

**STORYTELLING AS A TOOL TO FOSTER RESILIENCE:
AN ARTS-BASED STUDY WITH POSTSECONDARY INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS IN THE NEWFOUNDLAND CONTEXT**

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Abstract

This paper is a study of resilience regarding international students studying at Memorial University of Newfoundland, living in the St. John's metro area. Using *visual-based narrative inquiry*, a form of arts-based research, participants were invited to share their resilience stories through discussions and book making in virtual group settings (Kim, 2019, p. 143). The benefits of arts-based research methods were explored: it equalized the power dynamic between the researcher and the researched, employed aesthetics to deepen the understanding of human experiences, and widened the readership and audience for research. Through this study, it is noted that resilience can be fostered and can vary based on the time, contexts, and challenges faced. The study concludes that arts-based practices can be used as a mental health tool to help foster resilience. Other areas as well as forms of support that Memorial University can employ and expand on to support the mental health and well-being of international students were also discussed, such as changing the university's culture to that of learning for learning's sake, involving all to become advocates through university-wide intercultural training and incorporating intercultural learning as well as mental health support within classroom settings, providing reflective spaces to further support staff and students. The author of this study intentionally explained her social contexts and subjective stance to increase transparency. In doing so, she hoped to provide a different perspective to this study of resilience: as a person of colour, a student support staff member at the University and a former newcomer.

General Summary

This is an arts-based study that explores resilience in the context of international students studying at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Outcomes suggest arts-based practices that involve storytelling can be used to foster resilience and in turn support mental wellness of diverse populations, including international students as well as those who support them.

Land Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge that this research is conducted in the traditional territories of diverse Indigenous groups, including the Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, Innu and Inuit in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. While the focus of this study is not on Indigenous Peoples and cultures, I would like to acknowledge that storytelling is a tradition of Indigenous Peoples that I reference and discuss in the paper that follows. In addition, I wish to thank the Indigenous students and staff, as well as Elders that I met, for teaching me the importance of storytelling, as well as alternate ways to see and do things. I recognize that it is a privilege not only to study and conduct this research on this land, but also to live, work, and play freely where my family and I have chosen and been invited to settle by other settlers. I am incredibly thankful for these opportunities. Throughout the period I conducted this research, I have been learning more about my role and responsibilities as an immigrant, hence a settler to this land. While I recognize mistakes are bound to take place, I am committed to further learning, and I would like to act upon lessons learned as knowledge without action is futile.

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challenge myself. And thank you Caylee, our beloved daughter. The resilience shown through your young life has been and will continue to be an inspiration to me.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

A friend living far away asked on social media how am I feeling. I remember as a child I have been told over and over again not to cry. Extreme emotions are not something I experience often, so with everything that is happening around me, I feel things are not quite right, but I have trouble pinpointing what I am feeling. I feel okay...most times...but am I? (S. Ho, personal journal, April 2020)

2020 was a difficult year for many people to say the least. Those of us living in the city of St. John's and the surrounding area, in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, were faced with a historic snowstorm that kept everyone at home for some time. Not long after the storm, we were sent home to self-isolate due to the COVID-19 pandemic. What had seemed like another news story impacting people far away suddenly became something close to home. Resilience became a subject of much discussion and study during this turbulent time. While the term had been circulating in my mind since I started my master's years ago and I was considering this as my thesis topic, when the pandemic lockdown began, I felt it was finally time to take the plunge. For one, having to stay home, there was more time for me to focus on writing. The study of resilience had also become incredibly timely and relevant: the uncertainties and unexpected events of the pandemic amplified the need for greater understanding of this important topic. As someone who supports postsecondary students, I wondered how we, who work at postsecondary institutions, could encourage and help students keep their heads above water and thrive as they experienced such a challenging and uncertain time. Furthermore, how could we become and/or stay resilient as helpers to better support others going forward? While pandemic regulations and policies are no longer in place, I aim to draw on the experience to find

opportunities to support students and deliver services differently. From my perspective, it is an exciting time if we can hit the restart button and try out new ways of doing things.

Personal Context

Before I begin, I would like to state that I am a person of colour, a first-generation immigrant to Canada, and I have worked extensively in the field of international education. I am mindful that I wear many hats, as an entry-to-practice counsellor and student support service provider at the research site, Memorial University of Newfoundland, as well as fellow student and colleague to the participants in this study. Moreover, I come from a predominantly Western philosophical, educational and training background. My identity, the various roles I have assumed, and my training context have affected my perspective as a researcher, and hence how I designed and conducted my research. I hope to inform readers of any potential biases I may hold due to my context and social location.

Having noted the above, I would also like to acknowledge that my identity, in addition to the roles that I assume have given me a different and nuanced perspective regarding the topic of resilience and newcomers, which will be further explored later in the paper. I have thus chosen to use “I” throughout this paper to hold space and reinforce my position. In addition, my personal thoughts, including excerpts from my parallel journal created alongside the research process, like the one cited at the beginning of this chapter, are interspersed within this paper to further establish my perspective.

Background of Study

International Education is a continuously growing sector in Canada and the number of international students at all levels has significantly increased in the past decade (Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE), 2018; Choi & Hou, 2023; Government of Canada,

2019). More recent data showed that over a million international students, postsecondary students included, were studying in Canada by the end of 2023 (CBIE, 2023). With migration on such a large scale, it is important to examine the needs of international students, and the support provided to them, especially in postsecondary institutions where most of them reside (CBIE, 2018).

COVID-19 Context

My interest in studying resilience originated through my observations and interactions with international students over the years working as a member of student support staff, and my research subject was formulated over time during my master's studies. Though not in my original plan, this research took place during a very uncertain time across the world: the COVID-19 global pandemic, along with other world events such as natural disasters and political conflicts not only affected the global economy but also exposed entrenched inequalities within systems and societies that led to more polarized and divided views (Clemens & Robinson, 2021; Mullin, 2021). The mental health and wellness of postsecondary students were significantly impacted during this time. As explained by Arnold et al. (2021), "students are managing stressors that, in many circumstances, have reached abnormal levels, as friends and familial relationships, (un)employment anxieties, medical concerns, routines and schedules, and financial roles and responsibilities, among others, have shifted significantly" (p. 675). For international students, these stressors were intensified by their transient state as students living away from home (Firang & Mensah, 2022), in addition to their ties to home countries that might also be in a state of flux. It is within this context that I took a closer look at what resilience means and how it can be supported, using arts-based methods, with international students at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Moreover, the research planning and proposal of this study took place at the

start of lockdowns, and research data was collected when special measures and regulations were put in place due to the pandemic. The pandemic-informed context of isolation thus impacted the study design in a fundamental way, so is mentioned throughout this paper.

Purpose and Significance of Study

Transitions are not easy. Having worked closely with international students and other newcomers at the two public postsecondary institutions in Newfoundland and Labrador, I have witnessed some students struggle academically and socially, while others carry on by themselves without much help. Occasionally, I see students who persevere and flourish despite facing one challenge after another. These instances prompted me to think about what helps students manage stresses in their lives and move forward despite struggles and failure. Barton et al. (2020) claim that the study of resilience can provide long-term solutions in dealing with constant changes we face in our modern lives. Can resilience be taught to those who struggle so that they can better help themselves, or to those who are already equipped, to reinforce their strength? In a postsecondary education context, can service providers at academic institutions play a role in helping international students build resilience and further develop coping skills as they experience transitions and wade through uncertain and difficult times? These are the questions I hope to explore and address in my research. As much focus has been placed on deficits regarding university students' mental health (Brewer et al., 2021), this research attempts to expand the narrative by taking up a strength-based approach.

While there has been research into resilience for decades, studies on this topic continue to expand and evolve (Hope, 2023; Rashid et al., 2021). In Newfoundland and Labrador, the report by Choices for Youth and RBC Future Launch (2019) notes the need for mental health support for postsecondary students in the province, and resilience training is recommended. Further

studies about resilience and resilience training for postsecondary students in this province are therefore needed. This study employs arts-based research methods specifically to explore the experiences and perspectives of international students at Memorial University of Newfoundland who live in the St. John's metro region. According to the 2021 Census (Statistics Canada, 2023), the St. John's metro region has a population of 212,579. Though becoming increasingly diverse, most of the population of St. John's is of English or Irish descent (City of St. John's, 2022a). Since arts-based research is an emerging field, this study can help expand the repertoire, knowledge and understanding of this type of research, in the context of a mid-size Canadian city – population between 100,000 and 1 million (Government of Canada, 2024) – with a low level of diversity. Furthermore, while there have been studies on arts-based practices and newcomer support in Newfoundland and Labrador, the subjects are new immigrants and refugees in high school settings (Lewis et al., 2018, 2020). This study therefore aims to expand the literature on arts-based practices as mental health support for newcomers by looking at postsecondary international students, specifically those studying at Memorial University.

Mental health and storytelling are closely linked. A prime example is the narrative therapy approach used in counselling, whereby individuals are given opportunities to voice and externalize problematic stories in their lives and to explore and consider alternative narratives in the therapeutic process (Corey, 2013). I will argue that the therapeutic nature of storytelling can be used to empower individuals and potentially build resilience. Since storytelling is relatable to people across cultures, and has been a long tradition in this province, I believe it will work particularly well to support international students in the Newfoundland and Labrador context. Moreover, due to its interpersonal nature, storytelling in a group setting can provide a safe space and container for self-discovery, sharing, as well as relationship building (Arnold et al., 2021).

By telling their personal stories of strength, students can be better equipped for future challenges, and by sharing these stories with others from diverse backgrounds, intercultural understanding and social adjustment can be fostered. At the end of this paper, I aim to establish the value of storytelling as a flexible, holistic, culturally sensitive tool to help build resilience and support the mental well-being of international students studying at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

The purpose of this research then, is to help postsecondary international students recognize and foster resilience through storied exchanges. Intercultural understanding may also be fostered through the sharing of narratives among individuals from various cultural backgrounds. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, this research is unique as it was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus recorded a specific time with a heightened number of challenges, in which resilience was particularly relevant and needed.

Definitions of Key Terms

Prior to proceeding into further discussion, key terms used in this paper are defined below to aid understanding and ensure clarity.

Postsecondary International Students in this study refers to students studying abroad at the postsecondary level who are temporary residents in their host country. In the Canadian context, these students are studying at designated postsecondary learning institutions recognized by the Canadian government, public colleges and universities included and are required to obtain and possess study permits to pursue their studies.

Newcomers encompasses all individuals who are new to a place, in this case the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and intend to stay at least for some time. It includes international students and is used in place of international students at times in this paper.

Memorial University of Newfoundland is recognized as Newfoundland and Labrador's university. Following the format of the institution's website, the University is either referenced as Memorial University of Newfoundland, Memorial University or MUN for short in this paper.

Mental health, mental well-being and mental wellness are often referenced throughout this thesis. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is defined as "a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community" (2022, Concepts in mental health section, para. 1). Moreover, it is essential to individuals' health, exists in a spectrum and varies between individuals (WHO, 2022). Mental well-being and mental wellness are at times used interchangeably to indicate a similar concept.

Resilience has many definitions and is multi-faceted (Barton et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2017; Rybak et al., 2001, Southwick et al., 2014; University of British Columbia (UBC), 2014). It is generally described as a process, state, trait, ability, outcome or a combination of all the above that necessitates individuals to cope, adapt and overcome challenges (Rashid et al., 2021). The definition of resilience is explored in this study and the subsequent outcome and analysis of this study is based on a definition created by the participants collectively.

Acculturation refers to the psychological and subsequent behavioural changes in individuals as they interact with different cultures. The process may impact individuals in one direction or both directions, and the degree of acculturation may change over time. Individuals may choose to embrace both the host and home cultures, adopt the host culture and reject their home culture, reject the host culture while maintaining home culture, or deny both in cross-cultural transitions (Arthur, 2010; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). It is important to note that some cultural exchanges and interactions may involve unequal power dynamics, such as that

between international students and their host community, and may not lead to positive, lifechanging experiences (Research with International Students, n.d.).

Adaptation refers to the process of transitioning into a new environment and culture and becoming at ease in navigating them. While it recognizes individuals' agency during transition, one should be mindful of the assumption that this is a normative path that individuals need to follow (Research with International Students, n.d.).

CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature

Despite picking up all the worksheets and exercises from the resilience, self-care webinars attended, I am still drawn to making art. It always makes things feel better and gets me excited. So, if I am to tell a story about my own resilience...how would I do it? (S. Ho, personal journal, April 2020)

In this chapter, drawing from sources and literature of various disciplines, including Indigenous cultural practices, social sciences, social work, art therapy and psychology, the relation between storytelling, resilience, and mental health or mental well-being are explored. Furthermore, how these subjects are applicable to postsecondary international students, particularly those in Newfoundland and Labrador, will be discussed.

Storytelling

Stories have the power to explore people's relationships, both public and private, with their environment and with one another. In this way, stories illuminate knowledge in such a way that it connects us to the roots of who we are as individuals and as a community. For native/indigenous people, narratives are evocative accounts of sovereignty and loss, as well as identity and home. They are detailed and contextual, recognizing the importance of community and place. (Benham, 2007, p. 512)

According to Benham (2007), stories not only help individuals reflect who they are but situate them in their communities and their environment. They define and preserve cultures. This understanding of stories as producing knowledge and building identities are certainly shared in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (2020a & 2020b) recognizes stories as intangible traditions or cultural heritage that provide unique

knowledge and help define all individuals living in Newfoundland and Labrador. Similarly, the Youth Digital Storytelling Project offered by First Light (formerly St. John's Native Friendship Centre), in partnership with the National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education (NCCIE), illustrates the rich oral traditions of Indigenous peoples in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The stories told by the youth serve not only as records of Indigenous knowledge and cultures, but by participating in the project, youth attest to storytelling as an extension of their cultural heritage, and in turn, an affirmation of their cultural identities (First Light, 2020a). In this way, stories can contribute to the well-being of individuals.

