the activities as related to the different educational components within the university. So, we want something that's hands-on but at a high school level, and so don't want to make it too complicated and intimidating – and also engaging and something that they can relate with and feel like they come into the activity already knowing at least something. And so sometimes it's just, late at night watching a lot of YouTube videos [*laughs*] on as many hands-on activities as you can possible see and trying to figure out which one of those would grab the kids that you're working with. The light bulb one is very much like that . . . I was blown away after not getting any sleep but working all night long on it . . . at how much it worked, at how well it worked for those kids. They were actually wanting to try this and try that, and what happens if you do this. . . . you know that you've got them interested when they really want to keep experimenting with something, right?

The community partner describes funding as one of the challenging components of sustaining the program because not all funders understand the long-term view and relationship building involved:

> You have to work at finding the funding to be able to create this kind of relationship, because a lot of times they want programs that are quick and easy and show you the numbers, and this isn't that type of a program. . . . If those kids don't come to university, that's okay, if they have kids . . . they can tell their kids, "Well, I had a really good experience." That alone can make a difference.

Jamie tries to diversify her funding streams so that she is not relying on just one source and is able to work according to her relational values. She would like to continue building the relationship with the students at the First Nations high school and feels like the next step would be for them to do some workshops with her on campus:

> What I would really like to do is to be able to have them come on campus and spend a day . . . Just trying to break down those barriers makes a difference, so they can actually see themselves in the building, and see themselves there, and I think that takes away some of the intimidation factor of going to post-secondary education . . . just knowing that they're fully capable, and they know what kinds of things are going on behind the walls.

At the same time, she recognizes that Aboriginal students do experience discrimination on campus. She is working to change perceptions of faculty, for instance, through major public projects presented by Aboriginal students.

> I can't say that it's specifically a race thing, but there is definitely something there, right – because a lot of kids come in, they're shy, they've got their hoods up, maybe they have ear buds in – it doesn't mean that they're not engaged, and that's something that's important to realize because faculty can judge them just like they get judged on the street. . . . So I think that we're still having to change things within the institution too, there are still people that need to change some of their ideas, and concepts of what they think these kids are and who they think they are.

Summary of insights towards growth and sustainability.

Nolan and Jamie reflected on their design processes, on new learning they would like to continue to develop, and on structural constraints that they work within and beyond. Although our

partnership was short-term, it still allowed for professional development through exchanging ideas and engaging in a collaborative design process. Nolan wanted to build on the momentum of student collaboration and adult participation we had seen in the workshops. However, he wondered how that could work with the school's approach to having students work on separate courses at their own pace. We identified some effective strategies for partnership building, and Nolan cautioned that these partnerships need to be strategic and consistently maintained. As she usually does, Jamie used student responses to the workshop to identify what is working and what needs to be improved. She described some limitations to her process including pressure to report to funders about outcomes that are unrealistic in the short term. She explains how she diversifies her funding streams so she can work according to her relational values. Her vision for continuing the partnership with the school would include inviting the students to attend workshops on campus so they can begin to imagine themselves in that space. However, she also recognized the work her institution needs to do to address discrimination against First Nations students so that the campus experience is consistently welcoming and culturally safe.

Summary and Discussion

We learned that staff and students at the school desired a pedagogy that would be relational, purposeful, and relevant. We understood that they wanted to connect with a range of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners, address immediate needs and long-term goals, maintain traditional skills and gain new ones, and build from comfortable modes to expand their communicative repertoires. We worked to build an example of what this could look like and reflected on how we had brought the vision into focus. When conducting a retrospective analysis using constructivist grounded theory methods, I also noticed theoretical ideas that could help link our work to other studies and future practice. The ideas I focus on in this section include diversity within a

culturally distinct group, “failure fatigue” as a product of an inequitable macrosystem, and the healing/change-making potential of “suspending disbelief” and “double agency.”

Much of my study works on the premise that culturally sustaining pedagogy can be an effective approach to working with equity-seeking students. I have referred to theories of Indigenous pedagogy and literacy, and guidelines and promising practices for working with Indigenous students. This study reinforces the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches commonly advocated for within this field, including the importance of making learning relational and purposeful and extending cultural ways of knowing, doing, and communicating (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; FNESC, 2008; Kovacs, 2009; Lloyd, Lewthwaite, Osborne, & Boon, 2015). At the same time, I experienced push-back from community leadership, staff, and students when I used my interpretation of these models as a starting point for designing activities. For instance, I originally wanted to set up a creative project that would connect youth and Elders, but many pointed out that the youth already had strong connections to Elders and their own systems of passing on knowledge. Additionally, staff and students emphasized that they had diverse interests and wanted to further expand their knowledge and skills by trying new things. Almost every student indicated an interest in both traditional and contemporary/Western activities and every student had a different list of activities they wanted to prioritize.

In terms of communication, non-oral multimodal and digital communication were safe starting points for many students, but as demonstrated during our workshop, many students were at a threshold of expanding their repertoires and had more of a range of capabilities than some staff had assumed. This was an example of how, as Roberta observed, “every student is unique, some of them have a stronger communication skill set than others.” Jamie, the community partner, commented on our group’s diversity as well, saying, “they’re all different, they seem to

be different backgrounds and slightly different ages . . . they had lived some life right, so they had a real maturity to them in a lot of ways, and they were great to work with." How can the body of work on culturally sustaining pedagogy and Indigenous pedagogy/literacy continue to guide educators without glossing over the diversity that exists within distinct cultural groups? For us, it was important to engage with this body of scholarship without using it as a substitute for relationship building. It was important that the students felt listened to and influential in shaping new pedagogical experiences in the school – in this case, through informal input into the workshops, interactions during the workshops that shifted their direction, and more extensive feedback and brainstorming afterwards. In a sense, having a preconceived notion of what students need could undermine the potential for an open-minded, open-hearted connection with their humanity and dynamic cultural selves, preventing educators like us from enacting "cultural connectedness" (Irizarry, 2007). Further, returning to the advice of Castagno and Brayboy (2008), it was important to connect with learning needs of specific students rather than generalizing the group's learning styles, and to engage with Indigenous epistemologies as part of our workshop design.

Another idea that came up in my analysis was the influence of hope, fear, and "failure fatigue." Often in conversations about an innovative idea or a vision for our workshops, someone would offer a warning or cautionary tale about a time something similar had failed. This was not ill-intentioned negativity, and it served the purpose of identifying some real risks to student learning, well-being, and lives. Staff were often in the position of providing mental health support without the training to do so, and of trying to offer engaging learning experiences in an under-resourced environment while dealing with multiple curricular and logistical constraints. They were used to things not working. At times the response was to hyper-innovate, constantly

seeking new approaches because a plethora of "old" ones were associated with negative outcomes. My own project may have been part of this trend, taken up simultaneously with several other initiatives to see what would stick. At other times, fear of repeating mistakes became immobilizing. How do conceptions of past failure influence capacity for healthy, strategic risk-taking? I believe we can learn more by thinking about the macrosystem and the frontline and the temptation of falling back on the "safest" thing in times of trouble.

As Brayboy and Castagno (2009) and Kanu (2007) remind us, cultural continuity and Indigenous pedagogy are not enough if the macrosystem is stacked against Indigenous students. This study shows how without educational sovereignty or self-determination an alternative school that should be positioned to support First Nations students is continuously torn between providing them with learning experiences that work for them and learning experiences that will get them credit according to a colonial system. Additionally, these students experience inequitable funding for their education, which limits their opportunities now and in the future. I reflected on this in a memo on June 13, 2016:

> I imagine that the students might pick up on some of the general fearfulness and limitation experienced by the staff. Fear of passing inspection, of maintaining funding, of answering to multiple jurisdictional bodies. . . . How might this structural weight further compress the spaces in which students feel they can be themselves? How does the external pressure pass through the staff into the lives of the students?

I believe that the systemic problems of the macrosystem manifest in the staff and negatively impact their ability to feel empowered in their own decision-making or hopeful about what they can create with the students.

Additionally, I noticed that although staff constantly demonstrated stamina and resilience, their response to setbacks was sometimes to resort to more cautious approaches that guaranteed "success" as an absence of tragedy or failure. The constant work of grieving loss and grieving ideas and efforts that had failed in a punitive and inequitable macrosystem restricted pedagogical risk-taking. Even after a few months, I began to feel the fatigue of setbacks and failures myself and noticed how it impaired my creativity. In a journal entry on March 21, 2017, I wrote, "I feel my heart falling again, that familiar feeling of sliding backwards. . . . I don't know what's possible. I don't know what's true." I found many lists in my journals of everything I felt I could not do. Ladson-Billings (1995), the originator of culturally relevant pedagogy, believes that teachers must have positive conceptions of their students and of themselves. I believe the stress of scarcity and omnipresent fear that the youth would self-harm or be harmed by others may also have impeded positive conception of self that makes trusting relationships possible. From the outset of the project I felt these influences on my own ability to connect in the space. On February 8, 2017, I described "that feeling in my stomach . . . that worry that I might be too much for them." Trying to protect everyone is not the same thing as trying to uplift them. This connects to Tuck's (2009) desire-based theory of change as inspired by Vizenor's (1994) concept of survivance discussed in Chapter 3: "moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal" (p. 53).

I believe that creating these spaces required releasing ourselves from narratives of impossibility to create a momentary suspension of disbelief. In these moments, we all caught a glimpse of what was possible under better conditions. In this case, this was achieved through partnership with a facilitator who specializes in Indigenous pedagogy and who expected the workshops would be successful. The professional development was not just through learning

from her skills and knowledge but gaining strength and inspiration from someone who was operating beyond failure fatigue. Suspension of disbelief was also achieved through the "specialness" of the workshop, which included bending usual routines and rules, so that a new direction was signaled as a pathway apart from other perceived cycles of failure. Although the separateness of our workshops also made staff skeptical about what learning could be brought back into daily classroom work, it reminded us that it was the limiting structure, and not the staff or students, that was failing.

So, this suspension of disbelief was made possible through a concentrated infusion of additional resources tailored to the group, leadership/inspiration by someone not impacted by failure fatigue, and the signal that this was a departure from usual routines. These elements together created not only an opportunity to do things differently but an opportunity to see things differently. In this sense, the workshops functioned as a contrast agent does in medical imaging, as an extracellular agent enhancing the visibility of particular tissues, blood vessels, or cell lines. By briefly improving the conditions for success, we introduced a contrast agent to the "body" or educational system, so that practitioners could better differentiate between ineffective practices and effective practices and perceive what is healthy, what needs to be removed, or what could be healed. Just as a contrast agent can clarify a picture and help determine a course of action, it can also have adverse effects. I wonder if this process risks further disheartening educators if there is no prospect of improved resources after the temporary increase, or if the "specialness" that allows for suspension of disbelief is experienced as a fictional escape that has no bearing on reality. Here we could return to theories of change introduced by experienced educators in the last chapter to understand how suspension of disbelief may have increased the desire for change that builds momentum (Gloria, Aboriginal education specialist) and may have residual effects on

the way diverse ways of learning are valued (Yvonne, EAL specialist). I am not sure, however, that the temporary suspension of disbelief resulted in changed processes that would secure promising practices at the institutional level (Taylor, Newcomer education specialist).

Another concept I identified in my analysis is that of "double agency." I found that the pressure of outside control limited what we could create within our workshops. I also noticed that all of us were willing to work within those contradictions to prioritize the youth while still answering to our various institutional requirements. Nolan's relationships with the students and knowledge of their interests and needs helped us to constantly adjust our workshop plan in ways that put the students first. However, he had to do this while identifying curricular connections or otherwise making the case for use of school time. Jamie needed to demonstrate that this might help the students choose post-secondary education. I needed to generate data that could somehow relate back to my program of study. I reflected on this in the following memo on June 13, 2016:

> In some ways, this is a partnership between four key groups, the community partner, the school staff, the students, and me. Yet each of us comes representing a group/institution. Often the work of partnership requires a kind of double agent awareness, to make the necessary compromises to advance a common cause in partnership while staying within the good graces of the groups/institutions/funding structures that we are supposed to represent. This connects to the collaborating educator's comment about making sure the partnership is mutually beneficial not just as we perceive it, but as officially mandated within our organizations. When we do this, we cut down on the amount of explaining and manoeuvring we have to do. Although this is the most practical solution, it assumes that the mandates are/can be aligned with priorities that present themselves moment-to-moment – for instance, youth mental health crises or interest in a particular type of

employment training. Without that flexibility, or willingness to bend the rules, building on student interests and needs can be difficult.

The success of the workshops was made possible because each of us was adept at doing two things simultaneously: focusing on our collective responsibilities to the youth and adequately fulfilling official institutional responsibilities.

Throughout the planning and implementation process, Nolan and I encountered setbacks and surprises that required creative problem-solving and flexibility. Some of our deepest learning came from adapting to these challenges and noticing where our intentions were out of pace with what was possible in any given time and place. In particular, the complexity of our original ideas was not possible given the sudden increase in mental health challenges at the school and the realities of trying to operate in an under-resourced system. Instead, we identified a smaller pilot project that could serve as an example to build from. My own interpretations of what would be culturally relevant, such as working with Elders and stories, was also called into question as the youth and staff expressed the diversity of their interests and priorities. We also underestimated the challenges of partnership-building from scratch and spent months laying the groundwork to collaborate with people in the future. Effective strategies we used to reach out to community partners included putting in the time to build trust and connection, engaging in informal networking, demonstrating reciprocity, clearly stating goals and intentions, and understanding the structures/expectations that others are working under. Nolan also reminded me of the importance of being strategic and consistent about partnership building, and in a sense I interpreted this as a warning against the trend of "hyper-innovation" my project/presence may have added to. Through our partnership, Nolan and I learned about what staff and students desire from a relational pedagogy, and we worked with Jamie to learn about the strategies that could

realize that vision in this context, if only for a few afternoons. In addition to reinforcing the existing literature on effective Indigenous pedagogy, I believe we have created some new ways of seeking balance and mediating tensions in this work, including through theoretical concepts that help to identify educator conceptions of themselves and relationships to the macrosystems they work within.

CHAPTER 6: "WE DO ART, BUT AT THE SAME TIME WE TALK": DESIGNING CREATIVE PROGRAMMING WITH NEWCOMER YOUTH

Introduction

This chapter analyzes and discusses data generated through a research partnership with a settlement organization in a large urban centre in Central Canada. The research focuses on the values and desires that inform the design of their art program for newcomer youth, strategies for implementing and refining the program, and insights into how to grow and sustain it. Whereas in the previous partnership I was considerably involved in conceptualizing and planning, in this partnership I was more involved at the stage of learning with facilitators from their process of implementation and reflection. During my four months of research involvement, the weekly creative arts program was led by a volunteer professional artist who taught knitting and painting, and by staff who led the youth in creating crafts for others. Participants in the creative arts program during my involvement were mostly from the Philippines, some also being from Tibet and South America. The cultural backgrounds of the staff also reflect this diversity. Data generation consisted of journaling, conducting a series of five individual program debriefs with staff and the collaborating artist (10 total), and completing closing interviews with the program lead, collaborating artist, and four youth.

The first section focuses on the desires and values that inform the way the program is co-constructed, drawing out youth and adult perspectives on what kind of learning and creativity are worth pursuing and upholding. This section answers Research Question 1, "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?" The second section focuses on strategies for implementing and adapting, drawing from observations made by youth and adults about program dynamics and experiences. This section

answers Research Question 2, "How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?" The third section focuses on how participants are working to grow and sustain elements of the program that work well, including through their processes of designing and refining, identifying structural challenges, and renewing their vision. This section answers Research Question 3, "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational pedagogy in this learning context and in others?" Like Chapter 5, this chapter uses shorter quotations and more paraphrasing than Chapter 4. I chose to share the data this way because participants all share the same learning context and I am drawing connections and uncovering themes that emerged in this time and space. Pseudonyms are used throughout the chapter, but in some instances when the youth shared personal information or program critique, I did not use their pseudonym either in case the cumulative information shared under that name would make them recognizable to staff or friends.

