

From Researcher to Storyteller: For the Community, By the Community

I Belong Here Too: Understanding Collective Community and Cultural Resilience through a Highschool Mentorship Program for African and Caribbean Students in Canada

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Land Acknowledgement

McMaster University recognizes and acknowledges that it is located on the traditional and unceded territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the "Dish with One Spoon" wampum agreement.

Abstract

- How racialized immigrant students navigate their sense of belonging in predominantly white educational spaces
- Case study of a 2018 – 2019 mentorship program for African and Caribbean high school students, led by university students from the African and Caribbean Society
- Seek whether the sense of belonging and cultural identity affirmation that exists within the counter-space (the mentorship program) can live beyond those walls as students transition back out into the hegemonic white space
- Found that the students actively resisted white spaces through collective community, resulting in the building of cultural resilience and allowing them to navigate a world outside of the space where they felt heard and seen

Theoretical & Methodological Framework

THEORY

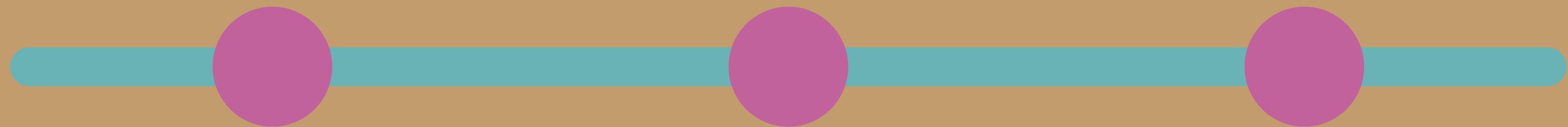
**Decolonial Theory
&
Critical Race
Theory**

METHODOLOGY

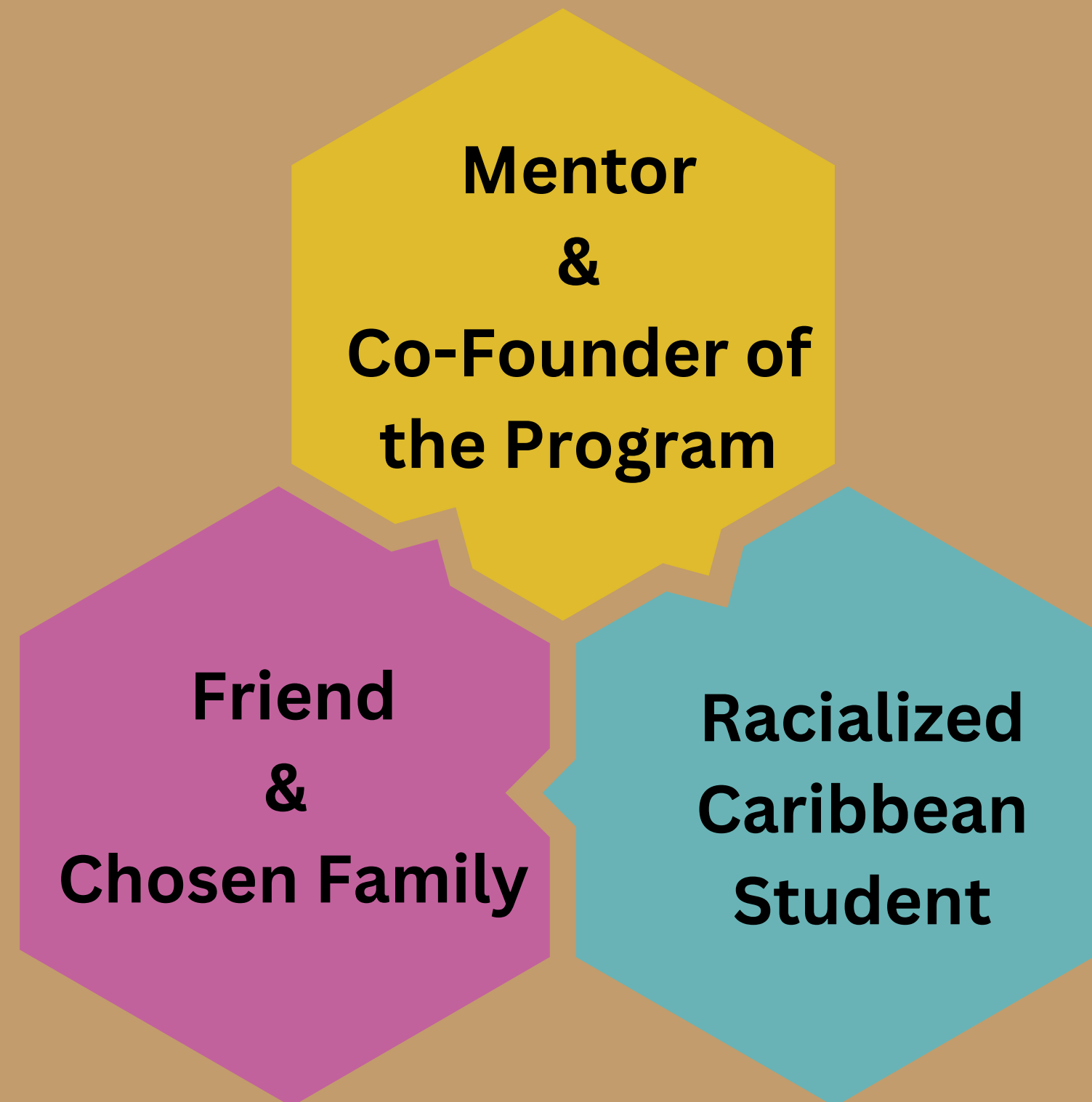
**Counter-Narratives
&
Lime & Ole Talk**