One of the most memorable moments during my counselling training at Memorial University was participating firsthand in conversations with visiting Indigenous Elders. Often these involved sitting in circles, listening to the Elders share their stories, while participants at times shared theirs. These were moments to learn about and understand Indigenous cultures, but they also provided opportunities to reflect and heal. As Lavalee (2009) explains in her study the impact of physical activities offered through a native centre in Toronto to Indigenous community members, sharing circles provide healing as participants share information, spirituality and emotions as equals. The Innu Elder, Elizabeth Penashue, from Labrador, did just that when sharing her story publicly on social media during National Indigenous People's Day (First Light, 2020b). She contrasted times past and present and noted the impact of development and pollution on the environment, which in turn negatively impact the livelihood, cultural practices, and passing down of such practices to future generations in her community. As she told the story, she expressed her sense of sadness and loss, and implored others to reflect and act, and potentially reconcile and heal together. In addition to advocating for the protection of the environment, and hence the survival of her community, she attempted to initiate healing by sharing her story. As

illustrated by the Indigenous practices above, storytelling can be used as a tool for healing and for supporting individuals' mental health.

This linkage between storytelling and mental health is also noted by Gu (2018) in his research on life writing. By writing their life narratives, university students in his non-fiction creative writing classes have become more self-aware. They can find their voices, uncover their value as unique beings, and express emotions and feelings that are often suppressed in their culture (Gu, 2018). So, while stories can be used to solidify individuals' cultural identities, they can also be used to challenge cultural assumptions that some may be burdened by. As individuals reflect on their past life experiences through the telling of their stories in writing, they find encouragement, support, comfort, new meanings, and perspectives, which lead to healing (Gu, 2018). Similarly, narrative therapists help individuals create new narratives about themselves, which enable them to assign new meanings and thus see their lives in a more positive light (Corey, 2013; Gu, 2018). As a therapist, Kottler (2015) believes therapy is storytelling in essence, and that storytelling allows individuals to express emotions and feelings that can be difficult to convey. Gersie (1993) states that therapy is "a highly specialised form of story creation, storytelling and trial enactment" (p. 5). She highlights the quality of stories to help individuals reflect, communicate and recognize experiences and thoughts that may otherwise go unseen and unexamined (Gersie, 1983). As with life narrative writing, the reflective process initiated through storytelling in therapy has the potential to turn individuals from feeling disempowered to finding agency:

Even though we may feel completely disempowered, we always also have a degree of agency. When we think of ourselves as intentional beings, ready, though maybe not

eager, to organise experience into ever evolving story-structures, we acknowledge that we are active agents in our life. (Gersie, 1993, p. 5)

In other words, as individuals tell stories of themselves, they assign meanings to their past experiences. Once recognized, this ability to make meanings can open new possibilities – allowing individuals to see different perspectives, feel more in control and thus empowered, and potentially experience improvement in their well-being over time.

As noted above, storytelling is a practice widely adopted by Indigenous cultures (Benham, 2007; First Light, 2020a, 2020b; Lavalee, 2009). It is also relevant in multicultural contexts as it is relatable to all (Gu, 2018). As Thomas King (2003), an Indigenous writer of Cherokee and Greek descent, notes, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). Storytelling is powerful as it helps individuals solidify their identities by helping them define who they are and thus ground themselves. Furthermore, it empowers individuals by offering them channels to give voice and thus agency. By allowing individuals to reflect and express their thoughts and emotions, storytelling can create meaning and in turn provide healing (Corey, 2013; Gersie, 1983; Gu, 2018; Kottler, 2015). Its value in promoting mental health transcends cultures and can be applicable to diverse individuals. Yet, it is important to consider what King (2003) says, that “[s]tories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous” (p. 9). What he means is that stories are double edged swords. While they have all the positives stated above in supporting mental wellness, they can potentially create and perpetuate stereotypes and biases, hence, “you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (King, 2003, p. 10).

Resilience

As with storytelling, resilience and well-being are closely linked. According to Barton et al. (2020), well-being can be the result of resilience or the pre-cursor for the development of resilience:

Resilience is related to the ideal of well-being as it refers to how people adapt to and adopt the ability to cope with challenges and new circumstances. When people are resilient, they are able to face others with confidence and positivity. Furthermore, they have the skills needed in different contexts and throughout one's life to maintain the positive approach to life that supports their well-being. (p. 3)

In a similar vein, Southwick et al. (2014) maintain that resilience is important for healthy living, and thus individuals' well-being.

Much research has been done on resilience; there is a multitude of definitions, and hence, different understandings of the concept (Barton et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2017; Southwick et al., 2014). Despite such variation, Barton et al. (2020), note that they often come from a trait or a process perspective, with the latter recognizing its potential to be taught and developed.

Liu et al. (2017) combine the two perspectives and propose the Multi-system Model of Resilience or MSMR, which considers resilience as being built from three distinct layers: 1) core resilience, that is similar to a personality trait and can be reflected in one's health and physiology; 2) internal resilience, which is composed of multiple factors, such as competency, self-control and regulation, hardiness, grit, coping system, and interpersonal skills that can be further developed and fostered; and 3) external resilience, which is the social-ecological context in which individuals exist.

Rybak et al. (2001) view resilience from a holistic and culturally sensitive perspective. They note that resilience is influenced by internal and external factors of individuals' experiences and evolves over time. These factors can be categorized into five different areas: 1) personal, such as personality, identity, and sense of self; 2) communal, as in the sense of belonging as well as shared history and emotional connection with other community members; 3) cultural, as the centre and mediator of all other factors; 4) familial as the initial context of understanding life; and 5) spiritual, that includes meaning of life and intrinsic values. Knowing these factors can help individuals understand their perception of healthy living and how it can be achieved, as well as their strengths that can help them adapt or rebound during stressful times (Rybak et al., 2001). In other words, resilience is not static and can grow and be strengthened over time.

While considering resilience an innate quality, in his presentation to service providers at the University of British Columbia (2014), Ungar notes that it varies based on individuals' contexts and can be influenced if help is provided to navigate and negotiate the resources available in the face of adversity. He further states that advisors and educators can help students foster the seven factors of resilience, namely, "positive relationships, identity, power and control, social justice, access to material resources, cohesion/sense of belonging, and cultural adherence" (UBC, 2014, 38:58).

As experts in the study of resilience from multiple disciplines, Southwick et al. (2014) differ in their understanding of resilience and recognize through their research that such understanding changes over time. While their definitions range from "a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event" (p. 2), to "a process of moving forward and not returning back" that "involves an active decision" (p. 3), to broader definitions such as "the

capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten the viability, the function, or the development of that system” (p. 4) and “a process to harness resources to sustain well-being” (p. 4) that involves “hope or meaning-making” (p. 6), they agree that resilience can be built and enhanced (Southwick et al., 2014). As with Rybak et al. (2001) and Ungar (UBC, 2014), when considering possible interventions these experts stress the importance of recognizing the complexity of resilience and the multiple levels of human existence – that they are “embedded in families, families in organizations and communities, and communities in societies and cultures” (Southwick et al., 2014, p. 12). Therefore, fostering healthy environments in families and communities can be particularly important in allowing individuals’ potential and capacity to weather adversity, to grow and flourish.

Despite resilience being a complex construct – that it may differ in meaning for individuals, families, organizations, societies and cultures, and that it varies between domains and phases of life and likely exists as multiple types depending on context – the consensus is that resilience can be fostered and facilitated. Indeed, resilience can be promoted through greater understanding of the self and acquiring skills and strategies that enable individuals to better navigate, negotiate and adapt to stresses in their contexts and environments. In addition, healthy and nurturing social environments can help further resilience (Liu et al., 2017; Rybak et al., 2001; Southwick et al., 2014; UBC, 2014). Drawing from a resilience lens thus a strength-based perspective, we will move on to look at the needs and support for postsecondary international students, which is the focus of this study.

Postsecondary International Students

As defined in the previous chapter, postsecondary international students are individuals studying overseas at the postsecondary level. Students are therefore required to leave their home

countries and all things familiar to start their lives anew. Transitions from one place to another often mean having to acclimatize to new culture(s) and experience acculturative stress or multiple stressors arising as part of the acclimatization or acculturation process.

Cross-cultural Transitions

Transition to university life can often be challenging. For international students this is amplified as they move from one country to another and have to transition from their home cultures to host cultures (Alsafar, 2015; Arthur, 2010; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Smiljanic, 2017; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). The transition or cultural adaptation process is “often unpredictable and non-linear” (CBIE, 2014, p. 42), meaning students are faced with unanticipated demands and events time and again. When studying abroad, individuals are constantly challenged to adapt and cope with being away from familiar people, places and objects, while trying to navigate their new environment, maintain old attachments and build new relationships (Smiljanic, 2017). Some common challenges international students face include academic performance, communication, finance, social adjustment, daily living, loneliness and homesickness, roles and identities, and careers (Arthur, 2010; Banjong, 2015; Iarovici, 2014; Smiljanic, 2017; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015).

Arthur (2010) notes that there are a few perspectives or theoretical frameworks in understanding cross-cultural transition. For example, *role adjustment* highlights the role and behavioural changes individuals may need to make when they enter their host cultures. The demands to shed self-affirming roles and the urgency and immediacy of such demands can be quite stressful. As individuals try out new roles, it can create confusion and distress if those roles contradict the expectations of their home cultures (Arthur, 2010). *Culture shock* describes a cyclical process of adjustment over time that involves four sequential phases. During the

honeymoon phase, individuals are excited and positive about their new environment. For example, students from big cities may find it exhilarating to be living in a smaller urban area with cleaner air and greater access to nature. As they become familiar with their surroundings, they may feel disillusioned, frustrated and disappointed when things do not live up to their expectations, thus entering the crisis phase. Students used to urban lifestyle may begin to discover inconveniences living in a small city. Once they find ways to cope and problem solve, they move from crisis into adjustment. Students may cope with homesickness by taking short trips to bigger cities nearby or going online to purchase familiar items that they miss, while trying new activities such as hiking and camping that are more accessible in their new environment. Finally, as life stabilizes and they are able to succeed in their host cultures, they reach adaptation. It is important to note that this process can vary among individuals (Arthur, 2010). As explained in the definitions section earlier, acculturation looks at the changes resulting from cultural interactions. It is impacted by factors such as the demands of new cultures, individuals' capacity to learning new cultures, their receptiveness to the host cultures, and/or the host cultures' receptiveness to them during cross-cultural transitions. Acculturation does not necessary equate to positive changes. Depending on individuals' desire to maintain their home cultural identity and to interact with host cultures, individuals may adopt different modes or strategies of acculturation – accepting or denying both host and home cultures, or accepting and denying one culture over another – which can in turn impact acculturative stress as they transition. The presence of unequal power dynamics can further exacerbate already stressful times. When demands from acculturation exceed the coping resources available, individuals may experience acculturative stress that can lead to minor issues or more severe psychological problems (Arthur, 2010; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015).

Relation between Mental Health, Acculturation and Resilience

International students' abilities to manage cross-cultural transitions can directly impact their health functioning:

Healthy functioning occurs when international students can navigate through the demands of living and learning in new cultural contexts and is dependent upon students developing a repertoire of coping strategies that can be applied to transition demands. Students may possess many strengths upon entering a new culture; however, positive adaptation is highly dependent upon their capacity for cultural learning. (Arthur, 2010, p. 425)

While most students do appear to adjust to the host culture over time and through experience, Arthur (2010) notes that those who cannot cope with the rapid changes and many new demands can experience deterioration in mental wellness that may potentially result in serious mental health issues. Considering the diverse experiences of these students, she encourages health promotion and illness prevention programming as proactive ways to help students adapt positively (Arthur, 2010).

Moore and Popadiuk (2011) compare international students undergoing cross-cultural transitions in their study and resilient individuals in other research studies. In both cases, they find individuals have “an optimistic outlook and the ability to carry forward knowledge gained under difficult circumstances to apply to future situations” and “a capacity to create meaning from trying times” (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011, p. 302).

The idea that resilience can act as a mediator for acculturation and mental health is echoed in the study Wu et al. (2018) conducted with migrant youth in six countries. The results of the study suggest that while the mode of acculturation adopted by individuals does not have

any direct impact on mental well-being, promotion of resilience during acculturation can contribute to mental health. In fact, Wu et al. (2018) note that resilience is “a systemic response to the adversity of migration” and “a uniquely important contributing factor for [migrant] youth mental well-being”, while recommending resilience building as a strategy to enhance their mental health (p. 69).

Smiljanic’s (2017) study of international students’ acculturative stress notes that “belonging to a university may foster resilience in international students and reduce their feelings of isolation” (p. 201). In other words, feeling that they belong, meaning feeling connected and valued (Lewis et al., 2018), can help them be resilient and grounded, which in turn maintains their well-being during the process of acculturation. Universities can support students by providing social opportunities, which may further a sense of belonging, in addition to offering opportunities to learn about adjustment challenges, coping skills and resources (Smiljanic, 2017).

As suggested above, mental health, acculturation and resilience are interrelated. Learning about coping strategies and resilience can help individuals through transitions and maintain mental well-being. Indeed, Barton et al. (2020) state that such understanding can help individuals overcome stresses that come with the constant changes that individuals encounter nowadays. It is also noted that while intervention or training to enhance resilience can happen before, during or after stressful or traumatic events, ideally it should take place beforehand so individuals can be better prepared (Southwick et al., 2014). Therefore, it makes good sense to implement resilience programming at postsecondary institutions to support students’ mental health. If such support can be offered in group settings, it can provide additional opportunities for international students to interact socially, in particular with domestic students, which is one of the main challenges noted regarding cross-cultural transition. It is also important to note that studies have shown that

counselling services at postsecondary institutions are often underused by international students, and when they do access these services, dropout rate after the initial session is high (Iarovici, 2014; Willis-O'Connor, 2014). Indeed, in order to benefit from counselling, individuals must feel safe when accessing the services and that it is permissible to access them. While there is stigma associated with counselling for many cultures, the lack of culturally competent staff, the clash between students' values and Western counselling practices, and the barrier of language for some to truly convey their experiences are other contributing factors to the lack of sustained access to counselling support (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Robertson et al., 2015; Willis-O'Connor, 2014). Therefore, using non-traditional counselling methods such as psychoeducation programming and arts-based practices for this student population may be more effective. Indeed, international students may welcome these approaches as they consider them as valuable learning and socializing opportunities.