Research Question 1: Desired and Valued Pedagogies

Introduction.

This section answers Research Question 1: "What are effective, promising and/or desired elements of a relational literacy pedagogy that allows youth and their support networks to co-construct learning that is contextually relevant and culturally sustaining?" Here I consider adult views on learning and creativity that inform program design, particularly how they conceive of their roles as facilitators in this context. I also sketch a portrait of each of the four youth participants to understand what they value in their creative practice and how they prefer to learn. I sketched these portraits by gathering focused codes that answered Question 1 (actions and

processes about desires/values) and reconnecting these with contextual details. For the youth, I found the most relevant information for Question 1 in their answers to interview questions about learning styles and creative practice, so I chose to focus particularly on these areas.

Adult views on learning and creativity.

Viola,[2] program lead.

As program lead, Viola brings her own experiences as a newcomer youth to removing barriers for young people and helping them benefit from programs and services within and beyond the organization:

> I am a newcomer youth. Technically I still am . . . I know how it feels and I've been through the struggle, my life has been hell for two years when I moved to Canada, and I know how difficult it is to access and to have the courage to access these services. And I want there to be less barriers for these youth to access these services because I know how helpful they are, and I know they can change our youth's lives.

Her priority in the newcomer art program is to help youth gain a sense of control and ownership over their work and develop confidence in their skills. Through providing a safe, non-judgmental space, she wants them to realize that they have always been talented:

> Empowering them. Giving them their right to self-determination. Having them own what they're doing. It's about owning their work and being proud of it. For me, I've seen a lot of youth who are not confident about their skills although the skills are there. A lot of the youth who come to the youth space think they cannot speak English, but they speak English super well. Or they think they cannot draw, or they cannot dance – but once you

[2] All names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

> provide them that safe space for them to do these things, a space where they won't be judged, a space where no one cares if they make a mistake, a space where all of the other youth participating can relate to them, to each other – it gives them that confidence, it makes them empowered that they can do it, and eventually the more that they do these things, the more that they can think, "Oh, I've developed the skills, the skills have been there all this time."

Additionally, Viola wants youth to develop a sense of responsibility to others and a desire to connect with and give back to their community. They can get volunteer hours for some of the creative projects, but Viola wants them to understand the deeper meaning of what they are contributing: "Many of them don't need any more volunteer hours, they have hundreds of volunteer hours, but they keep returning because we have nurtured their desire to give back selflessly to the program and to the broader community." Viola wants the youth to feel recognized and respected and have access to high quality training: "it's all about making the youth feel like they're heard and giving the youth the opportunity to learn the skills that would otherwise cost them a lot."

Viola values self-determination, skill-building, and contribution in her program design and facilitation. She draws on her own experiences as a newcomer youth to increase the accessibility and relevance of the art program.

Frieda, collaborating artist.

Frieda is a practising artist with a specialization in textiles. She has been volunteering with the newcomer arts program intermittently for two years. She got involved because she wanted meaningful social contact and had the skills to share. She found out about the organization's silk-screening program at a neighbourhood event and "from there I enquired about it, and I was really

intrigued. I thought, 'This could be really cool, I should really help out with this, especially because I have those skills.'" She also describes herself as a political person who wants to "give back and help with people who are either new to Canada or fighting against things like racism." Frieda has been inspired by her volunteering experience to go back to school to study child and youth care.

Frieda really cares about connection building and freedom of choice with the youth and puts skill-building second. "What I really care about is just connection building . . . They might not be perfect at it, they're not going to get it right away. And so, the one thing is when I facilitate these art programs, I want the youth to be relaxed, I want them to feel that they have control over their own decisions." She believes in giving positive feedback and never diminishing their efforts: "I don't ever want to kill someone's creativity no matter what their skill levels are. And so, that again is affirming . . . I like to help encourage them as much as possible to make art."

Frieda values connection, self-determination, and gentle guidance in her facilitation style. She draws on her skills as an artist, her views on social justice, and her evolving education in child and youth care to make the creative workshops engaging and meaningful. She brings these strengths to volunteering with the newcomer art program.

Youth views on learning and creativity.

Alethea.

Alethea has always loved being creative in her personal life and in school. She likes to salvage and repurpose beautiful things like beads, magazine clippings, and flowers: "Even with magazines and all, you know, like newspaper, if I find something cool like a cartoon or something like that, if it's kind of pretty I just cut that piece off and put in my book so that I can

use it in my future." She's also happy to find stores where she can buy craft supplies that she did not have access to before coming to Canada, "the creative stuff like feathers, beads, or stickers, ribbon . . . you get a different range of it. I'm happy about that, you get all the stuff here to do crafts. But back in [transitional country] we normally don't get this stuff, we have to collect it." Her creativity in school has included making things with the creativity club, decorating her assignments, and decorating the school bulletin board: "sometimes you get assigned to it, and you've got to decorate that board or choose a word or thought of the day kind of thing, and depending on that thought you have to decorate." In her personal life, Alethea likes to create cards and gifts for her friends:

> Whenever it's my friend's birthday or something, I don't buy cards, I just make them myself. And as for gifts, I buy gifts for them, like from a store, but along with that, I put something, put my creative work into it. Like making them a bookmark or something like that. . . . So, it's kind of like a memory for them too. And I also feel happy because I made it myself, and whatever creativity I put into it, it came from my heart because I have good feelings towards them. So, I think in everything you do you should put a piece of yourself, as in creative work.

Alethea likes to learn by listening to an explanation, talking and asking questions, trying and figuring it out, and looking things up on the Internet. She describes how trying to figure it out works best for her, because "if I try whatever they teach me and I don't like it, if I have a new idea of how to do it, I can tell them . . . and they might like it, and maybe we can switch to that idea." She also likes listening to an explanation combined with visuals and having the opportunity to ask questions, because "listening – I think if they show us an explanation, like you have to do this like this and like that, and showing it with pictures and all, I think that would be

easier . . . and if I have any questions . . . for example, even after explaining it, sometimes we don't understand how to do it." Finally, she likes using the Internet to refresh her memory about things she has already learned.

Alethea values beauty, resourcefulness, and generosity in her creative practice. Her preferred learning strategy is exploring, trying things out, and coming up with new ways to do them. She brings these strengths to her work with the newcomer art program.

Roxanne.

Roxanne describes herself as involved in many different things and good at many things: "I want to try new things and I'm adventurous." Her creative practices at school include singing with a performance choir, where she likes how the harmonies sound and what it feels like to perform together:

> We sang "The Shape of You" by Ed Sheeran . . . the different groups like the altos, sopranos . . . when we sang it together it was like, "Oh my God! Are we really doing this!?" It was so good . . . and then at the open house when we performed, all of the audience was like, "Ooh, what's happening?!" They were focusing on us while we were singing. There were lots of students and parents there watching us, teachers, you know, "My God, I'm nervous about it." And then when we sang, they all yelled and clapped their hands!

She is also involved in dance competitions at her school, where she says she reaches out to anyone from any cultural background: "as long as you're good at dancing, I want to take you as part of my group and then we're going to do a dance, practice, and do everything to win the contest." On her own time, she likes to draw and transform the walls in her room, often using images from the Internet to copy, elaborate on, or blend with the rest of her design concept:

> Sometimes when I'm bored I just need any kind of paper, just to draw something and then on that part I write something in quotations, or I write it on the wall. . . . I printed something on the Internet, and then I stick it up on the wall, and then I asked my mom like three times, "Do you have Christmas lights?" And I found one, put it in our room, and I think I used a marker and drew something on my wall. Mostly Tumblrs because they're a lot easier to make, to draw. And also, to draw animes, because they're kind of crazy. . . . My sister taught me how to draw them.

Roxanne learns best by listening to an explanation and talking and asking questions, but she also likes reading, watching someone do it first, and writing, thinking, and reflecting. She hates having to look something up on the Internet to try to understand it. She explains why listening and asking questions work best for her, especially when examples are used:

> Because when a teacher is explaining something, you need to listen and understand it . . . you need to focus . . . so that if you have something to do, like activities, you know what to do. And when . . . you don't understand, you can ask questions and then he or she will explain it to you . . . especially in religion because we are studying all of the religions – Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. . . . the teacher explained it clearly to us and allows us to ask questions. . . . And then sometimes she uses examples, for example, a story or something that already happened, for you to understand it.

Roxanne wishes the teachers would use the boards more to create visual examples while they speak, which was how teachers taught in her country:

> I observe here that . . . you have a board in your classroom, but they're not often used – they're just talk, talk, and talk . . . but in biology or science you need to use the boards to

make an example. For example, homeostasis, how does it work? You need to make something up on the board so that all your students see it.

Roxanne values collaborative performance, transforming space, and skill-building in her creative practice. Her preferred learning strategies are listening and talking things through, especially if the ideas can be clarified with images or examples. She brings these strengths to her work with the newcomer art program.

Phoebe.

Phoebe's creative practice includes making films through her school program, and sometimes writing. She feels like she's beginning to harness her creative talents at school: "I get to play with narratives and experimental modes of film-making, which I think is really cool, and I met a lot of people as well. At first, I thought it was competitive, and it is competitive but to the point that you bring each other up more, not like bringing each other down." She does not write very often, except when she needs to release some of her emotions: "sometimes I do write stuff that I feel like is too much for me . . . somehow some of that energy just transfers to the page and makes me feel kind of more calm." However, she asserts that self-expression is not the way she likes to be creative or deal with emotion: "To be honest, I'm not much of an expressive kind of person. I don't usually express what I feel, because sometimes I feel maybe I'm too – maybe I'm seeking too much attention or something like that. So sometimes I just don't want to share and just want to deal with things by myself."

Phoebe likes to learn by trying things out, watching someone else do it first, looking things up on the Internet and reading. She notices that watching someone else do it first is her preferred way to learn, because "I'm more of a visual kind of person, so I learn more by seeing people doing things rather than explain to me, because then I wouldn't know what they're talking

about . . . I follow what they do, like seeing them do it makes me comfortable, like 'Oh, this is how I – what I should do.' Like the proper way or something."

Phoebe values privacy, play, and uplifting competition in her creative practice. She learns best by watching someone demonstrate so she can follow what they do. She brings these strengths to her work with the newcomer art program.

June.

June is creative at school and in her personal life. At school, she loves art class and is trying to get into a photography class. She is passionate about drawing and has a sketchbook she works on in her leisure time. She is working on a comic book and likes to play traditional music in the background to inspire her work:

> I am currently working on a comic that I want to publish . . . right now I'm working with the script, so that after the script I'm going to do the drawing. . . . and also when I listen to instrumental music, that's where all my ideas come out and I go straight to my sketchbook and draw everything when I listen to it . . . Asian instruments, like the old ones. I couldn't work whenever there's no sound. Like, I don't know, my mind's blank whenever there's no sound. But when I go to YouTube and search for background music, that's where I started to draw.

June's best learning strategy is observing a demonstration: "watching someone do it first helps me. This is my top pick because I learn best while I watch people do it, that's why I go do some actions with the arts . . . I'm more like a visual person." She also likes to learn by listening, talking, and asking questions and reading. She describes how these processes work for her: "When I listen to the explanation I get the idea of it, and when it comes to reading I read it a lot of times until I get what it means, and it usually helps, like during exams and stuff. . . . Talking

and questions, just like what I'm doing a while ago. I talked to you like, "What does it mean?" And it helps give me an idea like, "Oh, okay, I know what to do."

June values contemplation, authorship, and musical inspiration in her creative practice. She learns best by observing a demonstration and taking part in activities that allow her to be active and visual. She brings these strengths to her work with the newcomer art program.

Summary of desired and valued pedagogies.

This section explored adult views that inform program design, and the strengths and values that youth bring to the program. I did this by sketching a portrait of each participant to understand the contextual nature of their goals and preferences. Viola, the program lead, draws on her own experiences as a newcomer youth to prioritize youth ownership and control, contribution to community, and confidence through skill-building. Frieda draws on her skills as an artist and her social justice/social work knowledge to prioritize youth control over the art-making process while offering encouragement. The youth have a range of personal creative practices and learning preferences that they bring with them to the program. Alethea likes to make visual art pieces and crafts from salvaged materials, often creating things that can be gifted. From this I understood that she values beauty, resourcefulness, and generosity in her creative practice. Her preferred learning strategy is exploring, trying things out, and coming up with new ways to do them. Roxanne is in a performance choir, enters dance competitions, and uses multimedia to decorate the walls of her room. From her stories I understood that she values collaborative performance, transforming space, and skill-building in her creative practice. Her preferred learning strategies are listening and talking things through, especially if the ideas can be clarified with images or examples. Phoebe likes collaborative film-making and sometimes writing to release emotion but also reserves the right to process feelings on her own. From her stories I

understood that she values privacy, play, and uplifting competition in her creative practice. She learns best by watching someone demonstrate so she can follow what they do.

June takes art classes at school and likes to work on designing her comic book while listening to traditional music. From her stories I understood that she values contemplation, authorship, and musical inspiration in her creative practice. She learns best by observing a demonstration and taking part in activities that allow her to be active and visual. The adults and youth bring these values and strengths to the program, influencing the way the program is designed at the outset and how it takes shape through iterative interactions with one another.

Research Question 2: Strategies for Implementation and Adaptation

Introduction.

This section addresses Research Question 2: "How can this pedagogy be effectively implemented and refined in response to ongoing consideration of expansive literacy practices, and relationship to self and others across the learning ecology?" Here I share the strategies that facilitators use to create a relational pedagogy, including how they build relationships of trust with the youth and cultivate feelings of safety and connection among the youth. I also explore how they work to make creative programming more engaging for the youth through a relational lens by encouraging collective skill-building, gifting, and contributing, and simultaneous making and communicating.

Relational pedagogy.

Relationships of trust with adults.

Both adults and youth speak about the important role that staff and volunteers play supporting learning and wellness. Viola, the lead facilitator, explains a few strategies that she uses to build trust with the youth, such as giving them choice and control over their learning, getting to know

them and checking in often, remembering the things that are important to them, and helping connect them to other supports.

Giving youth choice and control is something she establishes by setting a "casual" tone: "We all sit down, we all talk, there are snacks, and people work. It's not like a workshop where you have to talk all the time and tell people what to do." She also explicitly tells the youth they are in charge, and she sees her role as providing encouragement and materials for them to realize their ideas. For instance, when the activity was decorating the space for a celebration, she encouraged them to collaborate to come up with a design: "I let them make it their own, I didn't tell them how to decorate, I just asked them how they wanted to do it and let them know it was up to them." She also supports youth who are wanting to work independently: "We were decorating the space – she was by herself, and she proposed to me – I'll show you later – this art piece. And I was like, 'Yeah, sure, do it! I have the materials. You can do it.' She gave me the list, told me what to do and I just offered her the materials."

She describes one of her key roles as knowing the youth and being the one to initiate conversations and check-ins:

> Knowing the youth. If there's a new youth in the program, I often would spend a little bit of time, a little bit of one-on-one time with the youth just asking them questions, making sure that they feel comfortable. I always check in, I always ask youth, they probably get sick of me asking, I ask oftentimes, "Oh, are you okay?" or "Are you okay, are you doing okay, what's up?" Right. I ask a lot of questions, and I try to talk to all of the youth no matter how many they are.