METHODS

**Reflective Journaling
&
Semi-Structured
Narrative
Conversations**



Positionality & Relationality



Introduction

- **The Story Behind the Story**

- Staging the scene through an opening vignette – sharing my motivation

- **Setting the Boundaries**

- "...this meta-narrative has been written to exist with the academy but it is by no means **for** the academy. This dissertation is **for** my community, it is **for** the individuals who entrusted me with their stories, so I tell this story for **them**."

- **A Project with a Purpose**

- Challenging educational research that often speaks for young people
- Creating space for racialized students to reclaim and rename the cultural and racial identities within white, Eurocentric spaces, viewing them as knowledge bearers and producers

Decolonial & Critical Race Framework

Decolonial Theory (DT)

- Challenging and disrupting the hegemonic norms that view Western knowledge as universal and non-Western knowledge as subaltern (Spivak, 1993)
- "Decolonization is a process that begins with opening spaces from which the colonized can speak, thus allowing the inclusion of counter-narratives that are written, spoken, performed, filmed, or otherwise created by subaltern, colonized or oppressed groups of people" (Chawla, 2018, p.119).

Decolonial & Critical Race Framework

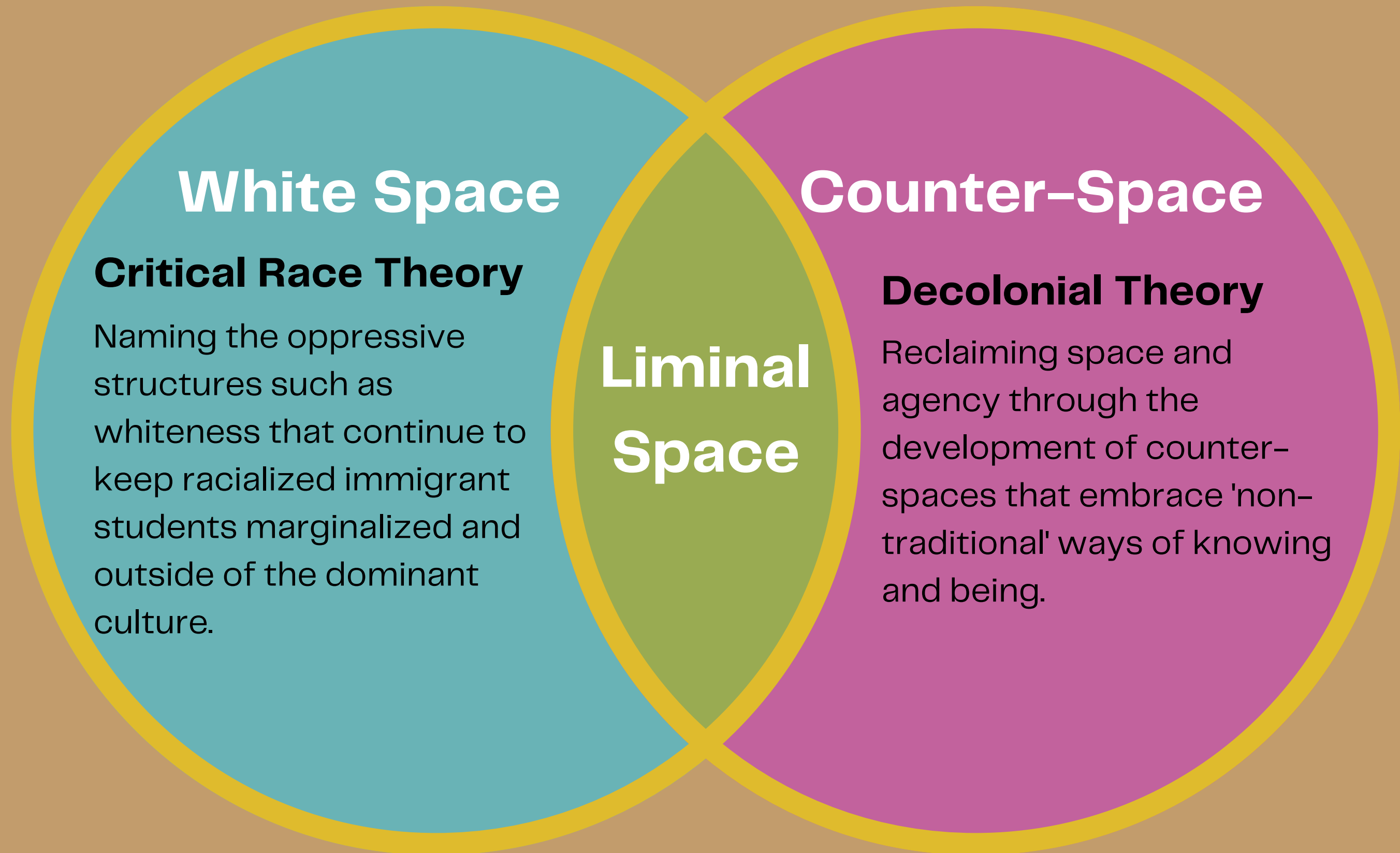
Critical Race Theory (CRT)

- Acknowledgement that race and racism are integrated into the fabrics of society (Ladson-Billings, 1998)
- "Critical race theory calls into question traditional claims of objectivity, race neutrality, meritocracy, equal opportunities and colour-blindness" (Bimper, 2017, p. 179)

Therefore:

- CRT allows us to name and interrogate systems of oppression, while DT provides the necessary tools to challenge and dismantle such systems.

When Theory Meets Concept



Building a Culturally Relevant and Critical Methodology

If methodologies have been used to silence and marginalize people of colour, methodologies can also give voice and turn the margins into places of transformative resistance.

Solóronzo & Yosso, 2002, P. 15

Decolonizing Research Practices

Research

- A practice, when disengaged from lived experiences of people, has stifled voices with centuries of exploitation, oppression, and trauma.