Resilience Programming at Postsecondary Institutions in Canada

A quick glance at the mental health support available to students at Canadian postsecondary institutions shows that a few institutions have offered resilience-focused programming or curricula. These resilience programming are listed in Table 1, namely, the smartEducation curriculum through the Okanagan School of Education at the University of British Columbia (Ragoonaden, 2017), the curriculum embedded in the training for medical students at University of Toronto (Kulman-Libsey et al., 2019), the training programs for students, staff and faculty at Toronto Metropolitan University (n.d.), Q-Life as an online resource at Dalhousie University (Wescott, 2017) and the professional resilience course at Memorial university of Newfoundland (MUN, 2024b). Some resilience curricula are targeted to specific groups of students, while others are open to the general student population and are offered as part

of the institutions' wellness programs. Two of the programs are aimed to support students who are pursuing high-stress vocations that could benefit from acquiring strategies to cope with these demands and are thus subjected to additional stressors not dissimilar to international students. However, there are no resilience programming catered specifically to support international students.

Table 1

Resilience Programming at Canadian Postsecondary Institutions

| Canadian Postsecondary Institution | Program Name | Program Description | Target Audience |
|---|------------------------------|--|--|
| University of British Columbia (Ragoonaden, 2017) | smartEducation curriculum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20-hour stress management and resilience training • mindfulness practices using a variety of experiential learning techniques • aims to help participants understand and become aware of their emotions and the emotions of those around them, and learn to balance them | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employed by Okanagan School of Education, Okanagan Campus • provided to pre-service school teachers |
| University of Toronto (Kulman-Libsey et al., 2019) | 4-year resilience curriculum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes online delivery on thematic topics, skill-building small group workshops, videos of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • embedded in the training for medical students |

| Canadian Postsecondary Institution | Program Name | Program Description | Target Audience |
|--|---|--|---|
| | | <p>students, residents and physicians sharing their personal narratives on mental health, wellness and resilience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> designed to empower students, break down stigma and promote the importance of help-seeking behaviours | |
| <p>Toronto Metropolitan University (Toronto Metropolitan University, n.d.)</p> | <p>resilience training programs for students and separately for staff and faculty</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> offered in-person and online using the 5-factor model of positive psychology as basis, participants learn how “mindfulness, gratitude, optimism, self-compassion and grit” can build resilience together (About section, para. 3) to increase accessibility and meet the varied needs of individuals, also provide a workbook and single | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> part of mental health support services for all students |

| Canadian Postsecondary Institution | Program Name | Program Description | Target Audience |
|--|---|--|---|
| | | workshops to reinforce resilience concepts | |
| Dalhousie University (Wescott, 2017) | Q-Life (unclear if it is currently running) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • online resource • initial assessments to help students evaluate areas such as stress and coping skills and determine which areas to work on • videos to help students better engage in their learning, with journal and workbook exercises to help apply learned concepts • aims to help students gain greater self-awareness, identify issues and devise solutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • part of mental health support services for all students |
| Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN, 2024b) | Course titled “Professional resilience: Building skills to thrive in challenging times” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7-hour continuing education that involves group work, worksheets and small group discussion • assess ways of coping and practice ways to cope better | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offered through Faculty of Business Administration • for professionals |

| Canadian Postsecondary Institution | Program Name | Program Description | Target Audience |
|------------------------------------|--------------|---|-----------------|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practice resilience building strategies such as overcoming negative thought patterns and adopting positive thinking • through understanding the six pillars of resilience, learn to better adapt and overcome challenges | |

In the report conducted by Choices for Youth and RBC Future Launch (2019) on mental wellness, the views of students, staff, and faculty of postsecondary institutions in Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as community service providers are collected and analyzed. Some findings from the report are that we need more open conversations about mental health and wellness to take place, more mental health training for students, faculty, and staff, as well as better adjustment between community and on campus support, in addition to addressing substance misuse and paying closer attention to male-identified students. One of the major findings is that there is a need to implement a curriculum that teaches high school and postsecondary students practical and psychological skills so they can become more resilient and better equipped to cope and succeed during and after their studies (Choices for Youth & RBC Future Launch, 2019). While resilience-focused training was offered as a support service during the COVID-19 pandemic at Memorial University of Newfoundland, it is seemingly not offered regularly other than as a fee-paying course for professionals through the Faculty of Business Administration

(Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), 2024b). Moreover, the report notes that ethnic minority students often struggle to seek help with mental health, and international students are identified as at risk since they encounter discrimination in the community and lack services that meet their unique needs (Choices for Youth & RBC Future Launch, 2019). As such, resilience training catered to international students may be considered potentially as a form of support for international students. In the following sections, mental health support provided to international students at Memorial University of Newfoundland will be further examined.

International Students at Memorial University of Newfoundland

Services and Support at Memorial University. There has been an increase in international students at all levels nationally, and this is also the case at Memorial University of Newfoundland, the only university in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (Alsafar, 2015; Philpott et al., 2014) with multiple campuses across the province and the largest campus in St. John's. Support specific to international students is provided through the Internationalization Office (IO), formerly known as the International Student Advising Office, which includes immigration advice, health insurance, housing, career support, counselling, as well as social and transition programming (Alsafar, 2015; MUN, 2014a; 2020b; Philpott et al., 2014). Mental health support for all students at the University is mainly provided through the Student Wellness and Counselling Centre (SWCC), staffed by counsellors, doctoral residents, registered psychologists and their professional students (MUN, 2020a). Online mental health resources such as apps and peer mentor programs as well as community resources are used to supplement the services offered at the University. In addition to the programming offered through various university departments, a few of the advisors at the Internationalization Office have either counselling, coaching or social work backgrounds to better support international students.

Challenges for Memorial’s International Students. The report on the experiences and needs of international students by Philpott et al. (2014) states that academics are not the main challenge for international students studying at Memorial University. Contrarily, their academic performance is often on par with domestic students. Key areas identified that require additional support include pre-arrival and arrival transition, housing, financial fragility, language, and social adjustment (Philpott et al., 2014). Of these areas, Dr. Xuemei Li at the Faculty of Education highlights social adjustment as a key issue (MUN, 2014b), one that is shared by postsecondary institutions cross Canada (CBIE, 2014). “People are friendly” is an impression that many attest to when they first visit Newfoundland and Labrador. Dr. Li notes that establishing meaningful human connections, beyond mere friendliness, can be key to help international students settle into their new environment. She further explains that international students may seem quiet because they are not sure how to connect despite wanting to do so (MUN, 2014b). This notion of establishing social connections with Canadian peers being a major challenge for international students is also noted in Alsafar (2015)’s research at the University. In addition to a language barrier for some students, Li notes that there are unique challenges that international students face when visiting this province: “Newfoundland and Labrador’s customs are foreign, as are the colloquialisms and cultural idiosyncrasies” (MUN, 2014b, para. 2). Indeed, Philpott et al. (2014) note that “while they [international students] are often the first to attend student social events, language, culture and lifestyle form an impenetrable barrier to domestic students” at Memorial University (p.32).

Newfoundland and Labrador is a province that lacks ethno-racial diversity and has limited ethno-specific infrastructure (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009), despite having become more diverse in recent years (City of St. John’s, 2022a). The lack of diversity means newcomers

have fewer opportunities to connect with people from the same culture and access resources such as food items that they are familiar with and which can bring comfort, and this can in turn impact the transition process. Furthermore, this can lead to lack of understanding and acceptance, discrimination and racism. The cold temperature and limited hours of sunshine are unique environmental challenges that can impact newcomers' mood, emotions and in turn mental well-being (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009).

Dr. Li highlights a few key services that the University employs to provide a sense of community for international students, such as the former MUN Mentors program as well as the weekly coffee club and discussion group meetings that continue to run today (MUN, 2014b). These programs are offered by the Internationalization Office (formerly the International Student Advising Office) and attempt to connect domestic students with international students so they can share, learn and develop intercultural understanding through informal meetings (MUN, 2014b; Alsafar, 2015). In addition, the previous "Culture-to-Community" program, whereby international students volunteered to introduce their cultures to school-aged students in rural communities, was another effort to support social adjustment. By visiting rural communities for their cultural presentations, international students were given opportunities to learn about local places and to connect with local people, thus facilitate cross-cultural understanding between the students and their host communities (CBIE, 2014).

The Internationalization White Paper of Memorial University (MUN, 2014a), research by Philpott et al. (2014), and the study by Alsafar (2015) suggest the increase in diversity and intercultural competency training at the institution can potentially help better support international students. The University has used tools such as the Intercultural Development Inventory to help build and assess the intercultural competency of students, faculty and staff

(Alsafar, 2015; Philpott et al., 2014). More recent efforts in promoting intercultural development at Memorial University include training provided via Human Resources to staff and faculty (MUN, 2020c), the Diversity Dialogue Series open to students, staff, and faculty alike through the School of Graduate Studies (MUN, 2020d), as well as the establishment of the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Office. Indeed, in CBIE's study (2014), one of the suggestions international students provided to mitigate the issue of social adjustment is to offer cross-cultural competency training to students and instructors alike, which may in turn foster inclusivity as campuses internationalize.

Enhancing Mental Health Services at Memorial in the Future. CBIE (2014) recommends researching the effectiveness of programs that aim to help international students integrate and enhancing services that help them to adapt academically and socially. Philpott et al. (2014) note that initiatives to facilitate the social adjustment of international students at Memorial University can be further expanded in and through other departments and faculties. In studying MUN Mentors at Memorial University, Alsafar (2015) also notes the importance of implementing further programming that fosters intercultural learning opportunities between domestic and international students, which in turn facilitate greater intercultural development in the higher education setting. Since it has been established that there is a need for resilience training to support the mental health of postsecondary students in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (Choices for Youth & RBC Future Launch, 2019), we should consider how it can ensure international students are accommodated. Other than ensuring the content and mode of delivery are inclusive, culturally sensitive and accessible to all, it will be beneficial to international students if additional opportunities for social interaction can be provided to support greater social adjustment, as Dr. Li highlights the importance of mitigating international

students' sense of loneliness and isolation (MUN, 2014b). In a province where it is a well-known and highly valued practice, storytelling is a feature of the local culture that is interpersonal and social in nature and can potentially play a role.

Storytelling in NL and Its Applicability to Students at Memorial. Storytelling has a vibrant culture in Newfoundland and Labrador. As a storyteller, author and folklorist based in St. John's, Jarvis (n.d.) notes that Newfoundlanders enjoy telling stories. St. John's Storytelling (n.d.) as a not-for-profit organization offers regular opportunities for the public to meet, share stories and hone their storytelling skills. The Trails Tales Tunes Festival (2020) on the West Coast of Newfoundland is another popular local festival that celebrates the tradition of storytelling. Further, the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador has initiated multiple projects to safeguard collective memories, oral history and stories in Newfoundland and Labrador. As mentioned earlier, Elders from various Indigenous communities, Mi'kmaq and Innu and Inuit groups, in the province are often experienced and skilled storytellers, who share their gifts in community settings (First Light, n.d.; Woodford, 2019). Both the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the former Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Council (RIAC) held Human Library events over the years, whereby individuals volunteered as "books" for others to borrow and "read" (CBC News, 2013, 2019). These examples show that stories have been used in the province to help promote cultures, create a sense of community, and foster cross-cultural understanding, which can all play a key role in international students' adjustment to their lives in this province. Regarding the value of storytelling in bridging divides between cultures, Jarvis (n.d.) sums it up well, saying that:

Storytelling is a critical tool for keeping culture and tradition alive. Stories let us peek into the past, while at the same time transmitting ideas into the future for the next

generation. They root us in our place and culture, yet also allow us to better understand people who are different. Storytelling sparks creativity, expands our horizons, improves our vocabulary, and teaches us to listen. (p. 6)

Perhaps more importantly, storytelling has also played a role in empowering diverse, marginalized groups within Newfoundland and Labrador. In fact, researchers in the province are familiar with storytelling as a tool to support the well-being of marginalized individuals and to amplify their voices. One such example is “Lullaby Project-NL” at the Clarenville Correctional Centre for Women, whereby two professors at Memorial University offer opportunities for women there to heal through sharing their life stories and creating songs in a group setting (Buley, 2020). Another example is the Patient Stories project, through which breast cancer patients are invited to share their journeys digitally, using a combination of photos, music and videos. Through video screening and focus group discussions with service providers, recommendations are made to improve breast cancer patient care (Sitter et al., 2019). As newcomers to the province, international students may feel alone and vulnerable. These projects show that storytelling can be and has been used to help marginalized individuals in the province to reflect, gain a better sense of control and become better advocates for themselves. Furthermore, they show that difficult and vulnerable experiences can be contained in stories and, when shared in groups, emotional nuances can draw in the listeners and thus resonate to form social connections and further understanding. Thus, storytelling is well suited and well positioned for my investigation of international postsecondary students in this province and support for their wellness.

Storytelling can promote resilience and may be used as a tool to support international students. Gersie (1983) notes stories are often told during transitions while Kottler (2015)

illustrates how the act of storytelling can instigate change. Since resilience is often needed during transitions, storytelling can potentially help international students understand their own resilience and feel empowered if they reflect on the experiences related in their stories. As people share their personal stories of strength, it may help them better understand who they are and recognize their ability and potential to adapt, cope and overcome difficulties. In listening to others tell their stories, it may also invoke memories of their own resilience and instill hope in their ability to cope going forward. When providing mental health support for international students, in addition to discerning their needs, Robertson et al. (2015) point out that it is important to consider how such support can accommodate students' worldviews and cultural practices. This is important as the challenges international students face are often associated with cultural differences. When this can be achieved, students are more open to accessing the services available and are thus better supported (Robertson et al., 2015). Storytelling, as an act that is familiar and known to all, can resonate and become a therapeutic space to support mental health.

It is important to note that international students are not a homogenous group, despite being often grouped together in services. They often come from diverse backgrounds and have various experiences even when they originate from the same regions (Arthur, 2010; Banjong, 2015; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Due to such diversity, Iarovici (2014) recommends flexibility in the mental health support provided to this student population. She suggests that providing group meetings outside counselling centres and outreach that helps students understand mental health can be quite effective. Mental health support with a storytelling element then can provide opportunities for individuals to express their unique selves and address their specific needs. As a student support mechanism, storytelling is an asset-oriented approach that "creates opportunities for students to engage in dialogue, critically reflect on their own experiences, past and present,

and to make meaning of their own transition experiences within the context of whatever they already know (rather than what they must still learn)” (CBIE, 2014, p. 51). Indeed, Moores and Popadiuk (2011) note that current research literature tends to focus on the challenges and issues of cross-cultural transitions, rather than the strengths, resources, knowledge, and skills that international students bring to the table. A storytelling approach will allow international students to showcase these positive aspects of their cross-cultural transitions; and, in sharing them with others (such as with international and domestic students, staff and faculty), can potentially foster resilience as well as greater cross-cultural understanding.