She observes that sometimes the casual conversations also function as an informal needs-assessment that allows her to connect youth to other services or programs, "And then when they

say these things, that's when I tell them, 'Oh we have this and that program, we can help you.'" She makes sure to connect with the youth by text and calls (through her work phone) and to reach out to them on Facebook: "I always reiterate how you don't have to call me, you can just text me, that's okay. And then at that point you establish a relationship already." During her facilitation, she also takes time to link back to previous conversations to show the youth she cares:

> When facilitating with the youth, with a group that I already know, just mentioning a lot of things that I remember from the last conversation with them make[s] them feel that "Oh, someone is listening to me." Because that's a common thing for many of the youth that they feel alone. Isolation is a very big barrier for newcomer youth, so you want to make sure that you remember things from the last conversation that you had and bring it up again: "Oh, how's Mobile Legends – are you still playing it? How's that game that you guys were playing that you told me to download? I downloaded it, it's pretty cool, I'm at level this and that." I actually download them, right? So, if you see this as a very informal relationship, it's a very casual, easygoing relationship, but if you think about it, it's really about making them feel valued and remembering the things that matter to them. Because not only that is important planning, it's also important to outreach because that way they trust you, they see you as a role model, they see you as someone that they would go to a three-day camping trip with.

Frieda, the collaborating artist, also prioritizes relationship building in her facilitation, and puts it ahead of skill-building. She creates connection through a non-authoritarian facilitation style: "If they are willing to learn, then I'm happy to be a helping hand to them, and if it's too complicated for them, they're free to do whatever else they want to do. I'm not being dictatorial

about what they should do. I'm giving them a lot of choice and freedom." One staff member commented that Frieda puts in the time: "they're open to this artist because she's been involved for so long, so they're receptive to her." Another commented that she is friendly and has "shared certain parts of her life with the youth. Telling them, 'Oh, this is my background' And the youth remember that."

This trust allows Frieda to be a source of information and guidance: "I'm not related to them, they're not related to me, they would have never known me if I wasn't a part of this, and yet now that I have this connection, they're taking so much from me, you know, like they're actually listening." For Frieda, it's a reciprocal relationship, and she also pays attention to what the youth can teach her, "It gives me a better understanding of what immigration is because myself as a Canadian born citizen I don't have those same experiences. So, the only way that I can have any way to understand is through others and learning from others. So, I felt like I've learned a lot from the youth." Frieda knows the connection is possible because of how often and how consistently she has shown up over a period of two years: "I've realized how long it took to build relationships and to build that trust."

When asked who in their lives they liked to learn from and talk to, youth described meaningful supports and guidance from their friends, families, and relatives. Some of them are also having trouble making friends, are separated from their families geographically, or experience tension at home. They valued close connections with the adults in the program and described how these help them with their learning and well-being. One youth acknowledged, "I don't usually like to . . . communicate with people in authority . . . but with them [program leaders] it's just different – you just feel at home, and I don't feel that kind of intimidation, I guess. I don't feel afraid to talk to them. They're more like friends."

Youth described how the facilitators help them with well-being; for instance, one youth identified three different youth workers she can share her true feelings with and said, "I cried once in front of Viola while I say how I felt. I can say they are my second family. So, I go to them whenever I have problems." Another youth said, "they've already been like a family to me, I guess, like I've shared some personal stuff with them and they don't judge me for it." Youth also described how the adults in the program help them with learning everything step by step: "You learn a bunch of stuff like how to do other things that you don't normally do, and they kind of teach you everything, everything that you must know about the program or about the activity they are going to do." This also extends to supporting them with schoolwork, for instance, by connecting them with tutors: "I told her, 'Ate Viola, I don't understand this thing and I need someone to teach me.' And then she told me, 'Lucky you asked me, because we're having tutoring in the library and it's free, you can go, and you and the tutor can discuss that.' Like, 'Oh my god, Ate, thank you,' I told her. 'I'm so happy, Ate, I'm so blessed, thank you!'

Adults in the program are building trust with youth by getting to know them and checking in often, remembering the things that are important to them, connecting them to other supports, keeping digital lines of communication open, being non-authoritarian, putting in the time, sharing things about themselves, and learning from the youth. The youth respond to their relational facilitation strategies, describing feelings of freedom, belonging, trust, and acceptance. The trusting relationships allow youth to listen and learn new things and reach out for help about academic and personal challenges.

Cultivating safe space and connection among the youth.

Youth described feeling safe and relaxed in the program space, and how this gives them confidence to be themselves. For instance, Roxanne described how the space makes her feel:

"When you're here in the youth space or doing other stuff, it makes you come out of your shell, it doesn't feel like you don't belong here. You belong here, you can do everything you want; no one is going to stop you or anything like that. You're free." Alethea says that it is a supportive environment where she feels "like I'm having the time of my life. Because, aside from studying, this is the thing which I like. . . . It's kind of like I'm having my time . . . creativity, I think it's in me . . . so if I could express it through this program, then I think I can be myself here, because creativity has always been a part of me." Youth mentioned that they find the activities relaxing and easy to access and understand. Phoebe enjoys the program "as a way to de-stress, especially when there's so much work at school . . . but then after I go to the youth space and do something different for us." Roxanne explains that the activities also relieve her stress: "Like when I'm all about something that I need to get done, but I need the break. I need the break to think about things. For example, when you paint, you forget about everything, you're just focusing on something that you're doing."

For some youth, the safe space also facilitates the deepening of existing friendships or the forming of new bonds. Viola observes, "A lot of youth that come to the program, they're really good friends. Either they met at other programs and started going to this program, or they already met at school and then started going to this program together." Other youth describe feeling the friendships are more casual, "low-maintenance kind of friendship" where you can catch up weekly, "like they've never been gone from you." For some youth, even though they feel good in the program space and are able to participate in group activities, they don't make friends easily. One youth states that through the program she "got used to talking to people. Because before that I don't talk much . . . I'm kind of – it's kind of hard for me to make friends." Another youth described that she got involved in the program because the staff invited her on Facebook and

gave her an opportunity to do a mock interview about herself: "And that's where I started going to their little programs and I started to explore myself, and that's how I gained confidence. I was able to talk to other people confidently." Viola describes how some youth are outgoing, but others take more time: "I know a couple youth who are really quiet and then once they get to go to the program a bit more, you hear a lot more from them, they get to be more confident in terms of doing their thing."

Adults in the program help youth feel safe and connected by accepting their diverse ways of participating and giving them opportunities to relax and let loose. For Viola, creating a feeling of security comes from acceptance, "providing that safe space, not just physically, but providing that safe space by being there as a facilitator who would really accept them for who they are and let them be who they are." After program one day, Viola commented on the momentum in the space and working from wherever youth want to engage:

> This group is made up of all the regulars, so they feel comfortable in the space. . . . I make sure they know that we value who they are and what they want to contribute, whatever it is. It's really chaotic, but they're having fun. I like it. That's how program is – some of them are singing and dancing, some of them are really focusing on their decorating project, and some of them are kind of spaced out, but they're willing to do more when I ask them to. I think it's cool that we have a space for *all* of that, for everything that they bring with them.

Frieda comments on how the art activities can have a calming effect because the youth have control over their own project: "They are told what to do at school all day, so it's nice when they have a chance to do things their way here, it relaxes them." She also observes how painting or knitting can be meditative for youth and that the fiber arts have been very healing for her: "So

why knitting is important to youth is it just helps – the repetitive motion of doing it helps kind of reset your mind and relax you from having the anxiety from dealing with school or family or whatever. You just pick up those needles, and you start making something." For Frieda, the space created through the art program is essential because it's free and free of judgement or pressure:

> This is a safe space for them to hang out. It's hard in communities without these spaces, where you need money to go most places. They need that access to a space where they can feel safe and have fun. They don't have to deal with older people, say in a café, who might get annoyed by them or misunderstand them because they don't know them . . . they need a free space to feel safe in and be able to just let loose and relax and stuff, and aren't pressured by anything like violence or drugs or alcohol or anything like that.

The space and activities are designed to be relaxing and non-judgmental, so that people can let their guard down and be themselves. Youth in the program describe feeling comfortable and welcome in the space, and that they are learning to communicate and connect. Some form close relationships or deepen existing relationships, while others are joining in more quietly and building confidence with time. Viola and Frieda support the youth by establishing a safe space through acceptance of their diverse engagement styles and facilitating arts activities that allow them to unwind and have a shared experience.

Creative programming.

Everyone thriving together.

Youth and adults spoke about the importance of encouraging skill-building, but often in the context of collectively improving or passing skills on to others. Viola describes this phenomenon as "everyone thriving together." Viola notices that, even though not all youth like art,

> I didn't even find it hard to outreach because I have a few youth who are passionate who want to do it and they do the outreach themselves, they bring their friends with them, and it makes for a good program because the friends see that their friends are good at it and they want to be good at it. They see that they are doing well with their friends, so everyone's thriving together.

Viola gave the example of a youth response in a program evaluation where the youth explained that "through her friends she started doing things that she would not normally do but started liking because of her friends wanting to do it with her."

Youth responded well to opportunities to make art together, and some were particularly engaged when they had a chance to collaborate on something. Phoebe describes her experience:

> Some of the favourite activities that I've done were silk-screening, where we basically put the design on – it's not really a canvas, but basically you put the mesh in there and then place the design on the shirt . . . I guess I like it because you get to be with a lot of people doing it, and it's just not like a one-person job, and you can coordinate with other people about what design to put, or just making the screen, or something like that, and you communicate with other people, which I think is really good."

Decorating the space for the Halloween party and then for winter festivities were also major collective projects designed to allow many individuals and smaller groups to come together to coordinate their vision and efforts. As Frieda observes, "with decorating the space, they worked together, they had different options for how to get involved." Even during individual art-making, the youth often exchanged tips and helped each other overcome challenges. Some of them bring skills with them from their own artistic practice and their personal and family lives. Frieda

describes how she encouraged youth to work together during one knitting workshop, knowing that there were existing skills that could be drawn from:

> The one girl helped her friend when she got stuck, and I helped as well. At first the girl who was helping her friend was giving instructions in Tagalog while trying to demonstrate what to do. It was still hard for her to communicate the steps to her friend in a way that she could get it. It could be a challenge of translating knitting terms/North American knitting style. We switched to English and I explained what to do. Obviously, they knit and crochet in their home countries too and have lots of ways of talking about that, and they are drawing a lot from what they know from their moms and grandmas.

Some of the youth also share the skills they learn in program with youth in other spaces. Here, Roxanne is proud of using her growing knowledge of drawing to help a friend develop those skills:

> Like everything that you do at program . . . you can apply it on other stuff. Like if someone needs to learn how to paint, draw, you can teach them, like that. And I think one of my friends, she's struggling with drawing, and I told her, get the basic part of the drawing, and then when you get into it do the sketching part, and then when you're done just make it bolder, like that, and add in something . . . And then she was amazed, because "Did I really do this?" Like, "Yeah, you did that because you're into it." . . . Now she's good. She's doing really good now.

Adults in the program are focused on providing opportunities for skill-building, often in the context of collaborative projects. They also notice when youth are skill-sharing and bringing each other up during independent work. Youth describe enjoying collaborating and passing on

skills within and beyond the program. The way they inspire each other to try new things and work together to improve their skills is what Viola calls "everyone thriving together."

Gifting and contributing.

Another strategy that program facilitators used was to design activities that had a purpose or an impact on others. For instance, while I was there, they invited the youth to decorate the space for the Halloween party and for winter festivities, they taught the youth how to make Christmas ornaments that were then gifted to elderly participants in other neighbourhood programs, and they arranged a partnership with a local business to paint boxes as a program fundraiser. Viola explains that many of the youth have also participated in the volunteer training program that connects them with community initiatives and are motivated to continue contributing through creative projects: "now they are very willing to continue giving back, to continue showing that reciprocity." She gives the example of how engaged the youth were in decorating for the broader program's Halloween party: "Most of them will come back on Monday for the celebration and have a sense of ownership and pride about the work they did to decorate the space."

Alethea liked painting the boxes for the fundraiser and imaging how people would enjoy the colours and patterns they created:

> I kind of feel like it's a good way to use your mind, you know, like your creative side. It's a good way, so it can not only help you but others as well while you do the stuff you love. And when people receive it, they would be amazed or surprised, like, "Oh my God, this one is painted so nicely! How did you do it?" They might – even though the painting's not that good – but they might like it because it will be colourful for them. So, I think it's a good way to help the community.

Alethea also feels motivated to make four Christmas ornaments even though she finds it difficult to do at first, because it makes her happy to imagine people receiving them:

> And the thing that these ornaments are going for people who couldn't afford it, I think it's good. I think it's good because you are doing something for them. It's like a Christmas gift from us to those people who are not that privileged . . . and then when they open the package, even right now we're packing it in a transparent packet so it will look exciting from the outside too. They will be like, "Oh my God, I want this one!"

Some elements of the program are designed so that youth know there is a specific purpose to the creative project they are completing. They can imagine how it will benefit people they know within the program, or people beyond the program they have never met.

Making and communicating.

Another program strategy is to help youth communicate and connect casually while making things with their hands. Viola observes, "In this program, we do art, but at the same time we talk, we don't have to force it, it just happens organically. We call it an arts program, but it's really more than that, it's a conversation circle too." One day she commented on how animated and interactive the group was:

> I think it's something to do with the first day of snow. Everyone's feeling festive. One student has only been here for two months. This is his first snow and he's pretty excited. He told me about his experience seeing snow for the first time and how it felt. That's special. I get to check in with the youth and ask what's happening in their lives, and they open up. That is the power of informal learning and making art together. It would not be the same in a classroom. Having this space for them matters.

Viola emphasizes that they never impose any rules on the youth about what language to speak, and that the youth negotiate and navigate these dynamics themselves:

> You find that a lot of the youth talk when we're doing activities. Oftentimes they would speak in their language. I've noticed that if there are other youth there who don't speak the language, they would still speak their language but they would speak English a bit more. For others it's an opportunity to practice their English. It's an opportunity for them to make friends, get to know each other.

Frieda also notices how arts activities can help youth communicate because they can express themselves without language, show each other how to do things, and share an experience together:

> I want to be able to help facilitate a building of community for themselves here in Canada so they . . . feel safe, they feel comfortable here and are willing to express themselves and open up. And that's just something that I feel can be done through art because you don't really need a language to understand it. Everyone has some kind of understanding of art and they can help each other. They show each other how to do things, and I think that's really great, so then they can make friends that way, they can start connecting to each other and it doesn't matter what their culture or what their backgrounds are, it's just doing those tasks makes them connect and have that relationship.

Some of the more difficult tasks also encourage conversation as youth work through it together or ask for clarification. Alethea describes the way knitting catalyzed talking and questions: "Even when we were showed and demonstrated how to do it, we still couldn't do it, so we had to ask how to do it, right? Where to go in, where to put the needle in, so that way we're

talking." Frieda also illustrates that because of the language barrier she combines verbal explanation with demonstration and engages the body's capacity to remember:

> They might pick up some things that I'm saying, but they might also have a misunderstanding of what I was saying, so I tried to make examples and I also try to demonstrate . . . but I noticed that if any of . . . the youth were having a particular struggle, I was right there to again show them right up close exactly what to do, and very slow, and trying to work with them. And then also they would show me work, to be like, "Is this right, Miss?" And I'd be like, "No, there's a mistake there, we're going to have to take it out, and I know how much this sucks, but we're going to have to take it out because it's just going to affect you later on. And then we'll do it again so it's properly done." The other thing too is that I really wanted a repetition, for the youth to do it over and over again . . . the muscle memory of doing those actions . . . your body has these skills that you start to remember.

Roxanne describes how making art together in the newcomer program has helped her develop communication skills that she applies at school. She describes that, during activities at the art program, "sometimes when you do things you need also to communicate to others, like how will you do the activity or what are you doing? You need to discuss what will be the thing or what will be the things that will help you. You need also to hear other people's ideas." She says she uses these skills at school: "Especially right now that we're going to do a play, a role play of Romeo and Juliette! . . . and we need to like, 'Hey, what are you guys doing? What are you doing for this part?' . . . or 'Maybe you can do this part and we're going to do this part so we can help each other and make things good.'"

In the newcomer art program, making and communicating are an interrelated process. Youth talk casually while their hands are occupied, they talk to teach and learn, and they talk to collaborate and share ideas. Sometimes youth are communicating in their own languages, and sometimes they are communicating non-verbally, observing and demonstrating techniques and participating fully as they engage their bodies in the process of remembering.