- Colonial motivations and abusive power dynamics rooted in exploratory and experimental research
- Call for a commitment to centre and value the voices and lived experiences of marginalized peoples
 - "Immigrant students' stories enter into 'little sites of struggle,' as they navigate restraining conditions" (Blommaert, 2008, p.21)
 - When provided with a trusting, supportive and culturally relevant environment, the telling of such stories become sites of empowerment and agency.

Storytelling Methodology

- Stories are just as important for the storyteller as they are for the reader.
 - "Oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their survival and liberation" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2436).
- Narratives are socially constructed and thus do not represent truth (Robinson, 2013)
 - Narratives do not claim universal truth but rather personal truths based on lived experiences "that form and inform histories, experiences and communities" (Samuel & Ortiz, 2021, p.5).
- Stories are emancipatory and transformative
 - "...we come to know ourselves through the world and its stories [and] we come to know the world through our experiences and our stories " (Lewis, 2007, p.11).

I Belong to Stories

I am a proud Trinidadian that grew up around the sounds of my family telling mismatched stories.

For me, stories were all we had.

I don't know the right spelling of my grandparents' names. I don't know who their parents were or where exactly they came from, but I do know of the stories that rang through our village.

The stories of resilience and strength that passed through the winds on which the indentured ships sailed.

And although these stories may have slightly changed over the years it is all I have—no history books, no documents, no birth certificates.

All I have are stories that deserve to be told, preserved, and shared.

A Combination Of...



Counter-Narratives

Rooted in Critical Race Theory

- Build a community among those at the margins of society
- Challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's centre
- Open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society
- Teach others that by combining elements from both the story and current reality, one can construct a world that is richer than either the story or the reality.