This study investigates resilience in the context of postsecondary international students in Newfoundland and Labrador. As illustrated above, resilience can lead to mental well-being, thus offering programming that foster resilience to international students can help better support their mental health. Furthermore, the building of social connections can help further resilience. If we apply what the literature relays about the needs of international students, we also understand that social adjustment is a consistent issue for all international students. This then leads to questions such as, if we are to implement resilience training at Memorial University, can we create an inclusive space that help students adjust and connect socially? Is there a role for storytelling and arts-based practices? Indeed, if embracing differences and diversity is becoming more important to our postsecondary institutions due to the increasingly diverse student population, and institutions are recommended to integrate inclusive policies and practices in all aspects of university life (CBIE, 2014; MUN, 2014a; Philpott et al., 2014), then mental health support for postsecondary students should reflect that as well. As established earlier, storytelling can act as a transitional aid in relationship building. Thus, using storytelling as a tool for mental health support, potentially as part of resilience training at Memorial University, can help create social

connections, ensure multiple perspectives are included, heard as well as understood. Through my research I hope to support this statement.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Art is something that I often lean on. For me, to make art is to learn to slow down and to be intentionally creative and thoughtful. The process of artmaking helps my mind to quiet down and provide space for it to wander freely. As thoughts take form in my mind, the act of writing or explaining them verbally help me further process these ideas. Images and words then have to go hand in hand for reflection to take place. (S. Ho, personal journal, July 2020)

Arts-based practices were utilized in this research and are explored in this paper. In this section, arts-based research is explained, in addition to the rationale of employing it in this study. The reasons for using arts-based research include being able to understand complex human experiences and relationships, create meanings through aesthetics, involve participants as collaborators, and challenge a wider audience to think critically about the experiences examined, in this case, that of international students living in a new environment. How the research design incorporated arts-based practices is detailed below.

What is Arts-Based Research (ABR)?

While arts have been used increasingly in research over the years (Fancourt & Finn, 2019), arts-based research is not a commonly known methodology and hence requires further explanation. The term *arts-based research* or *ABR* is most widely used to describe research that employs the unique qualities of creative arts in its inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2019a, 2020). By adopting arts practices such as writing, music, dance, visual art, film etc. during any or all phases of research, ABR practitioners seek more holistic and engaging ways to answer their research questions (Leavy, 2020). In contrast to scientific ways of knowing, aesthetic inquiry can help broaden and deepen the understanding of human experiences (Barone

& Eisner, 2012; McNiff, 1998, 2019). As Barone and Eisner (2012) note, the forms of representation individuals choose to share their thoughts and emotions can be both constraining and liberating. Just as “negative space defines a positive object in visual art” (Leavy, 2020, p.3), ABR provides a different perspective and hence promotes diverse ways of thinking and of knowing the world (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2019a).

More specifically, arts-based research uses the arts as both the object and the mode of study (McNiff, 1998). It often involves artmaking by researchers alone or with others to gain knowledge about themselves and others (McNiff, 2019). Barone and Eisner (2012) define ABR as essentially “a process that uses the expressive qualities of form to convey meaning” (p. xii). Through the creation of expressive forms, ABR draws out the emotive and affective aspects of individuals which are subtle and complex but crucial to truly appreciate and comprehend human experiences (Barone and Eisner, 2012).

There are no set steps in ABR that researchers follow; rather, the path of inquiry and understanding may emerge over time through the creative experience (McNiff, 1998, 2019). As McNiff (1998) states, “...in my experience artistic expressions are more prone to flight than to earthbound solidity” (p. 17). Even when ABR is planned and executed systematically, the creative process is complex and non-linear, which can lead to unexpected and unpredictable results and discoveries (McNiff, 1998). Such uncertainty is a challenge but also the value of ABR (Leavy, 2020; McNiff, 1998). Whether considered as an extension or a stream of qualitative research (Barone & Eisner, 2012), or a distinct field of research and method of inquiry (Leavy, 2019a; McNiff, 2019), ABR is recognized to have much potential yet to be fully explored. Indeed, since resilience is nuanced, and perspective and lived experience (aspects I attempted to investigate) are subjective, using ABR would result in deeper understanding and

more descriptive knowledge compared to more traditional quantitative research that relies heavily on more objective methods and tools.

Restatement of Research Question and Rationale for ABR

As a student support staff member, who works closely with international students at Memorial University of Newfoundland, I am interested in investigating how to best serve this student population. Using the ABR subtype, “visual-based narrative inquiry” or “storytelling research that uses visual methods such as images, photographs, drawings, paintings, collages, cartoons, films, video, signs, symbols, and other visual technology” I was able to engage students and solicit their direct input (Kim, 2019, p. 143). It also seemed a good fit as I would like to explore the potential of storytelling with visual arts representation in fostering resilience. Apart from my love for artmaking and my affinity to arts-based practices, the characteristics and strengths of ABR listed below further explain the reasons for adopting this methodology in my study.

Understand Complex Experiences through Creating Meaning Collectively

As mentioned earlier, one of the key characteristics of ABR is its ability to deepen and broaden understanding of human experiences (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2020; McNiff, 1998, 2019). Human experiences, or more specifically in this study, the experiences of international students in relation to adaptation and resilience, are complex and layered (Rybak et al., 2001; Southwick et al., 2014). While international students may come from similar geographic regions, ethnic communities, socioeconomic backgrounds etc. they are distinct and unique individuals as explained earlier (Arthur, 2010; Banjong, 2015; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Their experiences in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and how they experience resilience in their particular contexts can be subjective and may vary widely. For example, one

student's main struggle may be about meeting people and building social networks in a new environment, whereas another is concerned about their finances in addition to managing their academic studies. Just as art pieces can be viewed and interpreted differently depending on viewers and contexts, Leavy (2020) notes that meanings are evoked rather than denoted and multiple meanings can be created through ABR. As Chilton et al. (2015) explain, ABR has the quality of intersubjectivity, whereby meanings emerge, and realities are created collectively by individuals through aesthetics. This quality makes ABR a suitable approach for this study which sought deep descriptive information about how international students experience the development of resilience through their diverse lived and cultural experiences. Using traditional quantitative or qualitative research methods for this study would limit its potential for understanding the intricacies and complexities that can be unravelled through arts-based methods.

Aesthetics as Site of Knowledge Creation

ABR does not rely on the sole use of words to create knowledge and understanding (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Rather, it values aesthetics: preverbal, sensory, emotional, imaginal ways of knowing (Chilton et al., 2015; Leavy, 2019a; Leavy 2020). Malchiodi (2019) notes that, "...the arts evoke different responses than language and the logic of the 'thinking' brain and, at the same time, they also expand the logic of the thinking brain to other possibilities and perceptions." (p.72). Images, for example, resonate with individuals, which in turn relay a form of knowledge that is not achievable by words alone. The aesthetics or beauty brought forth by ABR can promote reflexivity as well as empathy in individuals (Leavy, 2019a, 2020), thus making the method applicable to a study like this, whereby the ability of arts to promote understanding and support mental health is investigated.

Using aesthetics as source of knowledge can be particularly relevant to the diverse and often multilingual population of international students. Studies that privilege spoken and written language in the relaying of knowledge can be limiting when some individuals may experience language barriers. For those whose first language is not English, they may not be able to fully express their thoughts and ideas simply through spoken or written words. Even when individuals are fluent in the English language, the usage may differ between countries, regions and cultures (Kučera & Mehl, 2022). Diversifying the ways knowledge is engaged thus helps broaden the options. Using visual-based narrative inquiry for this study then, aesthetic knowledge can accompany language and verbal exchange to create more nuanced and layered meanings. As Barton et al. (2020) suggest, the different forms of representation used in arts-based research make it a more inclusive practice.

Levelling the Field of Research and Engagement

Leavy (2020) speaks of the participatory nature of ABR. When participants are involved in ABR, they are seen as collaborators. Thus, rather than leaning on the expertise of the researchers and in turn reinforcing the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched, by inviting the researched to contribute to knowledge creation ABR can level the field of research (Leavy, 2020). McNiff (2019) notes that in ABR, the knowledge-acquiring process through artmaking is egalitarian and accessible as artistic knowing and ways of communication are something available to all. It is not seen as an academic discipline nor reserved for those who are talented or trained artistically. If international students are invited to share their resilience stories through artmaking, they can help broaden the understanding of the subject and in turn feel empowered as they find their diverse voices heard and amplified.

Challenging a Wide Audience to Think Critically

Barone and Eisner (2012) see ABR as most applicable and useful when reaching out to a wide range of audiences and to help them rethink social issues that are important (p. xvi). Due to its realness and closeness to humanistic experience, arts-based research can be more readable and engaging and in turn has the potential to be more readily impactful and useful outside the academic realm (McNiff, 1998). Leavy (2019a, 2020) notes that ABR has immense potential to educate – to raise awareness, to foster critical consciousness and empathy, to challenge dominant discourses, to break down stereotypes and include marginalized perspectives.

The ultimate goal of this study is not simply to satisfy my own curiosity about resilience and interest in visual arts and storytelling, but to potentially further the support provided to international students. The end product of my research will be informative for my role as a support person for international students at the University as well as those who fill similar positions. As the number of postsecondary international students continues to grow in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is important to ensure well-rounded support are provided to this student population. My hope is that this study may pique the interest not only of international students and other newcomers who share similar experiences, but those within the University and the larger community who support and interact with these populations.

In sum, arts-based research has the potential to create rich knowledge and understanding of subjective experiences. This research method is also culturally sensitive: it is accessible, engaging, relatable and empowering for international students. By providing opportunities for international students to express themselves, it may also shine a critical light on stereotypes in primary discourses concerning this population.

Research Design and Rationale

There is no set way of doing arts-based research (Knowles & Promislow, 2007; McNiff, 1986, 2011; Leavy, 2019a, 2020). Indeed, more structured design can limit our imagination and thus knowledge production. As ABR is an emergent process, I considered the following question by McNiff (2011) consistently as I designed and conducted this research: “does the research generate outcomes that inform the practice of others and have a positive influence on the people served, and the profession?” (p. 391). In other words, asking myself not only how and why this study is useful to me in my work as a student support person and an entry-to-practice counsellor, but also to others, including faculty and staff that support international students as well as international students themselves. As explained in earlier chapters, my interest is in resilience and wellness in the international student population, as well as the connection between wellness and the arts. Aligned with my postmodern counselling approach of working collaboratively with clients (Corey, 2013), I view international students as collaborators and invited them on my journey to seek knowledge which was made possible using ABR. Adopting visual-based narrative inquiry, my research aimed to explore arts-based practices, specifically participant storytelling and artmaking, as ways to build resilience, and in turn support the mental health and well-being of postsecondary international students in the Newfoundland and Labrador context.

Robertson et al. (2015) note that community is important to international students and Indigenous students; as such, they suggest one way of providing mental health support for these populations is to offer “skill-development workshops” that can become “‘talking circles’ in which individual participants are invited to share their experiences and perceptions” (p. 132). Since this is a study about mental health support for international students, I adopted this idea of talking circles in my research design. Participants were asked to share their experiences of

resilience in group meetings: staff were asked to consider students' stories of resilience while students were asked to reflect on their own resilience. Furthermore, drawing inspiration from social justice initiatives such as Photovoice projects and zine-making practices, participants were invited to turn their resilience stories into book forms. Photovoice is a visual research method that invites community members to document their lived experiences through photos, which in turn instigate discussions that could lead to potential social change (Budig et al., 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2020). Similarly, zines are often small booklets that are handmade, with original or appropriated texts and images, that are meant to share ideas as well as to challenge stereotypes and mainstream representations (Desyllas & Sinclair, 2014; Moyer, 2016). Thus, in both Photovoice projects and zines, artmaking along with narrative creation is used to create tangible forms that help give voice to and empower marginalized populations, not dissimilar to the visual-based narrative inquiry employed in this study.

Cognizant that participants had busy lives and thus it would be difficult to coordinate meeting times with multiple individuals, group meetings were limited to a total of three, of which two focused on discussing and exploring the concept of resilience and stories associated with resilience, and one optional session focused on group artmaking. The group meetings were held to provide a safe space for social skill development, and to create a sense of community, which was noted as important for international students in various studies, including but not limited to ones specific to the Memorial University context (Alsafar, 2015; Robertson et al., 2015; MUN, 2014b; Philpott et al., 2014). In discussing and creating stories in group settings, individuals were prompted to reflect more deeply on their experiences through their interactions with others, as Yalom and Leszcz (2005) note that interpersonal learning does take place within groups. Through these groups, participants were given a channel to have their stories told and

heard and become collaborators in knowledge creation. As outlined below, much thought was put into the selection and recruitment of participants, consent procedures, as well as data collection and analysis, to ensure the rigorousness of the process and thus the validity of data.

Research Setting

Since I study and work at the University, Memorial University of Newfoundland is my natural choice for the site of this study. Moreover, international students studying at the two campuses in the city of St. John's, Newfoundland, were the research subjects and collaborators. As noted in the previous chapter, Memorial University, like other postsecondary institutions in Canada, has been receiving an increasing number of international students. The latest report from CBC News (2024) shows that one fourth of the university population is made up of international students, approximately 5,000 individuals from all around the world. Dr. Sonja Knutson (2020), former head of the University's Internationalization Office, noted that the province of Newfoundland and Labrador view international students as potential immigrants and thus consider their recruitment to be a part of its repopulation strategy. The rise of international student numbers means there is an increasing need for support. While it is the University's responsibility to help students succeed, the province's goal to attract and retain international students further calls for better services for this population. Transitional and mental health support for international students is considered specifically in this study.