Summary of strategies for implementation.

In this section I have described strategies that facilitators use to create a relational pedagogy and how they design/facilitate creative programming. Under the heading "Relational Pedagogy," I described how Frieda and Viola use several strategies to build trust with the youth, including getting to know them and checking in often, remembering the things that are important to them and being non-authoritarian. Youth respond well to these strategies, describing the facilitators as approachable and understanding. Viola and Frieda also support relationship building between youth, for instance, by establishing a non-judgemental space and facilitating shared experience. Youth describe feeling comfortable and welcome in the space, and say that they are learning to communicate and connect. Under the heading "Creative Programming," I describe the facilitators' strategy of helping youth collectively build skills or pass them onto others, which Viola describes as "everyone thriving together." Viola and Frieda also enrich the impact of the art-making by helping youth contribute to the community and develop communication skills through the process.

Research Question 3: Insights Towards Growth and Sustainability

Introduction.

This section answers Research Question 3: "What theoretical and practical insights emerge from this iterative design process that could help to sustain effective elements of the relational

pedagogy in this learning context and in others?" Here I examine the system changes that facilitators desire and the design processes that facilitators engage with to nurture sustainability through responsiveness and flexibility. I also consider renewed visions for the program through identifying strengths and examining the ways participants are seeking stability and balance.

Desired system change.

Research participants discussed larger system changes that could help their work flourish. Frieda emphasizes that art programs like this need to be a collective effort and receive proper funding: "You can't do it on your own. It can't just be one person, you have to actually have a platform to jump off of to be able to do this kind of programming." She wants arts councils to recognize and support the value of art for all people and "having it more widespread to the community at large." She feels that there is not enough population-specific art programming to meet the demand in the city, "and a lot of people miss out on that opportunity." She is trying to fill some of those gaps as a volunteer, but as will be discussed in the following section, she is overstretched and unable to make the long-term commitment she feels the youth deserve. Viola would like training for her staff on how to incorporate arts into their programs for different purposes and feels facilitators in the non-profit field should have more access to these professional development opportunities. Viola also feels that better funding would make a difference to the program and allow her to provide consistent programming, better facilities, a diversity of activities in and out of the program space, and better materials. Here she notes how resourceful she has to be as funding fluctuates:

> Not all the time do we have the budget to facilitate all of these workshops. We might get lucky one year. Next year we might not have all of them. So, resourcefulness is a really important piece of programming, I would say. What supplies, can we get donations? Do

> other programs in the house already have this? Maybe we can borrow it for a couple weeks?

Viola wishes that funders cared more about the quality and depth of the learning experiences they facilitate for newcomers, and focused less on numbers as a measure of success:

> When we report to funders, they're just interested in the numbers. We are constantly dealing with quantitative reporting and quantitative demands. But there's so much more that happens beyond how many youth show up. More qualitative reporting would reflect the hard work that staff does and help people understand that what we do isn't easy. It would put more value into the work we do for outsiders who don't know the field. They would see how much work we put into helping newcomers be of value in society, in their new community.

Frieda and Viola discussed ways that better funding and training opportunities could help art programs for newcomers thrive and grow. Using volunteers and borrowing supplies helps the program do a lot with a little, and they feel they could do so much more with consistent systemic support.

Designing, refining, co-constructing.

Program staff plan activities ahead of time around key themes and goals, some of which are directly informed by asking the youth what they want. Throughout the program, they notice how youth are responding to the experience and take steps to adjust. Viola illustrates this dynamic: "I see this as a program that really values the youth's voice. I've heard a lot of youth say, 'Oh, I wanted to learn calligraphy.' We have a calligraphy workshop going on now. That's why we have it. 'I want to get volunteer hours.' 'Okay, you can do arts here while helping the

community.'" She gets a sense for what the youth are interested in by talking to them in person, and using texting and social media:

> I talk to the youth a lot, you know, even sessions where we're doing something I'm already thinking ahead and talking to them about "Oh, what's your interest?" What they want to learn next. I do that all the time. I would text the youth. . . . I think social media's been a great program planning tool for me and for the rest of the team. I do a lot of Pinterest and then if I see something cool I would ask a few youth, youth who are regular to the program, "Would you be interested in this?"

Both Frieda and Viola talk about adjusting their plans as they observe how youth are responding. As previously mentioned, Viola believes that working on art projects allows a natural flow of busyness and conversation. Shifts in this dynamic help her identify when something needs to be adjusted:

> It's also a great way to test if they feel comfortable in the space or if the program is working. If everyone is just working and you feel that no one is really eating snacks, or no one is talking to each other, or don't feel comfortable talking with each other, there might be something that you have to tweak in the way you facilitate things, because "Why do the youth feel awkward in the moment, even though there's already an activity going on? Why are they not talking, even to their friends?"

Frieda also engages in a lot of observation to gauge the skill level of the youth and decide when to intervene and when to let them problem-solve. After the first knitting lesson, Frieda reflected that she wanted to start with the basics because she had recently taught a workshop with another group that was too challenging. However, she was "surprised how easily everyone caught on." She was able to keep pace with two youth, but two others stalled and then left: "The two youth

who left earlier didn't get as much practice, and they didn't get to learn the next stage. I think I could have given them more of a challenge to keep them engaged." Frieda adjusted her teaching level to the group: "The next step would be to show some more complicated steps/stiches to see if the youth can handle it, then I could go back to easier options when needed, but I think I can challenge them." However, although some of the same youth returned, the group kept changing, and Frieda kept adapting to the new skill level and dynamic: "The two new girls came, and one of them attempted to knit but got frustrated at a certain point. The other one knew enough about knitting already to ask the right questions to move her herself forward. . . . The one girl helped her friend when she got stuck, and I helped as well." Frieda is constantly building rapport and reading the situation to decide how much to get involved:

> I want them to achieve independence with their projects, knitting is that kind of activity. I let them problem-solve on their own, but I'm always open to questions. I think right now they look at me as an expert, someone who knows a lot about what I'm teaching them. I'm gaining their trust. Even the girl who knew how to knit already was still willing to listen and hear me out.

As previously discussed, Frieda and Viola also read the room to understand when the youth just need to relax, need to be given different options that suit them, or need to be engaged and pushed further. They take the time to get to know the youth and their interests, ask about what activities they want, and observe and adapt within and between sessions.

Renewing the vision.

Strengths to develop.

The youth identified a few program strengths that they appreciate and want to see continued. Alethea emphasized that she values "the ideas which they are bringing, like not only exploring

ourselves through creativity but also helping others a little bit, I think they should keep doing that. Yeah, and they should keep being supportive and friendly as well." She also appreciated how things are explained clearly so that "everyone can learn from scratch." Roxanne suggested that "They keep on communicating to the youth, like they let them know what they should do, they let them ask about something." Youth were also asked to share advice with adults across Canada who want to design an art program like this for other newcomer youth. In terms of activities, June suggested, "Let the youth explore what do people do around here, in Canada." Roxanne suggested making it fun, for instance, by hosting competitions with prizes so that the youth would say, "Oh, I need to do this perfectly so that I can get that too. I need to concentrate more about what I'm doing!" Phoebe recommended some ways that adults could work to overcome the challenges of engaging youth in art:

> I guess they have to plan art stuff that youth would be interested in. Because most youth don't really participate or like doing art stuff, most of them are just on their phones or like, I don't know, spending too much time on social media. . . . So, I think there has to be some sort of way to break the ice I guess, and how to just slowly introduce art to youth. . . . Like you could have a painting session on the creative arts, but then most of the people might not know how to paint, and they would probably ask, "Oh, is there like a proper brush?" . . . I think it's more about guidance and what kind of arts projects would be easy to do for youth. Because sometimes other youth don't have the patience to do art stuff, especially if it's complex.

She was also clear that adults should be encouraging of the creative efforts that youth make: "people have different ways of being creative, right? So, I guess the staff understanding that much, and not criticizing the work that the youth are doing."

Youth also had advice about building relationships in creative programs. June suggested that they "have this friendly atmosphere so that youth would feel welcome coming, and they will have fun." Phoebe suggested the importance of facilitating connection among youth: "I also feel like if they encourage all the youth to interact with each other, as in you know, collaborate, I guess, I think that would be good." Alethea suggested that people who want to start a new program should learn from the staff here about how to let youth direct their own process:

> I think they should be like the staff here. They should be supportive, friendly. . . . Help them grow and let us be on our own pace – not tell us to hurry up and we have to do it, we have a time limit and all that kind of stuff – let us be on our own pace, use our own mind and creativity. I think that's the best option for them too if they wanted to start a program.

Viola also imagines how she could keep building on the community service model that the youth connect with. She noticed that the youth were most engaged during the ornament making and box painting: "I think the common piece amongst those two projects is that what they're doing goes to the community. I think if there's a goal that they know would make an impact to other people's lives . . . That, I think, adds a great piece, not only to attendance, but to the quality of the work that they're doing." Viola wants to build this component of the program further,

> I want to put more value into what they're doing because by putting more value into it you're putting more value into the person doing it. . . . For example . . . after they learn calligraphy, we have a refugee rights day event going on, and I would love for them to do signs for that event and for many folks to see their signs.

Viola also wants to continue the skill-building model but offer the youth "grand opportunities" that would be possible with more funding. For Viola this could mean connecting them to

opportunities outside of the program space: "I've mentioned involving them in more community initiatives, but it would be great to take them out a lot more instead of just staying in the space. I guess with more money I could take the youth to a gallery crawl, things like that."

The youth would like to see the program maintain areas of strength, including making the activities accessible and explaining them clearly, bringing new ideas, and helping them contribute to the community through their art-making. They also brainstormed how other programs across Canada should design newcomer arts programs, for example, by making them fun, exploring what kinds of activities Canadians do, and engaging youth even when they are hesitant or just beginning to learn. They say that the staff should be non-judgmental and friendly and let youth go at their own pace. Viola would love to keep building on the community service aspect of the art program and find ways to offer grander opportunities that might involve opportunities outside of the space.

Seeking stability and balance.

The people are the program.

In many ways, the relationships are the program. Youth want to participate because their friends are there, or they agree to come because a caring adult invites them. All the different programs offered by the organization tend to blur into one another, and the youth remember the activity based on who was leading it or who was there, rather than the topic or program category. For example, Roxanne describes her motivations for attending program:

> My friends let me know about this program and "You can get volunteer hours and learn a lot of stuff." . . . I asked my friends who are here, every time there is something going to happen here, we're here, every time Ate Viola wants us to be here or doing other stuff, volunteering to do other stuff outside the youth space or inside the youth space, we're

here. . . . Mostly I'm here Thursdays, Mondays, I think, and then when there's other programs or activities that are going to happen. I think I would be here for every day except for the weekends, except if they're not here, we were here, doing different things.

Viola knows how much this program is also about the youth spending time with their friends: "The space is great, the settlement workers are great, the volunteers are great, but just being with their friends and doing something with their friends." She describes how even adults need to keep their friendships healthy by going out and sharing a variety of experiences together, but "the youth don't have the luxury to do this, to go to a gallery, to do paint nights with their friends. But we provide that opportunity for them so that their relationships flourish or they find meaningful relationships within these activities."

However, Viola notices that the youth often come as a group, sometimes organized by someone in their group who is enthusiastic or has taken the initiative to find out about an opportunity. This can mean that youth do not want to participate individually: "I know a lot of youth who like being in the program, but then they won't come if their friends aren't here." This dynamic can create surges and lulls in attendance and also impact the energy and activity in the program. One youth describes disappointment and loss of momentum when not many others show up: "Overall, it's fun. It's fun to do it with a group of people. But sometimes it's also kind of sad because not a lot of people actually go out on a Friday . . . it really depends on the people sometimes – I think when less people show we don't really do much. We just sit down, we play the music and stuff, but if there's a lot of people then there's a lot of work." Although there is a core group who participate often, new youth are being welcomed all the time, and many youth need to take breaks because of the realities of their lives. This constant flux can be challenging when staff are trying to base the planning and design process on youth input. For instance, a

number of specific youth requested knitting, but on the day the knitting workshops began, many of those youth were not in attendance.

Relationships with staff and volunteers also drive the program, and this is a strength and vulnerability as well. The current lead facilitator took over the role of a staff member who recently moved on to another job. One research participant describes that this transition "kind of threw a lot of it up into the air" but that everyone managed really well. Additionally, the volunteer artist is overstretched between a part-time job and school: "I'm worried about trying to continue this and getting homework done – especially when I get home from work at 9 pm and have class that next day at 8 pm. It's exhausting." She worries about how taking a break might impact her relationships with the youth. She describes a connection she had built with one of the youth in the program and how much she wants to keep helping her learn. She considers whether she could gift her some supplies to encourage her to keep knitting without her guidance.

The people are the program. The activities are all relational in some way. The youth relate to pedagogy that emphasizes collaboration, conversation, and working on collective goals for their organization and community. The youth are also showing up for each other and for the adults that they care about. Focusing on relationships and collectivity is a culturally sustaining practice for many of these youth and has a positive impact on their lives. It is also an unpredictable component of programming that requires a lot of improvisation and spontaneity. When the people are the program, emphasis is on adaptability and less on control. How could the organization work to keep momentum going even for smaller groups who show up? How can they balance long-term planning and daily adaptation to connect with the interests of the youth who are actually there? How could systemic changes be made to support non-profit workers and volunteers so that their vital roles in the lives of young people are not so vulnerable to change?

Balancing structure and freedom.

As previously discussed, adults in the program are constantly trying to adapt the activities to the interests and skill levels of the group. Youth and adults have identified the importance of allowing freedom and self-direction, but there are also a few indications that emphasis on structure or skill-building is beneficial for some youth in some ways. For instance, one youth suggested that the projects are constantly changing "and you don't finish up what you did the last week. So, I think if they did an extra session to do one thing that's complex, that you think you would really be able to do in one day." Another youth seems to be seeking more challenging activities that would allow her to try something new rather than enforcing existing skills: "it's not learning right now we're doing, it's not learning, it's like we're practising or we're making stuff which comes to mind." On the other hand, one youth finds "some of the crafts are complex to do. Sometimes I'm too lazy." Alethea appreciates the structure of knitting: "with knitting we have to learn, and we have to follow the rules, otherwise you wouldn't get the pattern . . . I think it's a new way to develop myself." Roxanne describes how she likes creating her own structure and plan through the open project of painting boxes:

> Sometimes when I'm just looking at the box I need to imagine the image, how it would look when I paint it. But first I need to paint the base colour, the most colour that you will see, and then I use pencil when I don't know how to paint the object that I'm going to make. And then after that I'm going to mix colours and then paint everything like that . . . at the front, I need to make the same thing at the side and at the back, I need to make them look the same as I made the other one. . . . You know when it rains on your window, there's kind of water dripping? Like that, I painted that one, but I used different colours. It's only at the side of the box. And at the top cover I just put something in words –

Activities with more structure lend themselves to skill-sharing, where youth try to help each other understand a difficult technique. However, there is also a threshold at which youth give up. Frieda picks up on this and imagines that "if I could go further with this program, you'd see more and more of them either working independently but also helping problem-solve with each other." She also suggests that having different activity stations in the room can be a good way to meet the diverse needs of youth. In this case she uses the example of knitting and painting boxes:

> So, I found that the painting of the boxes was almost in a therapeutic role . . . just sitting there and being free about painting a box whatever kind of way you want. . . . On the flip side, it can also be really anxiety-inducing to just be told, "Just do what you want!" Because sometimes people do need direction . . . I think having both of them alongside each other actually was quite a good complement . . . I could focus on the youth that really wanted to do the knitting and let the ones who wanted to paint boxes to their own devices, and they were fine.