Solóronzo & Yosso, 2002, P.14



Lime & Ole Talk

Rooted in Caribbean Methodology

- Valuing indigenous ways of knowing and being
- 'Limin' – social engagement and 'Ole Talk' – Caribbean way of communicating
- Social space to speak freely, recount experiences, debate and build relationships
- Use of skylark (humor/joke/play around) and different forms of expression like show-off and vexation
- Limitations around focus and time

Nakhid-Chatoor et.al, 2008

Caribbean Research Methodologies



Method

Semi-Structured Narrative Conversations

- Reduce power hierarchies and intimidation that often come with 'interviews'
- Temporal lens – pre-mentorship, during mentorship, post-mentorship
- Stories often go undetected in interview research as participants are interrupted or re-directed when they go off-course
 - Shift from researcher – interviewer to listener– storyteller
 - Narrative generating– questions

Reflexive Journaling: Insider Knowledge

Journal Reflection - Energy

I think it's better to bring myself into the interview than to act isolated because I was a part of this program as well. Having the background knowledge and the common understanding, knowing the terminologies she was using to refer to certain things we did- I think it was good because we didn't have to go back and forth with descriptions. I also think she enjoyed the palm leaf and the coconut activity because it was familiar, it was home and it was an easy way to think about the good and the bad.

Reflexive Journaling: Relationality

Journal Reflection - Energy

I was able to relate to her and say, "Remember when this student did this?" or "I remember hearing this conversation, did you hear something similar?" At one point I was like am I showcasing bias by talking about my own memories, but I don't think so. I was using language like 'we' because it was a 'we' experience that we both had and we were able to relate on certain grounds but also share new knowledge with one another.

Reflexive Journaling: Positionality

Journal Reflection - Paris

We talked about how different it would be to talk about these things with someone who was white, someone who didn't understand or know what it was like. And for him, he brought up at the end that trust was important. If he didn't trust us, we wouldn't have gotten as far as we got.

The 'Biased Researcher'

"Although I cringed at inserting my own voice and ideas at the time, I recognized that building on the points of the other speaker, developing thoughts in the moment and co-constructing knowledge this way was a legitimate way of conducting interviews" (Burkhard, 2019, p. 189)

- My doubts were situated in Eurocentric ideals of objectivity
- To work within a CRT & DT framework, you also have to decolonize the mind and what you have internalized

Analysis

Narrative/Thematic Analysis

- "Stories are brought to life through the storyteller; however the story itself has life that is given to the teller and the listeners through the telling" (Lewis-Hilderbrandt, 2006, p. 831).
- Cautious of not co-opting or re-telling the stories in a way that takes away from the storytellers
- Hermeneutic techniques to note commonalities and narrative threads across all of the stories
 - "We change their stories by being changed by their stories" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2002, p.51).
 - Collective shared experience – "a story within a story"

Letter Writing

Dear Younger Paris,



You were really shy and found it hard to make new friends in a new country, but over time, you started to get comfortable and became more engaged in conversations. You always found it hard to talk about your culture because you were afraid that people wouldn't understand it, but it is heartwarming that you came to the realization that if you don't try to teach them, how else would they understand? You started off as the timid kind of person to someone with great leadership skills. People even started coming to you for advice! You then started following your passion for dance and you've developed so much in just less than three years. When you do something you love, with all your heart, you can achieve amazing goals! I am really proud of the person you've become and how inspiring you've become to others in your school and all around you. If I had a chance to go back, there is not a lot that I would do different because I am really happy of where I currently stand and that's all thanks to the development in character from younger me.

PARIS

Letter Writing

Hey Rey!



Hey young Rey!
I know nothing seems the same
But set your soul aflame
You aren't the one to blame

Your life is a book that's hardly done
You're 18 but still crawling in chapter one
Perfect surrounding but urging to be alone
Late nights, of course the phone
Trying hard but there's nothing that can
atone
A life of stanzas with the wrong tone

Why carry that cargo?
It's a river of vertigo
You should really let it go

A lightened path doesn't seem absolute
Because to many you remain mute
Just want to let you know ACS is the route
Yet you just gotta give it a minute!

It will spread your wings and help you ride
along
A comfort, a family, a home where you
belong
When you fall, they'll keep you strong
I'd let you correct me, except I'm not wrong!

REYSTON

Questions & Reflections

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