Participants and Rationale for Participant Selection

There were two groups of participants. While international students at Memorial University were invited as research participants and collaborators, I also invited staff at the University who support international students to participate and provide alternative perspectives.

As the researcher, my role was not merely to observe; rather, I facilitated the group discussions and participated in a peripheral manner to ensure the proceeding of discussions.

Considering my research is at master's level and that significant oral and visual data would be collected through multiple group meetings with the participants, it was determined that a total of eight to thirteen participants would be sufficient to meet data saturation, with preference for a larger ratio of student (between five and eight) to staff participants (between three and five) so as to place the focus on students' firsthand experiences.

Criteria for Participants

As student participants were expected to recall and reflect on their university experience in St. John's, it was important for them to be either current students or recent graduates who have lived in the city. The study was open to both undergraduate and graduate students to ensure a wide range of perspectives were considered. Similarly, staff participants were required to have worked at the University for some time so to ensure they could reflect on their roles as support people as well as the experiences of international students. Only staff at the University's Internationalization Office were invited as they would have high level of interactions with international students.

Researcher as Participant

In addition, I documented my own reflections during my research journey: a parallel process that took place during my data collection, analysis and writing processes. These reflections were my thoughts, ideas, reactions and responses as a researcher, member of staff and former newcomer, to the conversations, discussions, interactions with the research participants during the group meetings, students met outside my research as well as the literature reviewed. They were also expressed in the form of an art book, created along with this paper.

Thus, three sets of data were collected in this research: along with the oral and visual data collected from the two groups of research participants, my written and visual reflections are additional data that will be considered and further discussed in the autoethnographic chapter. It is important to note that, as someone who had similar lived experiences to my research subjects, (international students) and the professional vantage point of being a counsellor, I held a unique dual-lens perspective, as indicated by Lin (2019), which mirrored that of both the student and staff participants.

Recruitment

As an international student support person at Memorial University, I am a colleague of the staff participants invited. I was also aware that I may know the student participants through my work and studies at the University. For participant recruitment, to mitigate any conflict of interest, minimize power differences and ensure voluntary consent is not compromised, I utilized gatekeepers, namely administrative staff at the University, as go-betweens for myself and participants. Student participant recruitment material was disseminated through e-mail listservs and social media platforms managed by the Internationalization Office as well as student groups and associations. Recruitment emails were sent via the Internationalization Office to their student support staff.

Prior to the start of research activities and throughout the consent process, it was stressed to the research participants that participation in the study was voluntary and was not a requirement for their courses, program, work, or the University. Both the recruitment poster targeting student participants (see Appendix A) and the recruitment e-mail for the staff participants (see Appendix B) included a brief description of the study, the activities involved, as well as the time commitment required from each participant. Participant recruitment was

ongoing until the target number of participants was reached, and it was determined that data saturation was reached for thematic analysis.

Recruitment Challenges, Delays and Modifications

Recruitment for research started soon after my ethics approval was received in June 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic however, uptake for the research was slow. While there was interest shown in the study early on, participants often did not meet the necessary requirements. In addition, having to coordinate multiple individuals' schedules for group meetings proved to be quite challenging. Changes were therefore made to the research design to accommodate and resolve the issues encountered. For staff participants, the time required to have worked at the Internationalization Office was shortened, while the time required to have lived in St. John's was shortened for student participants. The criteria for student participants were expanded to include recent graduates as well as active students. Furthermore, additional recruitment strategies were employed to include postering and promotion through the School of Graduate Studies, which hosts a large number of international students. More flexibility was also granted to the number of individuals participating in group meetings. In all cases, all meetings had two participants in addition to me as the facilitator. Four staff participants and four student participants were recruited in total. Due to their busy schedules, a different pair of staff participants met at each session from the end of October to the beginning of December 2021. Two students responded to the recruitment and meetings were held throughout January 2022. A second pair of students were recruited in April and met between April and May 2022. In short, due to the prolonged recruitment, the data collection process took quite some time before saturation was reached.

Consent Procedures and Ethical Considerations

Since English was a second language for some participants in this study and consent might not be a concept familiar to all, additional steps were taken to ensure participants had a good understanding of what consent means. Once connected with me, potential participants were given the informed consent form detailing the study (see Appendices C and D). If they agreed to participate, further instructions on how to join the study were provided. Participants were encouraged to pose questions and raise any concerns about the study before attending the first group meeting. Signed consent forms were returned to me prior to the first meeting and the content was reviewed once more orally with all participants at the beginning of the first group meeting to ensure clear understanding of the study. Plain, non-technical language was used in the form to ensure English learners could easily understand it.

In addition to informing the participants of what the study was about and what they were required to do, participants were told that they could withdraw their participation after the study began but it would not be possible to remove their contribution to the recordings due to the group nature of the study. Digital images of their submitted storybooks could be withdrawn within a specific time frame.

The consent form also outlined the benefits and risks of the study. While it was anticipated that participants would find the storytelling and artmaking processes engaging and enjoyable, the exchange of stories could elicit emotional responses in participants that may be upsetting. The reflective nature and the meaning-making aspect of storytelling could therefore be exhilarating and emotionally draining, as noted by Corey (2013), Gu (2018) and Gersie (1983) in the literature review earlier. As a counselling psychology graduate student, I possess the knowledge and skills to manage these potential risks. Additional support within the University

and in the larger community were shared in case participants found the process triggering and wished to seek further help.

While anonymity can be requested in group contexts, the fact is that no group can be anonymous. As such, the consent form noted that confidentiality and anonymity would be respected though could not be guaranteed. Indeed, the small population in Newfoundland and Labrador and at Memorial University can make it more difficult to protect participants' identities. Moreover, creative artwork can be identifying in unanticipated ways, hence images submitted by participants could potentially reveal their identities. Due to the public nature of their roles, staff participants' identities might also be revealed. It is important to note that while I would like to credit the participants for the artwork produced and their contributions as collaborators in this research, due to the sensitivity of the topics discussed it was decided ultimately that protecting the identities of participants was more important. Participants were therefore encouraged to discuss with me ahead of time if they would like to be recognized for their contributions.

Data Collection

While ABR researchers are not required to be experts in the art forms used for their research, it is recommended that they have some familiarity with the art forms employed (Leavy, 2020). As someone who draws, prints and paints, I am most familiar with hands-on visual artmaking, hence I chose to use visual arts to accompany storytelling in this study. Since stories are often read from books, storytelling and book making go well hand-in-hand as arts-based activities.

To increase accessibility, participants were offered art materials to create their own art books. Contactless pick-up was used due to the COVID-19 pandemic protocol. Special efforts

were made to ensure a variety of art materials were provided so participants could choose materials that they were either comfortable with or would like to experiment with. The art material packages also included a book template and instructions on how to create the book (see Appendices E and F). They were intentionally kept simple so as not to influence individuals' autonomous processes, but to provide the freedom to explore and express thoughts and ideas related to resilience. Less rigidity may lead to varying interpretations. This enables participants to be true collaborators in the research, which is a key characteristic of ABR (Leavy, 2020). Freedom of artistic expression can enrich the storytelling experience, and in turn can lead to richer content and deeper reflection on the research topic (McNiff, 1998): in this case, what role resilience plays in the transitions of international students.

Due to COVID-19, all meetings with the participants were conducted virtually via WebEx, an online platform approved by the University. Student and staff participants were recruited and met separately to reduce any potential power differences and enable participants to speak more freely. Question prompts related to resilience, international student support, and storytelling (see Appendix G) were created ahead of time for the mandatory group sessions. However, since ABR is an emergent process (Chilton et al., 2015; Leavy, 2020), the facilitation direction of the groups varied depending on the group make-up, personalities etc.

In the first virtual group meeting, participants had the opportunity to get to know each other, and the topic of resilience was introduced and explored. Questions were not only raised verbally but were presented on slides or typed in the chat function of the virtual meeting platform, to allow participants to review and reflect on the questions presented. Participants were also given specific instructions on the storytelling activity including how to make a simple book structure using a single sheet of paper, and the types of visual presentation that could be used.

These instructions were sent to participants via email prior to the meeting and printed copies were included in the art packages for easy reference.

Participants were given two weeks to work on their stories and book structures. An optional virtual group artmaking session was offered during this time. Participants who preferred to work independently or had other commitments could opt to create their books in their own time. Having a set time to work together with other participants was enjoyable and motivating for some to complete the task. Moreover, in offering a group session that focused on artmaking, participants were not only provided an additional opportunity to bond, communicate and share but also to learn differently (Arnold et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2018, 2020), which potentially added to the richness of the stories created, the research experience and thus the data collected.

At the second and final virtual group meeting, participants were invited to share their stories and the book structures they had created. In addition to reflecting on their journeys of transition and stories of resilience, participants were encouraged to share what they had learned about themselves and about resilience. They were also asked to reflect on and discuss the storytelling and artmaking experiences in the study.

All group meetings except the staff artmaking meeting were recorded using WebEx's meeting recording function. To make up for the missed recording, brief notes were taken after the staff artmaking session.

Conclusion and Prelude to Analysis

ABR was utilized in this research due to the nature of the research subject, that is, arts-based practices as a potential mental health tool to foster resilience and support international students studying at Memorial University of Newfoundland. More specifically, the use of storytelling through group discussion and artmaking were studied. Oral and visual data were

collected from staff and student participants, in addition to the written reflections and visual output produced by me as the researcher, which were then analyzed manually using thematic analysis. Due to the nature of ABR, learnings were drawn through aesthetics that elicit emotional and resonance experiences. Layered descriptions of recurring themes were noted, thus translated to reliability and generalizability of data. Further discussion regarding how thematic analysis was applied to this study will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: Analysis

Yet, with COVID and as time progresses, it seems like I am losing my confidence. I wonder every now and then if this (writing a thesis) is something I can do. At times I feel like I am not sure what I am at and where I am going...How else is everyone holding up and getting on? Am I experiencing compassion fatigue, COVID fatigue, or information overload? Am I just tired because I haven't had much of a break for a really long time? I feel like I can never get caught up with everything that is happening around me...I feel tired getting up. Am I getting a flu, a cold, COVID? Is it time change, weather change? I feel I am letting all sorts of opportunities slipped by. (S. Ho, personal journal, November 2021)

In analyzing the data collected for this research, a *Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)* as proposed by Braun et al. (n.d.1, n.d. 2) was conducted. *Thematic analysis (TA)* is often used in qualitative research and in a variety of disciplines as it is flexible and accessible. It is an excellent fit for analyzing arts-based research (ABR) due to their shared characteristic of meaning making. In TA, “patterns of meaning” are generated in data to answer questions (Braun et al., n.d.2, para. 1), while meanings are created using aesthetics in ABR (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Chilton et al., 2015; Leavy, 2020). Importantly, rather than considering reliability through multiple coders and using a codebook for coding which helps predefine themes, RTA embraces the subjectivity of the researcher and their role in creating knowledge (Byrne, 2022; Lainson et al., 2019). Indeed, the main reason for me to have acknowledged at the beginning and throughout this paper the various roles I play is to provide context and in turn explain my subjective position regarding this study.

As Lainson et al. (2019) state, rigour and validity of data in thematic analysis are shown through “transparency, thoroughness, consistency and methodological congruence with the researcher’s chosen theoretical framework” (p. 96). In this study, transparency was achieved through stating my subjective stance and including my voice and experiences in the research. Furthermore, in explaining how thematic analysis was conducted through my arts-based research below, transparency can be further enhanced while thoroughness and consistency are demonstrated.

Data Collected

Three data sources were sought and utilized in this research, which include: 1) verbal recordings of ABR group sessions, 2) visual creations by participants and 3) researcher’s reflections. In drawing data from multiple sources, thoroughness is achieved as the subject is studied from various perspectives. The three types of data complement each other: while they point to similar themes, they provide additional richness and depth to the data collected.

Data Source 1: Recordings from ABR Sessions

The primary set of data is the verbal exchange and transcript recordings from the arts-based group storytelling and book making sessions with international student participants studying at Memorial University of Newfoundland, as well as staff at the University’s Internationalization Office, who work closely with international students. The steps for thematic analysis outlined below were applied to these data.

Data Source 2: Art Book Creations

The second set of data are the participant-made art books. Participants were asked to submit a photo of their visual story presentation via e-mail, which provides a more holistic understanding of the stories told. As the art books created were individualized and thus varied

widely with different images and wordings, it would be difficult to code and analyze them in depth as I did with the transcripts obtained from the group discussions. As such, these data were reviewed and considered alongside the transcripts. More specifically, I looked at how these creations/artwork/artefacts complement and supplement the themes drawn from the recordings and they are included for further discussion in the “Outcomes” chapter. Indeed, they help the readers of this research deepen their understanding of the experiences, and perhaps more importantly, the emotions participants shared in the recorded sessions. All images collected from participants are included in the appendix for reference (see Appendix J).

Data Source 3: Researcher’s Reflections

The final set of data consists of reflections from my roles as the researcher and the facilitator of the ABR group meetings, a support person in my work role, in addition to my past lived experiences as a newcomer. They include written reflections as well as visual representation through the creation of my art book. In particular, the art book is a synthesis of my thoughts written throughout the research process as well as my understanding of the previous two sets of data. A closer examination of this data will take place in the “Researcher Autoethnographic Reflections and Outcome” chapter.

Six-Step Analytical Process

Prior to analyzing the data, I had to contemplate whether to combine or separate the data collected from the staff and the student participants in my analysis. A preliminary review of the data demonstrated that the two groups of data offer similar information. The main difference is that staff hold an outsider and thus a more objective stance compared to that of the students. As such, I decided the data should be reviewed and examined together. The difference between the viewpoints of the participants is noted in the subsequent Outcome and Discussion Chapters.

Braun and Clarke (2006) have identified six steps of RTA which help researchers to analyze in more systematic and organized ways. These steps include: 1) familiarizing with data, 2) initial coding, 3) theme generating, 4) theme reviewing, 5) theme naming, and 6) reporting. In the section below, I will explain in detail how these were applied to my analytical process.

Step 1: Familiarizing with Data

In the first phase of thematic analysis, researchers are to become familiar with their data by reading actively and repeatedly so meanings and patterns can be identified (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., n.d.1; Byrne, 2022). Since Webex was the chosen platform for the meetings, transcripts of the group meetings were automatically generated. Transcripts for the video recordings were downloaded, then checked against the original recordings by replaying, watching and listening to the videos multiple times. This was done soon after the meetings were completed to help ensure accuracy.