The youth and adults are clear that gentle guidance and self-determination are core to the functioning of the program. Some youth like to work from their own creative vision, and some of them respond well to challenging, structured tasks. What is the adult role in pushing young people to be the best they can be in either of these categories? How can youth be encouraged to continue helping each other over that threshold when an activity seems too difficult? How can the space continue to be flexible so that diverse learning strengths can be channeled?

Summary of insights towards growth and sustainability.

In summary, I have examined desired system changes, program design processes, and visions for the future. Frieda and Viola imagined ways that better funding and training opportunities could help art programs for newcomers thrive and grow. They described how they design the program

according to program goals and input from the youth and engage in iterative design throughout to adjust to youth response. Both adults and youth in the program identified strengths and areas for growth. Program strengths identified by the youth included facilitator communication and friendliness and good program ideas, including community service opportunities. They recommended that other creative youth programs should also be fun, make arts learning less intimidating, encourage youth to interact, and help them grow without pressuring them to do things in a certain way within a certain time limit. Viola recognizes the community contribution pieces as a major strength and would love to keep building on that while finding ways to offer grander opportunities outside of the space. While both youth and adults are clear that self-determination is a core value, some youth like to work from their own creative vision, while others prefer structured tasks and new learning. Continuing to find ways to balance these different learning approaches will be an ongoing challenge for designing the program at the initial and iterative phases.

Summary and Discussion

Youth come to the newcomer art program with their own diverse learning strengths and rich creative practices. Adults use strategies to engage with this diversity while developing relationships of trust with the youth, including giving youth choice and control, offering gentle guidance and direction, initiating conversations, remembering what matters to them, and putting in the time. They also facilitate interaction in the space through creating a fun, accepting atmosphere and offering opportunities for youth to relax and be themselves. Youth respond well to these strategies, describing the staff as a second family and feeling a sense of belonging. Developing relationships was an important cultural value for everyone, and facilitators strategize to connect to this goal through creative programming. They create opportunities for collaboration

and skill-sharing, communicating while making things, or enacting community connectedness through contributing and gift-making.

Adults continue to refine the program by asking about and noticing what the youth want. Youth identify program strengths that could be built on or leveraged by other organizations such as being friendly and letting youth go at their own pace, making the activities accessible and explaining them clearly, bringing new ideas, helping them contribute to the community through their art-making, and exploring what Canadians do. Viola would love to keep building on the community service aspect of the art program and find ways to offer grander opportunities that might involve opportunities outside of the space. Participants believe that better funding and training would facilitate this kind of growth. Youth and adults are also trying to find ways to create stability in the program despite the ebb and flow of people, and to find a balance between structured and open projects.

When conducting a retrospective analysis using grounded theory methods, I also notice theoretical ideas that could help link this work to other studies and future practice. The ideas I focus on here include diversity within a culturally distinct group; relational art-making that does not perform identity, and leveraging existing program strengths to increase structured skill-building.

I work with the premise that culturally sustaining pedagogy can be an effective approach to working with equity-seeking students. This study adds support to the importance of using culturally sustaining pedagogy with newcomer youth, including the importance of multilingualism, and connecting with content and forms of expression that are familiar and relevant to young people. However, although the participating youth were a relatively homogenous group as categorized by their cultural backgrounds, they each had different ways of

learning and being creative, and different learning goals in the youth program space. Trying to structure activities so that everyone could engage meaningfully was a constant challenge for facilitators despite shared cultural backgrounds, languages, and newcomer experiences. Importantly, the facilitators allowed the youth to be complicated, encouraging them to make choices about which language to speak when, what kinds of projects they wanted to do, and how they wanted to carry them out. They also picked up on cultural values that all youth had in common, including reciprocity and collectivity, and provided different access points for enacting these values. Similar to my findings in my first study with First Nations youth, this is evidence supporting the importance of overcoming assumptions and generalizations, and connecting with student's dynamic cultural selves, or enacting "cultural connectedness" (Irizarry, 2007).

Given my professional training in arts education and my interest in authorship and counter-narrative (e.g., Cummins, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011), I wanted to research examples of youth self-expression and affirmation. However, in this case, while the youth are still interested in making art that is relational, purposeful, and real, they do not necessarily prioritize self-expression. In the making of gifts, the decorating of spaces, and even the painting of boxes, there was nothing for me to interpret about the maker. As evidenced by their personal creative practices, some of the youth would likely excel at, and benefit from, opportunities to author and perform identity. It is possible that limitations such as the drop-in nature of the program make it difficult to offer these opportunities.

At the same time, I want to recognize that I am experiencing a potentially culturally nuanced difference in ideas about what is empowering, or where power comes from. I learned so much from investigating the gaps between the answers I expected/wanted to hear and the answers I got from the youth. Here is a memo I wrote on November 15, 2017, in response to data

I was in the midst of generating through youth interviews and my journaling/informal observations:

> What about forms of expression that do not reveal identity, that are good places to hide and rest from interrogation, that are good places to gather strength and think before speaking? What about forms of making and doing that have predetermined outcomes and clear standards of excellence? What can this structure offer youth who are experiencing chaos? How can we be more open to the affordances of creative constraints, to the feelings of mastery made possible by moments of clarity and completion? And this has to do with the hands, with the making of things, with the physicality and productiveness that are not primarily conceptual. This has to do with creating as creativity, as labour, as useful. What is the reaction [my reaction] against these grounded and predictable forms of art?

Later, on February 4, 2018, as I was doing retrospective data analysis of youth and practitioner interviews at this site, I wrote the following memo:

> These forms are not identity texts, they are in a way, a break from the hyper-visibility or invisibility so often experienced by racialized youth. They provide a way to be noticed, and to contribute, without the pressure to disclose personal stories or to perform individual selfhood. Because the projects are structured and collective, there is predictability and an enactment of togetherness that allow for those other conversations to surface.

On March 29, 2018, I wrote a memo that attempted to uncover and challenge my own culturally informed preconceptions about what is valuable in art-making for equity-seeking youth.

Thinking again about the answers we want vs. the answers we get . . . What are the things I think are "good"?

- Inventiveness/authorship – as comparted to remixing, following set rules
- Abstract/conceptual/representative – as compared to making practical/functional things
- Representing self and being affirmed – as compared to collective projects or projects that don't reveal identity . . .
- Exercising sociopolitical agency through the arts – The youth don't speak so much of systems, but of personal relationships of love and care and creating beauty and happiness in their immediate worlds . . .
- Creating art rooted in traditional culture – my reaction to traditional Asian music vs. singing at Mass or Tumblr girls. How much I romanticize foraging for beads and flowers compared to . . . Dollarama. Where can I look for opportunities to understand the meaning these artistic practices have for each person's evolving cultural identity as a practice of becoming through relationships – new ones, old ones, imagined ones?

Looking back at these memos, I see how my process of data generation and analysis was also a process of revealing and challenging my own biases and cultural values about art-making, and learning to understand different criteria for excellence that make sense within the life worlds of these youth and practitioners. When I prioritized the individual, they gave me the collective. When I desired rebellion, they gave me structure and skill. When I wanted them to invent, they salvaged and remixed. When I hoped they would reveal, they wanted to encrypt. As one youth responded when I asked how she liked expressing herself, "Sometimes I just don't want to

share." As another youth emphasized, "In everything you do you should put a piece of yourself." So, they are making and communicating, gifting and contributing, and everyone is thriving together. It is important to understand this art-making as a culturally informed and deeply meaningful practice, and not as a stepping stone towards my own notions of valuable literacy practice, for instance, producing counter-narrative through identity texts. It is also not an opposing or peripheral practice; it contains many of the same pedagogical elements that also make identity performance meaningful for young people.

Engaging with facilitators allowed me to understand how their values inform program design, and how they are working to strengthen it within those parameters. For instance, they are working to respond to youth who desire more structured skill-building. It is difficult to maneuver in this direction because it seems to conflict with other identified program strengths. How could they protect and even leverage program strengths towards this goal? Youth are clear that they appreciate that the art is accessible and everything is taught step-by-step. This is achieved in the program through explanation, demonstration, and running dialogue that welcomes questions and encourages youth to problem-solve together. Importantly, even with structured tasks, this version of scaffolding or helping them complete their cycles of learning that are in progress in their ZPD can be carried out according to their own visions for the project, and not according to predetermined adult goals (Gutiérrez, 2008). Youth were also clear that they appreciate never being judged about their work. Pushing the youth to excel is still achieved in the program through projects of consequence instead of critique. For instance, the physical consequence of casting on improperly in knitting is that it will fall apart or warp. The social consequence of not completing the ornaments is that there might be people at the holiday party who would not receive a gift.

Learning through this partnership helped me to better understand the ways that practitioners respond to diversity within a culturally distinct group and create opportunities for relational art-making as a reciprocal and collective practice. I also reflected on how facilitators could engage program strengths towards structured skill-building, for instance, by scaffolding towards youth vision and continuing to offer projects of consequence rather than critique.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study explored the kinds of learning processes that equity-seeking youth and practitioners desire, and what strategies they use to design and refine their vision. Through 12 expert interviews and two research partnerships, I learned about the many different ways youth and their support networks conceptualize and enact relational pedagogy, including through attention to languages and modalities. In the preceding chapters, I shared my research findings, analysis, and discussion. In this chapter, I identify theoretical ideas that could help link this study with a broader set of phenomena (Akker, Gravemeijer, McKenney, & Nieveen, 2006; Reinking & Bradley, 2008). I have also reconstructed elements of relational pedagogy that work in specific contexts and generated practical insights and tools that are open to interpretation and adaptation for other contexts (Akker et al., 2006). Finally, I discuss limitations of the study and consider opportunities for further research.

Theory Creation and Elaboration

Relational pedagogy.

As previously mentioned, in this research I have taken a relational perspective, which means I am interested in how care and connectivity influence every aspect of young people's lives, including the way they learn. The "sensitizing concept" (Charmaz, 2014) of relationality influenced my research questions, the participants and partnerships I chose, and the interview protocols I created. Many of the cultural, professional, and/or personal values of my research participants centred on nurturing close connections with youth and strengthening their ties to all possible supports in their lives. As established by Irizarry (2007) and Ladson-Billings (1995), relational pedagogy is an integral component of culturally sustaining pedagogy. I used relational

pedagogy as a touch point when engaging in theoretical analysis, comparing my own emergent ideas from focused codes, memos, and journals to existing frameworks. In the following section, I explore three recurring concepts that I found across all three studies regarding relational pedagogy: the people are the program, moving across the learning ecology, and accessing diversity within distinct cultural groups. In my discussion, I return to the First Nations Holistic Life Learning Model (CCL, 2007), Stewart's (2011) adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and Tuck's (2009) theory of collective complex personhood within a desire-based theory of change, among others.

The people are the program.

It became clear as I was speaking with research participants that the topics and activities that ostensibly constitute youth programming are often secondary to the relationships that are built because of or despite them. In her programming with refugee youth, Corinne (leadership/settlement) admits how much of program content is predetermined by funding requirements, but then later describes how she will work around those mandates to meet the needs of the youth, particularly through fostering relationships within and beyond the program, and through the pedagogical choices she makes with deep awareness of their socio-emotional and cultural needs: "I'll just adjust it so that we can do it in a different way for them." Shirley (principal, K–12 school) perceives how Elders are integral to her students' education, saying, "They are the program." Shirley explains that advice from Elders informs decision-making at the school, that they are a vital part of sustaining cultural education, and that this is not just a strategy, but a way of life. She emphasizes the way that being out on the land facilitates focused and meaningful learning from the environment and the Elders. Similarly, facilitators and youth in the newcomer art program have built a community that inspires them to show up for each other

and not necessarily for a specific activity. Youth want to participate because their friends are there, or they agree to come because a caring adult invites them: "I asked my friends who are here, every time there is something going to happen here, we're here, every time Ate Viola wants us to be here or doing other stuff, volunteering to do other stuff outside the youth space or inside the youth space, we're here."

In some ways, the emphasis on people and relational pedagogy in these programs feels like a radical departure from the curriculum design and funding mandates they are supposed to be working under. There is almost a secondary program running as an undercurrent beneath the official one, characterized by learning that is co-constructed in real time between people who have formed relationships of trust.

Accessing diversity within culturally distinct groups.

Another recurring theme in this research is the importance of not making assumptions about youth and their learning based on their cultural background. For instance, in his photography program, Gilad asks youth what they need to feel safe and helps them have those conversations with each other, rather than assuming their shared culture or refugee experience puts them all in the same category. Youth and staff at the First Nations high school reminded me not to plan activities solely based on my interpretation of Indigenous pedagogy, but to stop and listen to the diverse interests and learning preferences of the youth in that space. This builds on the work of Castagno and Brayboy (2008) showing how reliance on knowledge of Indigenous "learning styles" can sometimes essentialize students, and systemic change needs to come from sovereignty and collective empowerment in education. They advocate not just for the rights of Indigenous peoples to control the education of their children, but for that education to in turn build the capacity of tribal nations to exercise self-determination.

Youth in the newcomer art program, despite being mostly from the same cultural group, also have diverse creative practice in their personal lives and a range of learning preferences that they bring with them to the program. Program facilitators in both contexts are trying to engage with an open mind to figure out: What does the group have in common, and how does each youth differ, in terms of values, motivations, and learning strengths? How can educators adapt to youth needs and interests while inviting them to try new things and push themselves within a framework that values who they are?

The findings of this study confirm the way Paris's (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy envisions culture as dynamic, drawing on Irizarry (2007, 2011), who proposes that successful teachers enact *cultural connectedness* by engaging with students' cultural fluidity. Irizarry views culture as collectively constructed, recognizing student identities as "complex because of the experiences and relationships they create with others" (2007, p. 22). They also align with Eve Tuck's adaptation of Gordon's (1997) concept of complex personhood for an Indigenous context in which the focus is on the interdependence of the collective and the individual. Tuck, drawing from Grande (2004), explains:

> Within collectivity, recognizing complex personhood involves making room for the contradictions, for the mis/re/cognitions, usually in an effort to sustain a sense of collective balance . . . For tribal peoples, this can mean resisting characterizing one another in ways that tacitly reduce us to being either trapped in the irrelevant past or fouled up by modernity . . . In sum, it is our work to afford the multiplicity of life's choices for one another. (Tuck, 2009, p. 421)

In keeping with these ideas, youth participants were making safe spaces for each other and exploring their cultural selves as contemporary, dynamic, and complex. They may speak

their languages and use skills they learned from their grandmothers, and they may experiment with new modes, materials, and friendships while still following the guiding values of their families and communities. Educators in my research study also worked to understand youth as having complex desires and needs and as constantly developing and sharing their cultural selves through relationships of trust.

Accessing the whole learning ecology.

Creating safe space for and with youth was a priority for most adults who work with them, but they often saw extending that safe space as essential to meaningful growth and development. I saw this as being described through four different phases:

1. **protecting**: enclosure and refuge with carefully curated experiences guided by trained professionals, sometimes anchored with one-on-one assessments and counselling;
2. **hosting**: inviting others into the safe space to work with youth according to the norms and guidelines that have already been established there;
3. **venturing**: leaving the safe space as a group to meet new people or experience new things, moving with the momentum of established solidarity and guidance; and
4. **accessing**: identifying and creating corridors to other areas of abundant care, advocating for and extending the reach of those emotionally/culturally/physically safe spaces.

Many of the research participants work within and across these phases simultaneously, but some linger in the *protecting* phase, particularly when real threats such as racism and violence seem to warrant it. Others are alternating between *hosting* and *venturing* to help youth eventually map out the routes they can take to accessing more. Some educators see themselves and their spaces as “home base” for the youth and focus on sustaining those opportunities, while

others move swiftly towards enabling *access* to a range of other spaces and accept that they will become part of a constellation of guidance to the youth, or that the youth may simply move on.