During this process, personal information regarding the participants was removed to protect participants' identities. Moreover, tones as well as facial expressions of participants were noted in the transcripts. For example, it was noted that participants nodded or laughed when speaking or listening to others. Indeed, arts-based practices are unique in their ability to elicit emotions, thus ignoring these intricacies can impact the understanding of the data. Furthermore, as stated in my research ethics proposal, the recordings were erased post-study to further protect the identities of the participants, and only the transcripts will be preserved for a minimum of five years. Thus, retaining as much detail and information as possible in the transcripts will be important in case they need to be referenced in future. As I tidied the transcripts, I became familiar with the data collected.

Step 2: Initial Coding

The second phase of thematic analysis involves coding. As explained by Byrne (2022), coding helps produce labels for information that may be of importance in answering the research questions. Semantic and latent coding were used, whereby semantic codes note the “explicit or surface meaning of the data” and latent codes go deeper and takes note of the “hidden meanings or underlying assumptions, ideas or ideologies that may shape or inform the descriptive or semantic content of the data” (Byrne, 2022, p. 1392).

Initial coding of the transcripts was completed as each group of participants wrapped up their meetings. The staff meetings were completed first, followed by the first group of students, then the second group of students. It is important to note that there was a period when I could not proceed with my study and was unable to conduct further analysis as I had not met the targeted number of participants, and no new participants had signed up for my study. However, this break between the ABR sessions allowed me to take a step back from my data and offered me a fresh perspective when I had to revisit them later. As noted in Lainson’s discussion with Braun and Clarke, such time away from data is important to lead to new and interesting insights (Lainson et al., 2019).

Although using software could improve efficiency, I chose to complete the coding manually in order to ensure greater familiarity with my research data. Before coding, I reviewed and revisited my research questions, namely 1) what resilience is and how it can be fostered in the postsecondary international student context, and 2) what roles storytelling and arts-based practices play in fostering resilience. Then, I read the transcripts multiple times and considered how the prompted group discussions (see Appendix G for prompts) during the ABR sessions helped answer the broader research questions. I looked for participants’ definitions of resilience,

as well as elements that contributed to their examples of resilience, such as their abilities, character traits, contexts, etc. By leaning on participants' interpretation of resilience in coding, thus using coding that was driven by the data collected, an inductive approach to analysis as noted by Byrne (2022) was adopted.

A Word document was created for each group session to aid the coding process. Each document had a table with two columns, the left column containing the transcript from each meeting. During the first reading, I attempted to gather a sense of common ideas that were brought up at the group meetings. Important sections were noted and highlighted. Then, during the second reading, the highlighted sections were summarized in the right column of the table in the document. As the transcripts were reviewed a third time, meta themes were identified and coded in colour. These codes were noted and further explained in comments to the right of the document. As more transcripts were reviewed, the codes evolved. When considering changing codes or adding new codes, all previously reviewed transcripts were looked at once again to ensure the changes were applicable to all.

Eleven meta themes or codes that represent the core facets of resilience were identified, with an additional code for the student participants. They are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Meta Themes and Codes

- Conditions of experience foster capacity/resilience
- Navigating change and changing environment
- Self-Development
- Role of family
- Social support/network/community
- Cultural nuances
- Role of spirituality/faith
- Going through a process (learning process? A trial? An end goal?)
- Courage/gumption/risk-taking
- Complex and varied experience
- Maturity/capacity due to lived experience
- Creativity

These codes came about as participants were asked to define resilience at their first meeting and some brought out personal lived experiences. Participants spoke a lot about changes and changing environments within these experiences, and the experiences often involve some form of self-development, in addition to other external elements, such as family, social support, cultural influences, spirituality and faith. While the staff noted students were courageous and brave, in reciting their experiences students themselves showed creativity. Hence, the student group has an additional code of “creativity”.

Figure 2 is an example of the data with the coding process applied.

Figure 2

Table with Data and Coding Applied

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Participant 12: Um, I'm, I'm much younger than all of you so I don't have much of a story to tell yet.</p> <p>For me, resilience is, I think it's a lot of understanding. Like, it's understanding that just like, I'm facing a lot of things, there are other people around me facing a lot of issues as well, and to not think that I'm the only one, who is going through something. Uh, that, we are all in a society facing things together.</p> <p>So, I've always been very dependent on my friends, my family, and they've helped me be resilient. To go through all of my problems together, to solve their problems as well. So, I think resilience is a lot about being with people. (12 & researcher laugh)</p> | <p>I2 talks about relation between age and experience (stories)</p> <p>Resilience is understanding the universality of it – that you are not alone in facing challenges. (are they talking about reciprocal resilience?)</p> <p>Being dependent on others to be resilient – or solve issues together – also realize one can contribute to solving issues for others as well (reciprocating the support that one receives)</p> | <p>SH Sonia Ho Universality of navigating challenges among humanity, community (E) *Notable quote: it's understanding...we are all in a society facing things together*</p> <p>SH Sonia Ho Social support provided through network, community enable resilience (E) Cultural nuance? Culture of collectivism? (E)</p> <p>Lewis, Leah Bridgette Yes, there is a recurring theme of social support and friendship</p> |
|---|---|--|

As noted earlier, the left column contains the transcript, the right column includes a summary description of the transcript and the comment to the right shows the meta theme or code and associated description. Some transcript passages touched on multiple codes; as such, more than one colour is used in the comment. As shown in Figure 2 above, the participant's note on resilience being an understanding that all people face challenges is marked with the comment "Universality of navigating challenges among humanity and community" on the right, in orange and green. The first part of this idea was considered associated with the orange "navigating change and changing environment" code while the second part with the green "social support/network/community" code.

The various coding drafts I created (see Figure 2 above) were reviewed and discussed with my academic supervisor, Dr. Leah Lewis, to ensure they were well thought through. She provided guidance throughout my analytical process and prompted me to further investigate and explore different considerations.

Step 3: Theme Generating

This step involves looking at the codes and data, combining and collapsing them to form patterns of meaning and thus themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., n.d.1; Byrne, 2022). For my process, once the meta themes and codes were established, all relevant transcripts, including that of staff and students, were compiled in an Excel spreadsheet. Transcript content was placed in a column to the left, while the codes identified were used as headings for the rest of the columns to the right. Each cell underneath the coding columns then describes how the specific line from participants on the left reflects each specific code. The cells were colour coded so they could be easily identified and differentiated. When converting the content from the Word document to the Excel spreadsheet, I took a more detailed look at the codes. I provided further

adjustments or clarifications when needed and attempted to identify relationships between various codes. Figure 3 is an excerpt of the Excel spreadsheet with initial codes, converted from the Word document mentioned previously. As shown, “maturity/capacity due to lived experience” (pink) was noted as an additional code compared to the previous iteration of the same conversation with the student participant in the Word document (see Figure 2).

Figure 3

Screenshot of Excel Spreadsheet with Meta Themes and Codes

| Script | Conditions of experience foster capacity/resilience | Navigating change, changing environment, challenge | Self Development | Social support/network/community | Cultural nuances | Role of Spirituality/Faith | Role of Family | Going through a process | Courage/gumption/risk-taking? | Complex and varied experience | Maturity/capacity due to lived experience | Creativity | Additional Notes |
|--|---|--|------------------|---|--|----------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|------------|---|
| (12) I'm, I'm much younger than all of you so I don't have much of a story to tell yet. For me, resilience is, I think it's a lot of understanding. Like, it's understanding that just like, I'm facing a lot of things, there are other people around me facing a lot of issues as well, and to not think that I'm the only one, who is going through something. Uh, that, we are all in a society facing things | | Universality of navigating challenges | | All (humanity) have to face issues - we face things together in a society | | | | | | | Age can have impact on lived experience | | |
| (12) So, I've always been very dependent on my friends, my family, and they've helped me be resilient. To go through all of my problems | | | | social support provided through network and community enable resilience | Individuals influenced by cultures of collectivism may rely more heavily on network/ community | | | | | | | | Subtheme - support provided through friends |

Once the Excel spreadsheet was complete, I reviewed all the cells with the same colour together by scrolling down the spreadsheet. This way I was able to gain a better understanding of each colour code separately as I continued to contemplate the relationships between the different coloured codes. The Excel spreadsheet was reviewed in great detail. As connections were made, codes were combined to create broader themes in a new spreadsheet. Figure 4 shows a screenshot of the Excel spreadsheet with themes.

Figure 4

Screenshot of Excel Spreadsheet with Themes

| Script | Formative Influences (Pre-NL) - self development, family, culture, spirituality/faith, lived experiences | Capacity fostered through conditions of experience when navigating change or challenge | Resilience is connected to how self engages - self concept, self understanding, self development, casel's model of social emotional learning - self awareness, self management, , responsible decision making, social awareness, relationship skills) as well as capacity built through formative experiences (Including maturity which may hinder connections) (UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE CAN HELP WITH THIS OR CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO DO THAT) | Resilience is connected to social network/system - family, faith, university, community outside university (UNIVERSITY STAFF/STUDENTS/THE ENVIRONMENT CAN BE THE COMMUNITY/ SUPPORT SYSTEM OR CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT TO OTHER SUPPORT) | Nature of resilience and developing resilience? Fluid (not stagnant), Non-linear, Multi Varied Process - subtheme? Main theme? Theme? | Additional Notes |
|--|--|--|---|---|---|--|
| (I2) I'm, I'm much younger than all of you so I don't have much of a story to tell yet. For me, resilience is, I think it's a lot of understanding. Like, it's understanding that just like, I'm facing a lot of things, there are other people around me facing a lot of issues as well, and to not think that I'm the only one, who is going through something. Uh, that, we are all in a society facing things together. | Age can have impact on lived experience (I2) | Universality of navigating challenges (I2) | | All (humanity) have to face issues - we face things together in a society (I2) | | |
| (I2) So, I've always been very dependent on my friends, my family, and they've helped me be resilient. To go through all of my problems together, to solve their problems as well. So, I think resilience is a lot about being with people. (I2 & researcher laugh) | | | | social support provided through network and community enable resilience (I2) | | Subtheme - support provided through friends; Individuals influenced by cultures of collectivism may rely more heavily on network/ community? |

Step 4: Theme Reviewing

At this stage, themes were reviewed and checked against the codes and the entire data set to ensure they provided meaningful information that helped answer the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., n.d.1; Byrne, 2022). In my case, the new Excel spreadsheet identified five main themes with subthemes noted through the previous stage of coding. They were noted as below:

1. Formative influence (pre-NL) – self-development, family, culture, spirituality/faith, lived experiences,
2. Capacity fostered through conditions of experience when navigating change or challenge,
3. Resilience is connected to self-development,
4. Resilience is connected to social networks, and
5. The nature of resilience as fluid, non-linear and varied process.

In addition to changes in the present, it was noted that formative experiences, those lived experiences prior to arrival in Newfoundland, were missing in previous coding and was thus identified as a potential theme at this stage. Moreover, the code “conditions of experience foster capacity/resilience” was combined with “navigating change and changing environment”, resulting in the second theme “capacity fostered through conditions of experience when navigating change or challenge”. The third theme “resilience is connected to how self engages” includes subthemes such as self-concept, self-understanding, self-development etc. It was noted that capacity built through formative experiences as well as maturity can potentially impact this. The University can also impact this by creating and offering different opportunities and experiences. The fourth theme, “resilience is connected to social network/system”, includes subthemes such as family, faith, university, community outside university. Again, it was noted that the University can play a role in helping students connect to different support services. Moreover, staff, students and the university environment can provide a sense of community and a support system. The last theme is about the nature of resilience and how it is developed, that is a “fluid, non-linear and varied process”. As I reviewed the entire Excel spreadsheet for themes, I took notes in the “Additional Notes” section (last column) to identify any further considerations, thoughts, ideas, and subthemes. These additional notes were helpful in my reflective analytical process.

Step 5: Theme Naming

This step involves analyzing each theme in detail, thus refining and defining them. The names of themes are to be decided and finalized at this point (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., n.d.1; Byrne, 2022). For my study, I recognized at this stage that the five themes identified earlier needed further consolidation. Considerations and decisions were made based on how they could

be integrated to create a relatively coherent story. It was noted that “formative experience” as a theme has elements that could be incorporated into other areas, such as the themes about capacity impacted by experience, self-engagement as well as social support. Moreover, while formative experiences of individuals could impact their current experiences, the final theme “resilience as a non-linear process built and evolved over time” provides an adequate explanation of this. Once again, my supervisor reviewed the Excel spreadsheet at its various stages, and the decisions on core themes were discussed before being finalized.

Table 2 illustrates how the codes from the initial coding process turned into encompassing themes. The latter stages (steps 3-5) of the analytical process are placed side by side to provide a clear visual and better understanding. The additional final theme “group storytelling and artmaking processes can foster resilience” is created to answer my research query about the use of arts-based practices. Indeed, the data demonstrated that group storytelling and artmaking sessions could impact self as well as social connections, which are elements of resilience identified through this research. This is further supported by the visual data created by participants as well as me, the researcher. Again, discussion of the visual elements of this study will take place later. The finalized themes and subthemes will be discussed in the next chapter.

Table 2

From Initial Coding to Theme Identification

| Initial Codes | Reviewing Potential Themes | Defining and Naming Themes |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family ● Cultural nuances ● Role of spirituality or faith | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Formative influence (pre-NL) – self-development, family, culture, spirituality/faith, lived experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resilience is fostered through changes and challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Challenges in the |

| Initial Codes | Reviewing Potential Themes | Defining and Naming Themes |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conditions of experience foster capacity for resilience ● Navigating change and changing environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Capacity fostered through conditions of experience when navigating change or challenge | <p>Newfoundland context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Formative experiences ○ New changes and challenges |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-development ● Courage/gumption/risk-taking ● Maturity or capacity due to lived experience ● Creativity (from student group) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resilience is connected to how self engages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resilience is influenced by self and social connections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Basic needs ○ Development of self, self-awareness and self-management ○ Social connections ○ University support ○ Barriers for students |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social support/network/community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resilience is connected to social network or system | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Going through a process ● Complex and varied experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nature of resilience as fluid, non-linear and varied process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resilience is a fluid, non-linear process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Resilience is varied and complex ○ Resilience as a process |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Group storytelling and artmaking processes can foster resilience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Book creations ○ Reflection of self and fostering self-development ○ Fostering social connections ○ Unique value of arts activities |

Step 6: Reporting

The final step of the analytical process is reporting the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., n.d.1; Byrne, 2022). Once the analysis was complete, I took an additional step before final reporting. To ensure the themes identified reflected participants' points of view, a member check survey (see Appendix H) was sent out to participants at the end of the research process. Since similar themes were noted in staff and student meetings, I decided to send out the final surveys to both staff and students at the same time, after all the data were analysed and core themes were identified. The final member check survey was created through "Qualtrics XM", a survey tool approved by Memorial University of Newfoundland and forwarded to all participants as a link via e-mail. Participants were given limited time to complete the survey, to encourage a quicker response. Four, or half, of the total participants responded to the survey.

The survey was important as it served as an opportunity for participants to provide clarifications and offer additional input. It was kept simple deliberately to provide participants with room and freedom to further reflect. Participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the four final themes identified, namely, 1) resilience is a capacity fostered through navigating change and challenges, 2) resilience is influenced by self and social connections, 3) resilience is a fluid, non-linear process, and 4) group storytelling and artmaking processes can foster resilience. All four respondents agreed with the themes. They were also able to elaborate on their answers, as well as further comment on the story told, the storybook created, the digital images submitted, as well as the storytelling and group sharing experience. The survey questions and responses can be found in Appendix I. Participants' takeaways and feedback included: experiences add to capacity in navigation, the importance of social connections which could impact resilience and of learning about one's own resilience, group sessions were valuable

due to their reflective nature as well as opportunities to share, learn and in turn receive support, resilience changes over time and in different contexts, and the value and challenges of book making.

Thematic analysis recognizes that knowledge is produced by the researcher together with the participants (Lainson et al., 2019). In this case, not only were participants involved in the investigation of resilience through the storytelling and artmaking group sessions, but the final member check survey also helped verify and validate the knowledge produced through our coordination.

Limitations of Analysis

As with all analytical processes, there are limitations to TA and my employment of RTA specifically in this study. Due to the inherited subjectivity in TA, this study and the results of it will be difficult to replicate. Having said that, the six-step process of RTA noted by Braun and Clarke (2006; Braun et al., n.d.1, Byrne, 2022) can help guide other researchers if they wish to conduct similar studies and analyses. In this way, rich data that are not limited to or bounded by pre-existing ideas and theories may result.

Secondly, alternative ways of conducting my analysis could potentially offer additional nuanced meanings. For example, my second data source, the artbooks created by the participants, was not analyzed independently. If a rigorous coding process like that of the transcripts was applied to the artefacts, additional meanings might be noted; however, if doable, would likely be quite time consuming. Moreover, if the researcher's reflective art book was created at the same time as that of the participants, a different direction in meaning making might have been taken in the research. Indeed, due to subjectivity, the pathways that the researcher could potentially take

in the analytical process are numerous. It was, however, determined that the flexibility of using thematic analysis outweighed its disadvantages in this study.

Thirdly, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic created a delay in participant recruitment, thus further delayed the process of data collection and stalled the analytical process. While time was noted as a plus in thematic analysis (Lainson et al., 2019), having to revisit data after taking a break meant familiarizing myself with it. The prolongation of the research process could potentially diffuse the researcher's attention and thus impact the rigour of the data. By adhering to the COVID-19 guidelines, the member check was conducted online. This may have impacted the response rate, as online survey was not particularly engaging. For the staff participants, a long time has passed since the completion of their group meetings when they received the member check survey, which could be another factor for their low response rate.

Conclusion

The above examination of how data was analysed in this study using RTA, thus sets the stage for the outcome chapters that follow. The six-step RTA process identified by Braun and Clarke (2006; Braun et al., n.d.1; Byrne, 2022) provides structure and guidance to the analysis. Moreover, the following chapters (“Outcomes” and “Researcher Autoethnographic Outcome”) conclude the final step of the six-step process, whereby the results of the analysis were reported and elaborated in detail.

CHAPTER 5: Outcomes

On the other hand, I feel inspired by all those around me: the students, people from other networks and the community. Despite how much is on their plate, they stand up, then make things work, whether through their hope and faith, sheer motivation, sense of pride or achievement, passion, family expectations and responsibilities... (S. Ho, personal journal, November 2021)

Four overall themes were identified in this investigation of how resilience can be fostered in the postsecondary international student context at Memorial University of Newfoundland. While similar themes appeared in both staff and student discussions, it is noted that staff held a more objective stance due to their roles as support people for international students and hence they were able to take note of students' experiences and in some cases their whole academic journeys at the University. The four themes identified were: i) resilience is fostered through navigating changes and challenges, ii) resilience is influenced by self and social connections, iii) resilience fostering is a non-linear process, iv) arts-based practices can help further resilience. In the "Review of Literature" chapter early on, it was established that resilience can be fostered, thus answering my first research question. In response to my second research question, whether arts-based methods such as storytelling and artmaking can be used to further resilience, the answer is a resounding yes and will be discussed below.

Participant Demographics

Four staff members and four students participated in the research. While all participants attended the two mandatory group meetings, all students and only two staff members participated in the optional artmaking session. Moreover, while there were always two staff participants

attending each session, the groupings changed for each session due to the staff's busy schedules. Participants were not asked specifically to identify their gender or sexuality. There was no disclosure from the participants when they were asked to introduce themselves or at any point in the research process except for one participant who specifically spoke about their roles as a wife and a mother. Since priority was given to protecting participants' identities and ensuring anonymity, the pronouns "they" and "them" will be used throughout the rest of this paper to refer to individual participants.

Only staff working at the Internationalization Office at the St. John's Campus were invited to participate as they support international students across all campuses at the University and thus are most familiar with their experiences. The staff had various roles at the office and a range of experiences, including both long-time staff as well as recent hires. One of the staff participants identified themselves as a former international student. Staff were from various racial backgrounds and cultural heritages, including those who grew up locally in Newfoundland and Labrador. They are referred to as S1, S2, S3 and S4 in this paper.

Student participants were international students from South America and South Asia and were studying at the two campuses in St. John's. Two students participated in the research when they had been in St. John's for four months and had only studied in their programs for about one semester. The other two students, recruited later, had lived in St. John's for ten months at the time this research was conducted. One of them had just completed their program, while the other was midway through their two-year program. Three students moved to St. John's with their family, two of which came with their children. Two students were studying undergraduate programs while two were in graduate programs. Student participants are noted as I1, I2, I3, and I4.

The demographics of participants are noted to demonstrate the diverse viewpoints and experiences represented in the study due to social context and location. One needs to be mindful that viewpoints of individuals from one specific region are not representative of that region. It is also important to note the COVID-19 context, that all student participants arrived at about the same time in 2021, when the University and the Canadian government were implementing various regulations and policies due to the pandemic. These included quarantine upon arrival and virtual learning, at least for part of their programs. While originally the study was conceived involving in-person groups, all meetings were conducted online due to COVID-19 distancing requirements. On one hand then, this study lacked the nuanced exchanges that come with making art in groups in person, whereby, for example, individuals might assist each other with their artmaking, allowing skills transfer and deeper connections. On the other hand, online meetings enabled greater access and flexibility, bypassing issues such as transportation, busy schedules and family responsibilities. In other words, there were some gains and some losses in outcomes for participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theme 1: Resilience is Fostered Through Navigating Changes and Challenges.

At the beginning of the group discussions, research participants were asked to define resilience. All participants noted that resilience involves experiencing and getting through some form of transition or difficulty. Descriptors that participants used include “stretch and adapt...to fit the circumstance” (S1), “weather the storm” (S2), “keep going in...hardship” (S3), “get through a hard time or many hard times” (S4), “face challenges” (I1), “facing...issues” (I2), “overcome...recover from...something negative” (I3), “getting...adjusted” (I4). The international student experience by nature involves unavoidable transition. Indeed, to study in-person overseas, international students are required to move physically. As such, international students

all encounter various changes that may come with challenges that require navigation. From the day-to-day, such as where and how to access necessities, to things that require nuanced understanding, such as etiquette and communication in different settings, international students are often required to face challenges with limited support. In contrast, local students, students from the immediate jurisdiction, or even Canadian students from other provinces, typically have fewer hurdles to overcome due to their familiarity with cultural settings and practices. While they may also be adjusting to the university experience, they likely have family support that are accessible and social circles such as hobby groups that are well established or can be sought out more easily.

As identified in the literature, some common challenges international students face include academic performance, communication, finance, social adjustment, daily living, careers, loneliness and homesickness, as well as life roles and identity (Arthur, 2010; Banjong, 2015; Iarovici, 2014; Smiljanic, 2017; Sullivan-Kashubeck-West, 2015). Performing well academically is often of particular importance to international students, due to the high cost of international student fees, family pressure, maintenance of immigration status, impact on future career, etc. Language may be a barrier for those who are English as a Second Language learners, which can hinder communication when attempting to build new social connections. Learning in a different language and in different cultural contexts can add to already challenging academic tasks. Loneliness and homesickness are experienced since students must leave social ties back home and establish new social connections in a new environment. Moreover, postsecondary students are often at key points of their life stages. Those who just completed secondary education may find themselves being away from home the first time and learning to be independent. They may be trying to establish their sense of self through exploring their interests, deciding on their career

paths, etc. Mature students may be seeking their second careers in addition to starting or taking care of their families. Further, researchers studying the Newfoundland and Labrador context have highlighted weather, an environment that lacks diversity, language and social adjustment as some of the more challenging aspects for international students in this geographical region (Alsafar, 2015; MUN, 2014a, MUN 2014b, Philpott et al., 2014; Reitmanova & Gustavson, 2009). These challenges and how they were navigated surfaced as a theme in the conversations with staff and students throughout this research. How the challenges transpired during the COVID-19 context were also discussed in the group meetings with participants and are further explained below.

Challenges in the Newfoundland Context

Specific challenges in the Newfoundland context identified by the research participants of this study included weather, population size, transportation, newcomer services and support, language and communication, loneliness and isolation, as well as housing and settlement. Such challenges often create obstacles and barriers to their quality of life and thus adjustment in establishing a new home. Participants also identified additional challenges brought forth by COVID-19, basically, unexpected and unavoidable situations that one lacks control over during a very uncertain time.

Weather and Population Size. In Newfoundland, due to the marine climate, the temperature does not vary in extremes but remains rather cool for most of the year (Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism, n.d. b), and the city of St. John's is often windy (City of St. John's, 2022a). St. John's, the capital city of the most eastern province of Canada, is a lot quieter than other Canadian provincial capitals due to its small urban population density (Statistics Canada, 2022). The cool weather and quiet environment are often what students

encounter and notice when they first move to Newfoundland. Weather can create added barriers to individuals' mobility, especially during the winter months. For example, uncleared sidewalks can prevent safe pedestrian crossings (Singer, 2023) and newcomers like international students may be deterred from driving in wintry conditions: "I need some practice... Waiting for the winter, I didn't want to go out and, you know... Reverse parking and all that" (I4). Regarding the quietness of the city, while some enjoy it, others struggle tremendously: "I was coming from [home country] and...is crowded... And then arriving to a small place, I mean, small in terms of population. And it's like, wow, where is the people, here, you know" (I1). For those who are used to living in bigger, busier and warmer places, living in St. John's is a big change and getting accustomed to it can be a challenge, which can in turn affect smooth settlement.

Transportation. The city of St. John's has few options for transportation (City of St. John's, 2022b) and residents are often car-dependent (Yeoman, 2020). Buses are the more affordable option and are widely used by newcomers, including international students (Roberts, 2023b). However, ridership increased significantly in 2023, possibly due to the rise in living costs, expensive fuel and a growing number of newcomers (Roberts, 2023a; Kelly, 2024). The bus stops can be far apart, and the buses infrequent, which the bus company tried to mitigate by involving community buses that normally serve seniors, partnering with Memorial University to offer on-demand services, as well as adjusting the timing of traffic lights to move the buses quicker as they sought more long-term solutions (Roberts, 2023a, 2023b). Furthermore, it was noted that the bus system could be much more user-friendly by providing additional signage (Roberts, 2023b). The lack of an efficient public transit system can therefore create settlement challenges for international students. For example, one student participant recounted the

experience of missing a bus with their young family, which in turn intensified the feeling of isolation:

Once we, we went out to get some groceries and then we missed the bus...it was around 7:30. And we could not get a taxi, because the taxis won't come...we didn't have car seats at that time...we had to hang all the bags in the stroller...we had to walk from the Walmart...we were discouraged...and it was so cold and...that is something, you know, unforgettable. (I4)

In addition, the current transit system only provides limited access to resources and experiences, as noted by various staff. Newfoundland is well known for its nature and breathtaking scenery (Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism, n.d. a). Without accessible transportation, international students may not have the opportunities to enjoy such beauty. Students' experiences may therefore be limited to opportunities that are within or close to the campus. This in turn can impact individuals' sense of belonging and settlement in their new home.

Newcomer Services and Support. While the province has become more diverse over the years and the number of new immigrants has grown exponentially (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2022), there continue to be gaps in the services and support provided to the increasingly diverse residents of the province. Access to affordable cultural and ethnic foods was identified by students as an issue in Newfoundland, as one of them noted: "I went to Walmart. It says the Latin American food or something like that there. And I was there, in that aisle and then it's like there is no real [ethnic] food here. It's like, I'm scammed" (I1). Food can be closely connected to individuals' sense of identity and belonging; furthermore, it often brings comfort and can ease transition for those who are living far away from home (Bailey, 2017; Lin et al., 2020). As finance is often a concern for students, they often select

budget options when grocery shopping. The lack of access to cultural foods that are economical may prevent international students from feeling settled and at home which can lead to further homesickness.