Some of the educators are particularly invested in enabling access through advocacy simultaneous to the other phases of creating safe space. For instance, Alexander (youth-led program) sees his role as directly linked to advocacy and helping refugee youth navigate institutions and services that are not always fair. It is this orientation towards addressing injustice that illuminates ecological learning models in a new way (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Stewart, 2011). This is not just about strengthening bonds and connections within a nested system of supports; it is about connecting youth with those specific people who will fight for them to have better relationships at every level, it is about having someone recognize their personhood and then force the macrostructures to acknowledge it as well. I am interested in this addition to Stewart's interpretation of the ecological model. She identified nano-systems, or intimate relationships of care within larger systems, as essential to refugee student success. In other words, one quality affirmative relationship makes all the difference. Does it make a difference mostly on a personal/emotional level so that a young person finds the encouragement to persevere and thrive, or as in the case of Alexander, do the nano-systems he enables have a strategic bearing on the way that a young person is positioned/related to at every level, in every sphere of their lives?

My research also revealed the ways that hosting can be a particularly challenging endeavour when inviting First Nations people into a school. Shirley emphasized how important it is to focus not just on the safety of the students, but on the safety of Elders who have experienced residential school. She suggests working out on the land can help overcome some of that negative association with a school space. Similarly, in my work with the First Nations high school, it was not easy for me to get Elders or cultural resource people to come into the school,

and I wonder how much of that was resistance/mistrust connected to unresolved histories of colonial violence in spaces like these. Studies show that Indigenous parents and community members often feel that they cannot go past the fence of the school yard, that only certain sanctioned Eurocentric behaviours and languages are allowed/taught within that space, and that teachers and administrators do not reach out or participate in community life outside of those boundaries (Agbo, 2007; Murphy & Pushor, 2004). As Cree scholar Donald (2013) has described, schools for Aboriginal children and youth replicate the fort in Canada's founding fur trade narrative; a separate Eurocentric space where teachers may "incorporate" or "infuse" Aboriginal perspectives into dominant patterns without allowing for meaningful exchange. Donald suggests that treaties offer a better narrative for teachers to draw from so that engagement with Aboriginal perspectives is "an opportunity for relational renewal and enhanced understanding" (2013, p. 29). In this sense, the work of making education meaningful and effective for Aboriginal youth is also the work of reclaiming their authority within formal and informal learning spaces and imagining and enacting new roles and relationships based in mutual respect. The school already had some cultural resource people and Elders working with the youth in various capacities, and that momentum continued to build during and after my research.

Engaging communicative repertoires.

Creating cycles of acceptance and expression.

Laying the relational foundation.

Many of the educators in this study engage youth in practices of expansive literacy that allow them to continue building their positive sense of self. Importantly, establishing a safe space and sense of solidarity comes first. For instance, Gilad prioritizes safety in his photography program: "We provide these workshops as a way of building community or building a safe space where

the youth feel comfortable about themselves and expressing themselves." Educators describe using a variety of strategies to establish this foundation, such as building non-oppressive relationships of trust; partnering to get a strong team in the room; encouraging personal choice, control, and self-determination; encouraging multilingualism and non-linguistic modes; and allowing the creative process to unfold. These are described in further detail in the section on Practical Insights and Tools.

Expansive literacies.

One of the strategies educators use to create cycles of acceptance and expression with youth was encouraging the use of their full communicative repertoires, including multilingualism and non-linguistic modes. For instance, in her comic book program, Nora encourages youth to use their languages in their art and uses drawing as a tool to help youth learn about one another through their drawings. Yvonne (EAL specialist) trains teachers to use hands-on engagement that allows for full participation by all learners:

> they have to ensure that the students in front of them are feeling that they are a part of, and that they belong, and that they are safe. And that's not done through words, that's done with how we engage our learners, and it's done with how they're participating and how they're going to be interacting with one another . . . even without speaking, can you understand one another? Is that built in? . . . anything that's hands-on for a language learner, that they can interact and produce and understand, they're going to be very good at it while they're learning to do it.

At the First Nations high school, youth were able to demonstrate their capacity for interaction and communication when the activities allowed for a range of modes, such as hands-on building, making, and experimentation. With the newcomer art program, youth were encouraged to speak

whatever language they preferred and to engage with a range of expressive modes that facilitated further verbal and non-verbal communication and collaboration.

Returning to the work of Gutiérrez (2008), we see how this study builds on her theory of socio-critical literacy where a collective Third Space facilitates cycles of deep learning. Although only a handful of my research participants engaged youth explicitly in sociopolitical critique, many were involved in cultivating "authentic interaction and a shift in the social organization of learning and what counts as knowledge" (p. 152). Many of them were also working along similar lines to this idea of collective Third Space as a reworking of Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, where youth are moving themselves towards their own creative visions and goals and not being scaffolded towards predetermined outcomes. Like Gutiérrez, I found that activities that engaged imagination, dialogue, and play created space for youth to fully participate, learn deeply, and extend their repertoires of practice (2008).

Moving within and beyond authoring identity.

Helping youth to author and present artistic pieces about themselves can be an affirming experience (Cummins, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011). However, for some young people in some contexts, the concept is being adapted or countered. Some youth have a cultural or individual preference not to share personal details with strangers, especially in groups experiencing trauma, oppression, or the attempted erasure or exploitation of their languages, stories, and ways of thinking. Some youth also prefer to focus on collective and reciprocal projects, rather than draw attention to themselves. Additionally, educators and facilitators may have limitations that make it difficult to do authoring identity well; they may not have access to the necessary partnerships and resources or be able to establish safety within a group that is in flux.

How can I engage critically with my own expectation that youth can and should share their stories as a way to build self-esteem, heal, and engage in resistance and socio-political critique? In particular, I am interested, as were many of the educators in my study, in helping youth create counter-narratives so that they can speak back to power and challenges assumptions about their lives. Youth have their own ways of claiming power, which can involve telling their story as in the example of Gilad's photography program, direct advocacy and political action as in the example of Alexander's youth-led group, or creating joy and beauty in their own lives and the lives of others as in the example of Corinne's youth group giving out cards and singing on Valentine's day. I am interested in a feminist analysis of why nurturing and aesthetic accomplishment are so often treated as lesser pursuits, and the ways they could be conceived of as political. Drawing on Willis (1977) and Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987), Tuck and Yang (2014) remind us of the ways that agency and desire do not necessarily lead youth to confront oppression in the ways that researchers/adults want them to. In a memo written in April 2018, I reflected on these contradictions:

> Just as I have wondered at times if this program was enough about performing identity, I have also wondered if it is political enough. The community engagement and volunteering [are] based around gifting and lifting spirits, but the youth respond well to the dual goals of improving their skills and giving back to the community. Does every youth space need to become a forum for discussing and dismantling oppressive systems? Or is that an unfair burden that adults sometimes place on young people, projecting malaise, romanticizing youthful restlessness, and asking those with very little systemic influence to initiate and inspire structural change? For youth coming from countries where violence and unrest are commonplace, or from families who have lived those fears

> and losses, what are the complexities of resisting and being good? It reminds me of Desmond, the First Nations student who articulated how dangerous the city is and how he learned to navigate it. Everyone talks about wanting youth to feel safe, but many are not. Safety is not a construct, it is an elusive goal for many First Nations people who encounter racism and physical risk daily. Feeling safe is much easier when a young person is safe. So, we want them to be political, but also successful within current systems. We want them to feel welcome and free to move, but we want to protect them from real danger.

Growing and sustaining.

Understanding disruptions to the design process.

We are not a grocery store.

Some of my participants describe feeling that youth, or the idea of youth, is exploited for purposes that do not further the interests/rights of young people. Researchers are no exception. I had many meetings and phone calls with organizations and individuals to ask if they would be interested in partnering on a research project. Many of them politely declined, and a few illustrated previous negative experiences with researchers that have solidified their resolve to say no. As previously shared, here is Alexander's description of working with researchers and journalists:

> At times "youth" is like this buzzword, like people want to work on youth stuff in their PhDs or whatever, so I get requests all the time from people whose initial thing is like, "I really want to volunteer, I see that you work with youth, I'd like to volunteer with youth." And I'm like, "hmmm, ok, we'll see – " And then it's oftentimes it's "Well, I'm doing this project –" And I'm like, "Well, we're not a grocery store." Right? . . . Sometimes

> it's . . . a bit too much [for the youth], where they're like, "We just want to just *be* instead of always having to tell our stories."

Nora (comic book program) also describes how she wishes funders would focus on what youth actually need and not on funding a flashy short-term project that will make their organization or company look good through youth branding. These inequitable interactions disrupt and take away time from the design processes that educators need to be engaging with. They also represent a missed opportunity for collaboration, particularly with researchers, that could help organizations enrich their design processes. In a memo written on April 2018, I responded to Alexander's concern:

> This is such an important statement. It haunted me throughout my attempts to partner with organizations throughout the year, and the fact that I did eventually find a partnership by volunteering and then asking about research once I had their trust. We need to think about different ways to "recruit" participants that are based in mutual benefit and that are transparent. Part of the problem is that the PhD removed me from my networks and in many ways removed me from my creativity and sense of self-efficacy. Emerging from that kind of isolation and rigid institutional training put me at a disadvantage for organically connecting with others on shared projects. And yet being too closely linked to something can be considered a risk for bias. We need to figure this out because so many people I approached were suspicious and cited recent negative experiences with researchers. How can we show some collective responsibility to our profession and to community organizations, and not leave people feeling used? How can we do better than embodying this metaphor of clearing the grocery store shelves? What does this metaphor say about people feeling that their lived experiences are for sale or

open to scrutiny? Like they say in the next line, "we just want to just *be* instead of always having to tell our stories."

I then began to explore the possibilities of longer-term relationships with institutions and teams of researchers, so that relationships of trust and the real responsibilities of maintaining them are not with just one person in a transitional phase of life. This would require a major reworking of the core values of individualism in our colonial institutions. See the Harvard University Native American Program and their research initiatives as a positive example (HUNAP, 2018).

Counting souls.

Educators often felt stressed and pressured to fill their programs with sufficient numbers of youth so that the funding would continue to flow. With the newcomer art program, Viola wished that funders would show an interest in qualitative reporting about the depth and not just the breadth of work. How does pressure to attend conflict with trauma-informed approaches that emphasize choice and control? How does pressure to attend change the dynamic of the space, as Alexander noticed after he stopped worrying so much about numbers? How does this model of social services create competition between organizations? It contains echoes of the way different churches had to bid for who could run residential schools with the least amount of funding for the most children. Corinne (leadership/settlement) reminds herself that it is okay when numbers are low if it is because youth are connected to other opportunities like jobs, volunteering, and sports. However, funding structures may discourage organizations from helping youth *Access* other safe spaces and incentivize them to maintain their *Protecting* role. How can youth be counted within a collective of care rather than claimed, and how can reporting reflect the quality of the work? See Programs Without Walls as a positive example of community partnerships in social service work (Macaulay Child Development Centre, 2018).

Fear and failure fatigue.

Fear and "failure fatigue" prevent imaginative design work. Frances, high school ESL teacher and curriculum lead, is concerned that downsizing and temporary positions can make teachers afraid to share and collaborate to improve things for the students,

> They had been moved to many schools, but they weren't open to sharing. Some people get insecure about what they're doing, and they don't want any judgement, and that's not the attitude that we have in our department. . . . I think that the staffing will continue to change, and this year we lost 24 teachers at our school so we're downsizing. I'm feeling that I've lost some of that energy.

Similarly, staff at the First Nations high school were impacted by limited resources, instability, and real safety risks in the lives of youth. As I have written about in Chapter 5, this made it difficult to brainstorm without running into memories of those barriers and challenges.

Vulnerability and risk-taking are essential to the design process and to working with youth. How can we address macro-structural variables that make it difficult for adults to create a sense of stability and security in their own lives, let alone in the lives of youth? How can we build in a healthy interaction with past setbacks, so that those are still areas of learning that can be revisited rather than avoided? Organizations and educators trying to keep their programs afloat are also often working with youth whose interactions with inequitable systems keep them in a state of crisis. As first discussed in chapter 3, Tuck (2009) creates possibilities for longing amidst these realities, drawing on Vizenor's (1994) concept of survivance: "Moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal" (p. 53).

Initiating/reclaiming the design process.

Despite interacting with inequitable macro-systems, research participants strengthened their design processes by enacting double agency, suspending disbelief, and sharing knowledge. Double agency is the capacity for educators to simultaneously work within and outside of systemic constraints in order to respond to youth needs and desires, sometimes in partnership with representatives of other agencies who are maneuvering in the same way. Suspending disbelief is the capacity for educators to engage in imaginative thinking and ambitious planning even after experiencing setbacks and can be catalyzed through small glimpses of possibility that shift thinking and change the narrative. Sharing knowledge is the capacity for practitioners to share promising practices, problem-solve together, and access and contextualize current research for their purposes.

Practical Insights and Tools

The following section takes the findings and analysis from my research and begins to imagine how these ideas might be useful for certain audiences and purposes. In keeping with design research strategies, the hope is that the reader will gain inspiration from these specific examples to adapt and apply in their own way. I have kept these concise so that they can easily be read and interpreted by busy practitioners.

10 ways to help youth express their identities.

My research has shown that helping youth author aspects of their own identity can be a powerful and affirming experience for them. It also uncovered ways this can be a complex endeavour that risks re-traumatization and/or feelings of being reduced or exploited. The experienced educators I interviewed shared strategies they use to mitigate these risks and create a safe space where this type of deep learning can occur. I focused primarily on actions taken by interviewees whose

programs centre on authoring and presenting identity (Gilad, photography; Nora, comic books; Jackie, art therapy). I also referred to the work of interviewees whose programs include art-making that culminates in presentation, though not necessarily/always about individual identity (Corinne, youth leadership; Wendy, poetry-Elder Project, Alexander, youth-led program). The following list of promising practices is compiled from the various strategies these experienced educators find effective. I hope they will give other practitioners working in this area some ideas that they can develop or adapt for their own specific purposes:

1. **Partnering to get a strong team in the room**: Depending on the vulnerability of the group, it can be helpful to have trained mental health professionals in the room to foresee potential triggers and help the youth manage things that come up. Sometimes this means that artists reach out to counsellors who already know the youth, or that schools reach out to art therapists. Sometimes settlement workers/counsellors reach out to artists and collaborate in a space that is familiar to youth.
2. **Being or training non-oppressive adults who can be trusted**: This can be done through being real and vulnerable with the youth and showing reciprocity by learning from and with them. It can also be achieved by listening to the youth and adapting to their needs, rather than assuming things about their experiences or cultural identity.
3. **Creating collective guidelines for respectful interaction**: Facilitators can guide explicit conversations about how people want to treat each other, and particularly what the shared expectations are about responding to each other's art. These ideas, generated by the youth themselves, can be documented and referred to for mutual accountability.
4. **Facilitating preliminary activities that strengthen group solidarity**: Facilitators can help establish a feeling of safety and care within the group by guiding activities that

require collaboration or enable shared experience. For example, games that invite youth to move around the space so they feel they belong there or activities that encourage feelings of togetherness as youth work on similar projects side-by-side.

5. **Encouraging personal choice, control and self-determination**: Youth can be encouraged to go at their own pace, take a step back, or ask for support. They can be reminded about choices they have about when and how their story is shared. They can be encouraged to share things that are complex and generative, and not be pressured to tell stories of pain or fill in the images others hold of them.
6. **Encouraging multilingualism and non-linguistic modes**: Facilitators can fully accept youth and expand creative potential by encouraging access to all of their expressive tools. This can include welcoming their languages and whatever forms of creative expression they connect with, so that the identity youth express feels authentic to them in form as well as content.
7. **Allowing the art-making and creative process to unfold**: Once the groundwork for safe space has been initiated, the process of making art can further extend the space in which youth feel they can express themselves authentically. Creative process can be an affirmative and grounding experience that allows for imagination, experimentation, perseverance, and actualization.
8. **Allowing the artist to emerge**: Placing equal or greater emphasis on art materials and/or skill development can take pressure off of the individual and their story. Understanding their work as artistry can help them access feelings of control and competence and facilitate belonging to a community of practice.

9. **Sharing back**: Youth can share aspects of themselves through their artwork and be affirmed within their group or with broader audiences. Showcasing their work more broadly can be meaningful and expand the spaces where they feel seen according to their own narrative. This can be done through exhibits and galleries, films, books, celebrations, readings, and performances. The showcase can also celebrate process and effort, involve youth and give them a sense of ownership, and value the work through the quality of the publication or event.
10. **Debriefing and following up**: The process of sharing personal stories can be powerful and leave youth wondering what comes next. It can be helpful to guide youth in processing the experience and considering next steps within or beyond the group. What other opportunities are there for developing their skills, accessing equipment or materials, or reaching out for support? What opportunities are there for them to continue becoming artists, mentors, or leaders?

20 creative projects youth can do for and with others.

The following is a list of 20 creative projects inspired by my research participants: youth seeking cultural and linguistic equity and the practitioners who support their artistry. Each of these projects engages youth in a creative process that is real, relevant, and relational but does not ask them to author or present individual identity. I generated these by going back through my findings and analysis searching for descriptions of creative practices that are collective or serve others. These practices are listed below with one or more examples from my expert interviews or research partnerships.

1. **making and listening**: listening deeply while sanding bone for a necklace, carving soap, lifting tools, or knitting a scarf;

2. **reciprocating**: exchanging stories to learn about each other, writing poetry about the stories Elders share, and teaching adults a new language they've never spoken before;
3. **reclaiming**: taking back stories and languages and working on rebuilding them away from oppressive systems in places where people value them;
4. **gifting**: making gifts for people who would enjoy receiving them, like crafting bookmarks for friends and ornaments for the Elderly;
5. **decorating**: decorating the walls with affirming images and messages and collaborating to transform program spaces into event spaces;
6. **celebrating**: sharing food and laughter, participating in book launches, designing haunted houses and Halloween parties, making a big deal about birthdays, and celebrating the first day of snow;
7. **healing**: healing together through the meditation of photography, the focus and relaxation of painting, and the release of drumming;
8. **harmonizing**: practising, being swept away by the beauty of combining voices, drawing the audience into the magic;
9. **choreographing and synchronizing**: inviting youth from all cultural backgrounds to practice for and win a dance competition!
10. **life-saving**: doing the creative work of preventing fires and knowing first-aid, protecting life and putting it back together again;
11. **building**: learning to make furniture so you don't have to buy it, knowing the value of birch bark baskets;
12. **remembering**: remembering the whole history that others keep forgetting;

13. **inventing**: moving words around until they make a poem, imagining new configurations and purposes for everyday objects, playing and experimenting with scientific principles;
14. **salvaging and repurposing**: gathering flowers that have already fallen, finding beads on the floor, clipping pictures from a newspaper, pressing them in the pages of books, using them when the time is right;
15. **closing the circuit**: learning to make a pair of shoes from start to finish; completing an electrical circuit to light the bulb; hunting, cutting, packaging and delivering caribou to the community;
16. **elaborating**: printing a sketch of a photo of a Tumblr girl, drawing it yourself, arranging it as an installation with lights and writing on the wall;
17. **thriving together**: collectively improving and skill-sharing, inspiring others to try something new, belonging to an artistic community of practice, becoming a mentor to other youth;
18. **getting it right**: working with determination and precision to sketch a human face, to cast on properly so the scarf will not warp, asking for guidance and fixing mistakes;
19. **encrypting identity**: exploring versions of self as a bitmoji or Tumblr girl, in the way each handmade gift has something of yourself within it; and
20. **receiving from/creating with the land**: trapping, snaring, hunting, learning language on the land, listening to Elders on the land, understanding what can be done in every season.

Limitations

As previously mentioned, limitations at both of my research sites made it difficult for me to get youth input into program design or to include youth voice in my research. In my partnership with the First Nations high school, the students were experiencing trauma as a result of the suicide

epidemic, and many were managing life-threatening mental health challenges themselves. Most did not want to/could not prioritize research. In my partnership with the newcomer art program, youth input was generated as part of a longer-term planning process but could not genuinely be responded to within the timeframe I was suggesting for research. In both cases, it was very difficult to get youth to return their consent forms, and in many cases the youth who participated were older youth who were able to sign for themselves. In both cases, I had intended to do observational research, but youth often returned their consent forms near the end of the program after the majority of my notes could have been taken. Additionally, I was unable to complete member-checks with the two youth interviewees at the First Nations high school because I was concerned the process would reveal their identities to staff.

I also found drawbacks to some design research strategies given the complex contexts I chose to research in. Given that the role of the design researcher is akin to that of a collaborator or even consultant in some iterations, a certain amount of expertise is implied. I sometimes wondered if this would work better for a professor rather than a graduate student in the ambiguous space of learning/apprenticing. I also found that because I was using constructivist design research and not controlling the process, the design often moved in and out of my areas of knowledge. For instance, I set out to guide a project about cultural knowledge, intergenerational storytelling and arts-based expression, but the interests of students and partnering facilitators were quite broad and varied, and not all of them were easy to connect back to my strengths.

Additionally, I set out to find contexts where an intervention was likely to succeed despite initial challenges and where the educator and organization were committed but not superhuman (Brown, 1992; Reinking & Bradley, 2008). This is in keeping with the goals of design research to determine "what can occur under good, but not highly unusual, instructional

circumstances" (Lehrer & Schauble, 2004, p. 640). This is a difficult criterion for work with equity-seeking youth and the organizations that serve them, who are often scrambling from one crisis to the next. The First Nations high school was managing significant mental health crises. The settlement organization was also dealing with turnover, and the staff member who had agreed to partner on research left the organization. This meant less data collection at the outset, and more input from team members who were adjusting and learning on the job. Times of change and turmoil are not ideal for testing an instructional idea. At the same time, these "unusual" circumstances are in fact representative of the daily reality in which research participants work and learn.

I also recognize that within my expert interviewing process there are many important mentors in young people's lives that I did not reach out to. Although I interviewed a wide range of professionals involved in supporting youth, and many of them had cultural and community connections, I did not include other experts in their personal support networks such as Elders or parents.

Finally, I found there were limits to how I could conduct grounded theory analysis with some of the data that I generated. In particular, Aboriginal participants tended to share their ideas in an Indigenous narrative style that spiraled back to add new layers of meaning, sometimes through metaphor and imagery. After line-by-line coding and identifying my own conceptual categories, I sometimes found myself putting these narratives back together and feeling relieved when they were whole again, as in the instances when I sketched portraits. At times I felt that I did not need to add anything to the stories I was told and felt that whole sections of my thesis where I have added little introductory phrases and framing are like the work of pharmaceutical companies that patent plant life by altering the genetic make-up just a little bit. I think of the way

Kentucky became a producer of bourbon because settlers could claim land by planting corn on it, even when there was already too much corn. In this way, have I laboured upon something to claim it as my own?

Future Research

As I established at the beginning of this dissertation, many learning environments in Canada fail to adequately meet the needs of equity-seeking youth, particularly those who are linguistically and culturally non-dominant. Education systems in Canada are not adequately meeting the needs of Aboriginal students who experience the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies, being constrained by deficit models, and facing macrostructural barriers (Alberta School Boards Association, 2011; CCL, 2007; Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Kanu, 2002; Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 2005). Education systems in Canada are also failing newcomer youth by denying adequate access to culturally appropriate programs, supports, and learning environments (Shakya, Khanlou, & Gonsalves, 2010; Van Ngo, 2009).

While education and literacy are often framed as tools of advocacy and upward mobility, positive impact depends on how that education is designed, including which values and practices it upholds. In this study, I have strived to better understand the teaching and learning processes that equity-seeking youth and practitioners desire and the communicative and relational strategies they use to move towards this vision. I explored strategies that educators use to initiate/sustain cycles of acceptance and expression by laying a relational foundation and using multimodal and multilingual approaches to allow for co-construction of pedagogy and meaning. I considered how educators work with young people to decompress and extend the spaces in which youth feel they can express themselves as themselves. I also explored the ways youth move within and beyond authoring identity and assert create or sustain artistic practices of

cultural and/or personal significance to them. Finally, I considered ways that educators are working to strengthen their work, including through their design process and confronting the inequitable systems they work within.

It would be interesting to further contextualize these findings by exploring the ways that youth practice literacy, creativity, and making across different contexts of their lives and to include interviews with family members. Broadening and contextualizing the work in this way could better elucidate nested systems of support (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Stewart, 2011) and honour the many people who act as learning guides (CCL, 2007). It would also connect my work with a rich tradition of emplaced research on youth literacies and lives (e.g., Mitchell & Rentschler, 2016; Rogers, Winters, Perry, & LaMonde, 2015). Additionally, it would be worthwhile to further explore when and where youth feel compelled to author and perform identity, and what factors contribute to their sometimes resisting these practices and claiming others. Under the right circumstances, do most youth enjoy exploring and sharing who they are? What is the potential for adapting this practice in contexts where reciprocity and collectivity are valued? How can educators work to recognize and develop other forms of making and creating that are meaningful to youth?

Finally, I imagine that future research in this area could be methodologically innovative, seeking ways to make the research process itself part of healing through self-determination. These might be opportunities for meaningful participation through visual and multimedia representation (e.g., Mitchell, 2011), sensory work that connects to body and place (e.g., Pink, 2009), or inviting participants to make decisions about how broadly their pieces/statements are shared. For instance, they could be encouraged to feel freedom of expression through control by deciding which work is destroyed, kept and viewed only by them, shared within the small group,

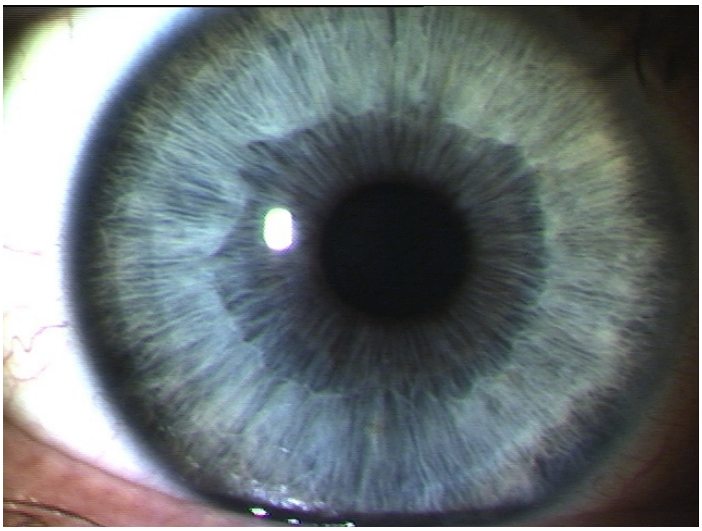
or destined for public audiences. Finally, questions of audience and implied potential for change-making could be further investigated. Further research could consider, as Mitchell does (2017), whether target audiences are engaging meaningfully with what young people author and present about their lives.

CHAPTER 8: RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS AND AESTHETIC EXPERIMENTS

Learning and Unlearning to Research

Ocula Obscura.

This piece is about the limits of my ability to tell the story of this study as an outside researcher. It is about the way my eye functioned as a pinhole camera, flipping the image and recording only the silhouettes of real lives on the wall of a dark room. It is about the way my gaze, my blue eyes with their floral wallpaper pattern, is also the gaze of my institution and all the researchers who have come before me. It is about the vulnerability I feel knowing people can examine my eye now, up close, and see right through me.



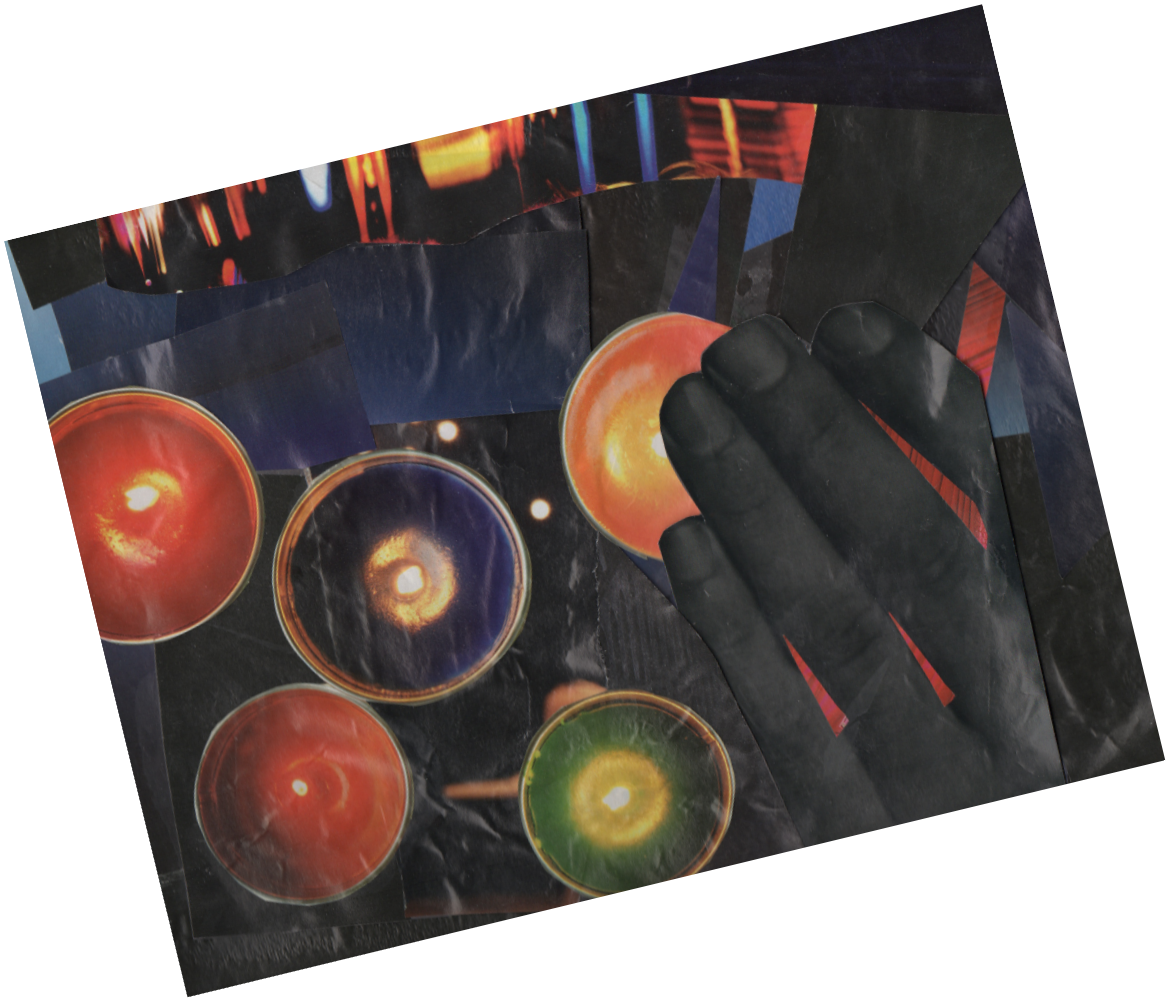
Undoing Double Binds.

Throughout my research, I was pulled in different directions by the promises I made to not cause harm and to produce something useful. So often these goals seemed directly opposed. Below are two sides to a postcard I have created. On one side, you can see the work of healing and protecting; on the other, the promise of new growth and innovation. Each of the instructions below corresponds to a cut that can be made in the postcard, so that when you are finished cutting, you can open the double bind and step through it.[3] This is what the process of thirding looks like, of what finding liminal space looks like, of what resistance looks like. It is complex, it is creative; it is not permanent. It is through those moment-to-moment decisions, sometimes mundane, sometimes courageous, that the space opens up and may close again.

Instructions:

1. Commit to being harmless. Commit to being helpful. Gather candles for comfort on cold nights. Light them for the vigil. Lay down railroad and string up power lines. Surge into the industry of knowing more than ever before. *Glue these paper promises back to back.*
2. Sway at the back of the room, shift your icy feet, turn your back and tie your hands to a notebook. Wear sunglasses and witness nothing. Fold yourself in half when the wind blows off the lake and your own abiding silence is more than you can take. *Fold the paper in half the long way*.
3. Fall through your leafless morning and hear the winter branches snapping, clear the snow from your throat and feel the sap tap tapping. The snarl that slows your quick descent, the voice unleashed by accident. *Cut a slit on each side near the left and right edges. The slits should be vertical and go down from the fold.*

[3] With help from www.wikihow.com/Fit-Your-Body-Through-an-Index-Card

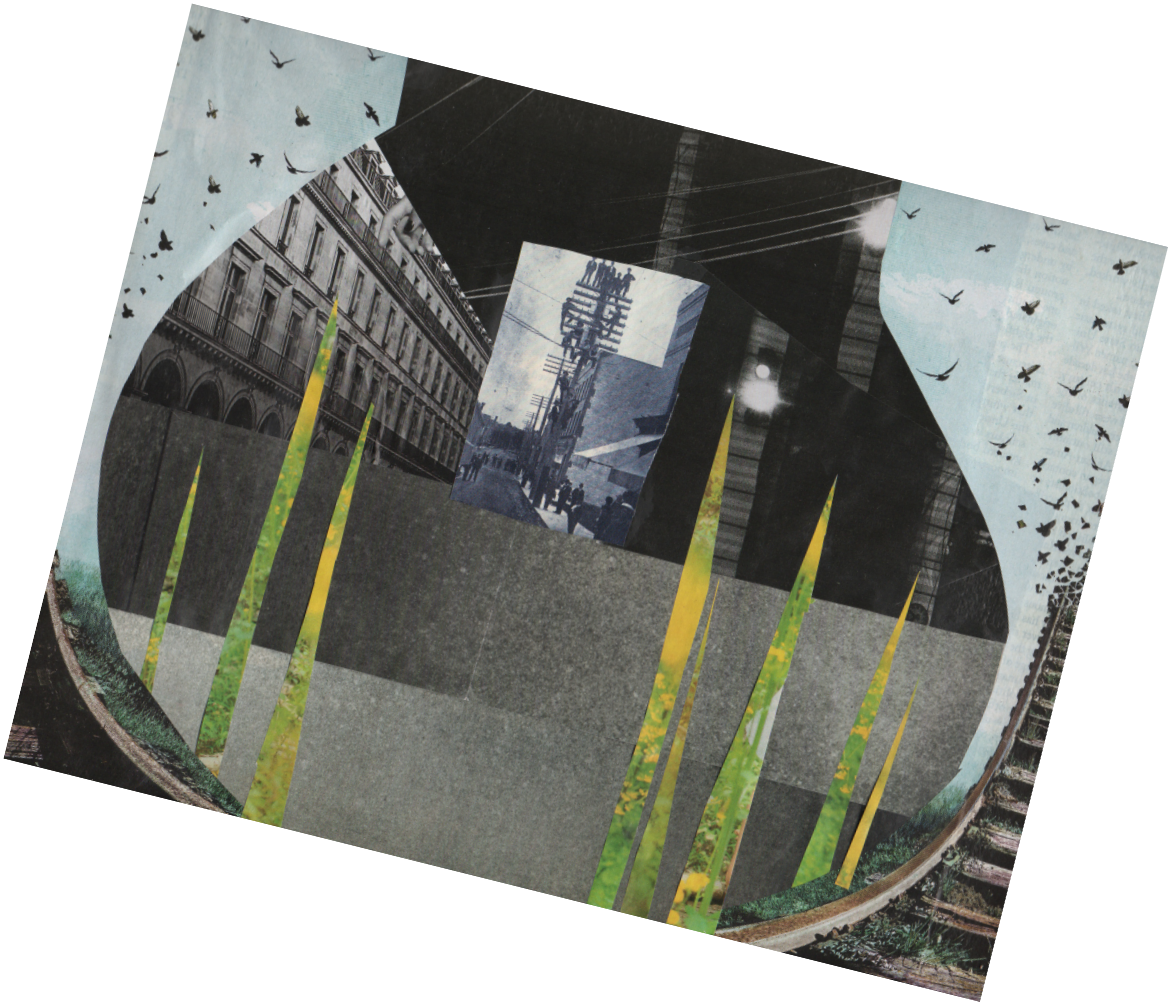


4. Sing the songs you already know when you're waiting for the bus and it's 50 below and the sweater you borrowed is full of holes and the meeting you planned was cancelled again and people keep mistaking you for someone else.

    Ring the bells that still can ring
    Forget your perfect offering
    There is a crack, a crack in everything
    That's how the light gets in.[4]

Snip off the folded edge, stopping when you reach the slits.

[4] From Cohen's song "Anthem" in *The Future*, 1992.



5. Slow it down and see it all, the monopoly man, the raven's claw, the judge's shoes down a long marble hall. Find love in the labyrinth, put desire in the doctrine. Dive through secret doors, across moving floors, past ridders and fiddlers and nevermores. *Alternate each cut, one coming from the unfolded edge and then one coming from the folded edge*.
6. Feel around in the dark for the space you have created. Enter with equal measures humility and courage. You will not tear, you will not implode, you will not "descend into the code."[5] *Carefully open up the paper and step through, watching the space close behind you again.*

[5] In reference to Ondaatje's poem "White Dwarfs," in *Rat Jelly*, 1973, p. 70.

Off the Record.

This is a piece about the majority of stories I witnessed and heard through this research process that were off the record. The many conversations I had – in coffee shops, in cubicles, in pizza places, in vans – that never became research. I will carry these forever, and they will become part of my knowing and my body in action in the world. Below is a consent form I have folded into a "fortune teller" or "chatter box." It celebrates the revelatory conversations and uninhibited playfulness that occurred when we took a break from research, and a celebration of everyone's right to say no to research before, during, or after.

Revisiting Imagery and Motifs

Hands at Work.

On my 24th birthday my partner gave me a dual-language book by Pablo Neruda called *The Hands of Day*, or *Las Manos del Dia*. I had forgotten it until now. *I declare myself guilty of never having/ fashioned with these hands I was given/, a broom. Me declaro culpable de no haber/ hecho, con estas manos que me dieron/, una escoba.* I think of Alethea gathering beads and flowers with her hands, knitting so quickly once she learned. I think of the children on Penelakut Island taking photographs of their hands next to their Elders' hands. I think of the children at Shirley's school opening to new knowledge as their hands worked to carve the soap. I think of Jackie asking the children, "What is clay like in your hand?" Downstairs I can hear my mother washing potatoes and singing to my daughter. They can hear my fingers tapping on the keyboard. *At this hour I cannot deny/ I had the time,/ time/ but not the hands, and so,/ how could I aspire/ with my mind to greatness/ and not be capable /of making/ a broom, not one,/ one? En esta hora no niego/ que tuve tiempo,/ tiempo,/ pero no tuve manos,/ y así, ¿cómo podría/ aspirar con razón a la grandeza/ si nunca fui capaz/ de hacer/ una escoba,/ una sola,/ una?*

Water Keeps Moving.

Alethea says about knitting, “once you learn how to start, it’s just the flow, it runs like water, you know, you just get the pace.” Gloria says, “When I think about changes in education and society as a whole, I think for anybody who wants to stop this, it’s going to be like standing in the river and trying to hold it back with their hands.” This is a piece about how water cannot be contained.

After Winter Comes Spring.

I caught some of my research participants at very difficult times in their lives. I caught some of them in the darkness of winter or in times of transition and uncertainty. I have heard later, off the record, of some of them thriving once the weather warmed, once the funding came in, once the rules relaxed. This dissertation is partly a celebration of the way youth and their communities make it through times of scarcity to enjoy abundance.

> The Europeans took our land, our lives, and our children like the winter snow takes the grass. The loss is painful but the seed lives in spite of the snow. In the fall of the year, the grass dies and drops its seed to lie hidden under the snow. Perhaps the snow thinks the seed has vanished, but it lives on hidden, or blowing in the wind, or clinging to the plant's leg of progress. How does the acorn unfold into an oak? Deep inside itself it knows – and we are not different. We know deep inside ourselves the pattern of life. (Hampton, 1995, pp. 31–32, as cited in Battiste, 1998)

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Appendices

Appendix A Interview Protocol: Expert Interviews

Introduction

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself as an educator? What is the context that you work in and what inspires you to do the work?
2. What is your teaching/facilitation philosophy? What do you truly care about when it comes to working with young people?
3. I am interested in interviewing you particularly because of your involvement in _____project/your commitment to_____in your teaching. Can you tell me more about this work? What are some specific examples or memories that stick out for you?

Values, strategies and concepts

4. Why do you choose to emphasize connections and relationships in your teaching? How did you come to learn about these values and concepts and understand them as important? Are any of them drawn intentionally from Indigenous teachings or pedagogy?
5. What are some strategies that you have used in this work in terms of:
    - Planning and preparation
    - Implementation
    - Sustained learning/follow-up/assessment or debriefing
6. What challenges have come up and how did you work to overcome them?
7. What impacts have you seen from this work with Aboriginal youth? With non-Aboriginal youth? How has it impacted you or other involved adults?

Insights into guiding principles

8. What are some guiding principles or values you use to keep you focused with this work in general?
9. What are some guiding principles do you use to make decisions about:
    - Topic and content explored
    - Materials and modes of communication
    - Your interactions and teaching moves
    - The overall tone, environment and group dynamic

Closing

10. How would you like to see your work with relational pedagogy continue to grow and change in the future? How do you imagine that this kind of work could be established and supported more broadly?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix B Survey: First Nations High School

Student 5

5. **What are your ideas for hands-on learning activities at the school?** (Circle all that apply and put a check mark by your favourites)

Arts

1. Painting or drawing
2. Photography
3. Video
4. Digital media (like graphic design, video games, animation)
5. Traditional crafts (like making birch bark baskets or mitts)
6. Mixing sound – rap, beats, music
7. Radio broadcasting
8. Traditional singing and/or drumming
9. Pow wow dancing
10. Other_____

Outdoor and traditional skills

1. Learning about First Nations history, treaties and land rights
2. Fishing, trapping, using different parts of the animal
3. Finding and using plants and medicines
4. Leadership, team work and problem-solving
5. Environmental care and protection (waters, lands, wildlife)
6. Survival skills, mapping and navigation
7. Learning and using your native language
8. Outdoor adventure sports and trips (i.e. rock climbing, hiking, sailing)
9. Learning cultural teachings, ceremonies and stories
10. Other_____

6. **How do you learn best? Circle all that apply, put a star on your top pick:**

- I learn best by listening to someone explain it
- I learn best by reading about something
- I learn best by talking with someone and asking questions
- I learn best by trying something until I figure it out
- I learn best by watching someone else do something first
- I learn best by writing, thinking and reflecting about something
- I learn best by looking things up on the internet
- Other_____

7. **What advice do you have for the school for planning interesting learning activities?**

Appendix C Sample Initial Coding

Source	Initial Code	Text
ExpertEducatorInterview_Jackie_2017	Using endless art forms as forum/platform for expression	There's no end to what we use in terms of the expressive arts, to give the kids a forum and a platform for expression.
ExpertEducatorInterview_Jackie_2017	Anticipating and observing to determine direction	And what generally happens – often we'll go along the lines of themes that are relevant for particular groups – but sometimes it's also more open and we just organically see what's coming up for these kids and what's being shared and from that.
ExpertEducatorInterview_Jackie_2017	Developing identity, visibility, connection in context	So I guess the philosophy behind it is that in order to feel connected and part of the school environment it's important for children to be seen and to have a sense of identity and to understand how they are in relation to the school context.
ExpertEducatorInterview_Jackie_2017	Providing forum for voice re longing/fear, past/present	So, I think very much that this provides a forum for them to be visible and to have a voice so they are able to share their experiences, the experiences of coming to Canada, the experiences of leaving their homeland, longings and fears, what they've left behind and how it is for them to be in school.
ExpertEducatorInterview_Jackie_2017	Developing identity, visibility, connection in context	So, I think that's an important philosophy – is that sense of connection, belonging, and real integration, through being visible, into the school environment.
ExpertEducatorInterview_Jackie_2017	Sharing books/projects with the school	And we've done that in various different forms too – we've even created books, we've done projects so that they can share within the school context as well.
ExpertEducatorInterview_Jackie_2017	Youth choosing when to share broadly, usually wanting to	It's entirely in their hands always -we've done specific programs so it's been a little different- but with this program it's entirely in their hands and they tend to really want to do this.
ExpertEducatorInterview_Jackie_2017	Using endless art forms as forum/platform for expression	There's no end to what we use in terms of the expressive arts, to give the kids a forum and a platform for expression.

Appendix D Sample Focused Coding

Example of focused coding for newcomer youth art program: Focused code "creating and extending safe space" under the heading "Implementation and adaptation" (Question 2) that categorizes initial codes and associated text segments.

Document name	Focused Code	Segment
Debrief notes artist Nov 3 2017	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Providing access to free/welcoming/non-discriminatory space	This is a safe space for them to hang out. It's hard in communities without these spaces, where you need money to go most places. They need that access to a space where they can feel safe and have fun. They don't have to deal with older people, say in a café, who might get annoyed by them or misunderstand them because they don't know them.
Closing interview artist Dec 20, 2017	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Program serving youth who don't know where to go	Because it's just a really good program to have in a city, and especially for newcomer youth because they don't know anything – not that they don't know anything – like they don't know where they should be going, they're at a loss some of them, especially the ones that are super brand new to the country.
Closing interview artist Dec 20, 2017	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Youth needing a free space to let loose/feel safe	And they need a free space to feel safe in and be able to just let loose and relax and stuff, and aren't pressured by anything like violence or drugs or alcohol or anything like that.
Closing interview artist Dec 20, 2017	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Having a safe place to hang out	Well I think that them coming to the Friday program is super beneficial because I feel like the impact it has is making friends and having a safe and quiet- well not quiet – but safe place to hang out, right?
Closing interview artist Dec 20 2017	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Building safety through art without language	They feel safe, they feel comfortable here and are willing to express themselves and open up. And that's just something that I feel can be done through art because you don't really need a language to understand it.
Closing interview staff_January 16 2018	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Providing safe space physically and through acceptance	Yeah, providing that safe space, not just physically, but providing that safe space by being there as a facilitator who would really accept them for who they are and let them be who they are.

Closing interview staff_January 16 2018	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Building confidence to create through safety/relating	but once you provide them that safe space for them to do these things, a space where they won't be judged, a space where no one cares if they make a mistake, a space where all of the other youth participating can relate to them, to each other – it gives them that confidence, it makes them empowered that they can do it,
Debrief notes staff Dec 1 2017	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Youth new to Canada traveling out of comfort zone	Many of the youth who came to program today have only been in Canada for two to three months. It's impressive because they left their neighbourhood [north part of city] and travelled all the way downtown to get their volunteer hours. They are out of their comfort zone.
Debrief notes staff Dec 15 2017	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Regulars feeling comfortable in the space	It's good. It's really busy. This group is made up of all the regulars so they feel comfortable in the space.
Debrief notes staff Nov 10 2017	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Student sharing feelings about first snow with her	One student has only been here for two months. This is his first snow and he's pretty excited. He told me about his experience seeing snow for the first time and how it felt. That's special.
Debrief notes staff Nov 10 2017	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Having this space for them matters	Having this space for them matters.
Debrief notes staff Dec 15 2017	How: Implementation and adaptation\Creating and extending safe space – youth/youth\Making space for all moods, types of expression, chaos	It's really chaotic but they're having fun. I like it. That's how program is – some of them are singing and dancing, some of them are really focusing on their decorating project, and some of them are kind of spaced out but they're willing to do more when I ask them to. I think it's cool that we have a space for all of that, for everything that they bring with them.