The low level of diversity in some classrooms was noted by students, which may lead to a sense of otherness and isolation. This may also mean that inclusive practices, such as those that cater to the needs and learning styles of international students, are either not in place or not practiced widely. One student (I1) talked about the experience of being grouped together in a class with another international student from a different country when both were struggling:

...[the instructor] was using a lot of technicisms, um, and some words we didn't know so it's like, wow... to put all, the two only international students in that class together...working in a lab as lab partners... So like we are totally lost...finally he made some changes...and yeah we had a Canadian in order to help us...but, yeah, I had to talk to him and ask him this issue that we had.

In this case, assigning international students and domestic students to the same working group would have helped. However, it is important to note that not all students feel comfortable bringing up issues with their instructors due to the power dynamic. Another student (I2) spoke of their first ever lab experience being at the University while their instructor assumed they had prior experience. Having prior knowledge and needs assessed at the beginning of the course, breaking down instructions into small steps and making them accessible in different formats, as well as offering check-ins for individual students are some inclusive practices that can potentially help. As Clemens and Robinson (2021) state, establishing caring relationships and creating a community of care for students is the foundation for more inclusive practices. A lack

of understanding of their needs from faculty and instructors can thus make international students feel unsupported and therefore perpetuate their feeling of being outsiders.

Language and Communication. Language as a challenge was brought up by both staff and students. Despite having met the language proficiency requirements to enter the University and being deemed competent to learn in the English language at the postsecondary level, international students may not be ready for the actual demands of language use in their chosen field and academic programs due to nuances of language in context (Alsafar, 2015; Russell et al., 2022; Xiao, 2021). They may not be accustomed to or feel confident using the English language daily in new social, academic and professional settings, and require further support as well as time to adjust (Alsafar, 2015; Neumann et al., 2023; Russell et al., 2022; Xiao, 2021).

Furthermore, differences in the use of language, accents and communication styles can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding, which can in turn impact connections with others. One student recalled struggling with the accent, as well as colloquialisms and technical terms used by their instructor: “There is...a local teacher and he’s old...for me...was so difficult to understand him because he speaks like a Newfoundlander. You know, a lot of sayings and I don’t know...for me, it was a nightmare that class...” (I1). Indeed, Newfoundland has its own colloquialisms (MUN, 2014b), and there is a dictionary of Newfoundland English that documents these terminologies (MUN, 2024a). According to the Dialect Atlas of Newfoundland and Labrador (n.d.a), due to its settlement history, there is great regional variation in Newfoundland English. For example, “h” can be added to or deleted from the beginning of words when they are pronounced, thus, “eat” may sound like “heat” or “heat” may sound like “eat” depending on individuals and regions, which can be confusing for newcomers to this province (The Dialect Atlas of Newfoundland and Labrador, n.d.b). Another student explained

their attempts to communicate with their non-Canadian work supervisor were often stressful, that the blunt responses and lack of feedback had led to some self-doubt regarding their capabilities and writing abilities in particular. Thus, the inability to communicate well with others, whether real or perceived, can be stressful for students.

In addition to struggles with the English language, one staff participant noted that the lack of opportunity to speak one's native language can be challenging: "...when you can't speak to someone in your language, it also reminds you of how far away you are from home. And how it's not your home until you're able to communicate with the people in, in the area..." (S1). Since languages are closely tied to individuals' identities and sense of belonging (Salomone, 2010; Xiao, 2021), those who have few people to converse with in their native language may feel less connected and experience greater homesickness.

In sum, language and communication can significantly impact the transitional experiences of international students. While having opportunities to speak one's own language can help affirm one's roots and identity, mastery of the English language and communication are important for international students at Memorial University to manage their daily lives, perform academically and work toward their desired goals and career. Moreover, good communication skills are needed to build new social connections with individuals such as peers, instructors and colleagues in a new environment. Indeed, failure to make new connections can be particularly challenging for international students as explained below.

Loneliness and Isolation. Loneliness, isolation and difficulty making new connections are identified as the predominant challenges by the student participants in this research as well as in the literature, especially during initial settlement for newcomers in Newfoundland (Alsafar, 2015; Dixit, 2018; MUN, 2014b; Reitmanova & Gustavson, 2009). Both students from the first

student group chose to focus on their experiences of loneliness and isolation in their book creation. One of them talked about their own fear of meeting new people, while the other spoke of difficulties in finding people to meet and talk to during the COVID-19 pandemic in St. John's, a place with a sparse population. As mentioned earlier, experiences can be more difficult when challenges are compounded. The feelings of loneliness and isolation can enhance feelings of homesickness and culture shock, which were challenges identified by students and staff: "...that wishing for home and not being able to be at home and so that is also a theme that follows with so many meetings that you have with students..." (S3). Homesickness and culture shock can make individuals feel lonelier and more isolated.

The sense of loneliness and isolation was further exacerbated during lockdowns and when stringent public health policies were in place due to COVID-19. One student talked about the difficulty in finding others from their cultural community: "It was very hard to find [an individual from my home country] ...when we came here. Now, also they are wearing masks and so we can find who it is only through the eyes." (I4). Another student mentioned how physical isolation and lack of physical touch due to COVID-19 regulations reinforced the feeling of isolation. They became emotional when explaining themselves: "Nowadays with the pandemic, it's like, I need to ask always for permission in the [cultural] community. I don't know if I should hug you or not" (I1). Yet another student talked about the difficulty of finding the motivation to go out and meet others during the pandemic: "I think it's easier to, just like in my story, to cage yourself, that with Skip the Dishes or with online classes, sometimes I go through entire weeks without even looking at the sunlight" (I2). In this student's case, technology enabled them to stay closed off from others, which exacerbated the challenges of loneliness and isolation. During the time when this research was conducted, COVID-19 regulations significantly reduced networking

and social opportunities, thus making it difficult for students to make new social connections, especially for those who would normally struggle to connect socially with others. While loneliness and isolation were concerns for international students pre-pandemic (Alsafar, 2015; Dixit, 2018; MUN, 2014b; Reitmanova & Gustavson, 2009), COVID-19 further complicated such known barriers.

Housing and Settlement. While finding accessible and affordable housing for international students has long been an issue (MUN 2014a), housing has become much more difficult to find in recent times due to the lack of supply in rental properties and increase in the cost of rent in St. John's (Lazarenko, 2023; Pottie-Sherman et al., 2024; Reid, 2023). All students agreed this was a challenge for them. Students noted that different practices created additional challenges in the housing search: in particular, some landlords' practice of requiring references can be unfair to new international students who do not have references locally and the request for proof of income can seem intrusive to one's privacy. Even when accommodations were found, they might be located far from campus which exacerbates struggles with transit as discussed above.

...it's very hard because we are from...we are outside Canada...and people, they don't trust us [I3 nods in agreement] ... We had to show our income, we didn't have anything to show as proof of income in Canada. Like, they don't trust us basically [laugh]...because they don't know if we can pay the rentals or not so... I had to live off campus...because I couldn't find anything on campus and anything closer to the campus. (I4)

Staff noted access to affordable and safe housing is not always available, which can potentially lead to precariousness and homelessness for students. Indeed, Pottie-Sherman et. al. (2024)'s study and local news (Lazarenko, 2023; Reid, 2023) report on the distinct housing affordability

challenges international students face and their vulnerability to discrimination and exploitation in the St. John's housing market. In addition to being unfamiliar with the city and rental practices, being "young, racialized and temporary" may make international students more susceptible to scams and being taken advantage of or mistreated by landlords (Pottie-Sherman et al., 2024, p. 53). For example, they may be misled on a rental property's availability or condition prior to arrival or required to pay a large deposit or inflated rent (Lazarenko, 2023; Pottie-Sherman, 2024; Reid, 2023). The pandemic worsened these housing injustices by introducing new financial vulnerabilities and "'legitimizing' exclusion as a matter of public health" (Pottie-Sherman et al., 2024, p. 52). Indeed, international students may have trouble accessing funds from overseas, or may have lost jobs and thus income while having to manage rising living costs and additional fees in a highly competitive rental market as they pursue their high-priced education (Pottie-Sherman et al., 2024). Furthermore, the challenge of setting up a place that feels like home was also mentioned by staff: "...Like, you find that, as an international student, home is, either you don't have a home, or you have somewhere very temporary that you can't personalize..." (S1). Thus, the challenges students face in seeking accommodation and building a new home can be stressful, daunting, discouraging and unsettling.

Other Challenges and COVID-19 Impact. There are other challenges that international students face, and some became more difficult to tackle during the pandemic. What made challenges more difficult to deal with was that many were unexpected, unavoidable and out of one's control. One student (I4) brought up specific difficulties encountered during their initial settlement such as additional financial costs, and new travel restrictions and requirements. Another student (I3) talked about the delay to processes, particularly the processing of immigration documents, which are closely tied to the status of international students in Canada

and can impact their eligibility to stay for study and work, their ability to travel, as well as access to support and services (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 2021). For example, in Newfoundland and Labrador, students can access the public health insurance only with a study permit valid for twelve months and proof of full-time enrollment (Medical Care Plan, n.d.). Delay in immigration processes, then, may leave international students in precarious and vulnerable situations, thus inducing additional stress and anxiety (Cadenas & Nienhuser, 2021).

Due to the uncertainties of the pandemic, online learning was the main mode of teaching and learning for students at Memorial University during the years of 2020 and 2021. Despite living in St. John's at the time they participated in this research (between January and May 2022), all student participants completed some if not most components of their academic programs online. While technology has allowed more flexibility for some students, for others it has widened the gaps of differences in education systems and access to resources. For example, on one hand, I4 was able to stay home and provide childcare while maintaining their studies online, and I3 could be more at ease doing their presentations online. On the other hand, some international students began studying online overseas and struggled with the technology and course content, while not knowing when they could study on campus because of delays in immigration document processing and travel restrictions.

I felt that for some people from other countries, the tasks weren't clear...because of this distance, they were behind...So I felt that it was like a cultural difference in education, system, maybe... And the connection, the disconnection, the time difference. It was chaos.

As stated above, I3 noted the unfairness of the situation and empathized with those who were disadvantaged in their studies due to the implementation of COVID-19 measures. Furthermore, I1 noted the impracticality of studying technical courses online. Uncertainties of the pandemic therefore not only brought forth additional stressors and worries for international students, but they also impacted the quality of their study experience as individuals and groups.

Individuals can prepare for changes that come about by choice, such as deciding to study abroad. However, these choices still come with uncertainties and unanticipated challenges. It is the unexpectedness and uncertainty that can make challenges seem insurmountable. This sentiment was shared by the student (I4) who found themselves pregnant upon arrival:

And during my quarantine period... I was not feeling comfortable and... I got to know that I was pregnant with the third child. So, at that time, I was like, What the heck happened to me. I don't have...nobody here. I didn't have my parents. I came here to do my degree with two kids and I'm going to...have another one now... I was nowhere as to how I should manage. How could I do my studies? Because my husband has to go to work if not...there will be no income... I have to pay my fees...we have to pay the bills, pay the rent and so many problems. I was so, like, actually stressed at that time.

This student explained their thought process and worries when they first learned of their unexpected pregnancy in a foreign country. An unexpected pregnancy would be stressful for any student, but it becomes much more stressful for international students when they are isolated and unfamiliar with how to access the necessary services and support.

Prior to the pandemic, international students already had to navigate complex processes and systems. During the pandemic, these processes and systems became even more complicated

as they adapted to pandemic restrictions. Indeed, the unpredictability of changes to come made the time of COVID-19 lockdowns and strict regulations particularly challenging for all.

Formative Experiences

In navigating challenges, it was noted by both staff and students that international students possess resilience through their formative experiences. These may include their family upbringing, faith, and previous lived experience. All staff noted how childhood and former experiences can impact individuals' abilities to face future challenges. One student shared specifically how faith can provide a sense of hope and strength when they lack a support system locally:

I believe in God... I'm a religious person... I do Bible studies and... I think through that, I got uh, some, some strength, some hope. And it was a big thing for me...because...if I was in [home country] ... I can talk to my mom, my dad or even a friend...(I4)

Another student talked about how their near-death experiences changed their perspective on life:

I survived a shipwreck. I was in a boat and the boat sank. So, I survive, I spent one and a half year in bed because I had a terminal, terminal illness. And, thanks God, I am alive...so it's another opportunity in my life... These...experiences had taught me...how to start from scratch...(I1)

Not only do previous life experiences inform understanding of current experiences, but they can also provide reassurance and hope for individuals that their current difficulties and experiences will eventually pass. One student spoke about a particularly difficult time in a former study abroad experience and how that helped them put things into perspective with their current studies: “it was a chaotic time. And I survived that, right? So, sometimes I, when I feel like, I'm too weak or I wouldn't be able to overcome something, I remember that period specifically” (I3).

Former experiences can also teach individuals strategies for handling new challenges. A student talked about their experience of taking a different path than others and taking time to choose the right path for themselves:

...where I'm from, it's looked upon very differently if you have a large study gap. And I, I haven't started university for many years after finishing high school and so staying at home, and being told different things, by different people. I had to tell myself again and again that my time will come eventually when I find the right place for myself. So, uh, that's something that I have to train myself to do to, to not listen to others' negativity.

Yeah, I think that experience has made me a lot more resilient than before. (I2)

Formative experiences can therefore help individuals be prepared and ready to face new challenges. They can lay the foundation for further skills and mindsets for resilience.

New Changes and Challenges

As international students navigate change in their environment, they often encounter situations that challenge their capacity. This is reflected clearly by the responses from staff. A staff member (S1) stated that, “You become resilient because you don't have the supports that you're used to. So, you have to navigate, you have to make the mistakes, you have to go through the challenges”. This was echoed by another staff member (S3): “whether the student possesses it [resilience] or not, the experience may demand that of you”. Both staff members talked about how circumstances demand resilience and force one to step up even when individuals lack the capacity. In other words, new circumstances can help build and foster resilience capacity in individuals.

From the staff perspective, resilience is nurtured through international students' academic studies, on- or off-campus work that helps provide income, and non-academic experiences such

as volunteering and internship opportunities. One staff member (S3) gave the example of a student having built confidence after working: “But there was definitely a confidence piece that wasn't there until [they] started working. And started meeting with some success, you know”. Other staff members (S2 & S1) also noted that, through exposure to individuals from different parts of the world, students can learn new information and how to associate with those different from themselves. Through intercultural learning, then, they can further their capacity.

In handling new challenges, the international students participated in this research attempted to put things into perspective, such as accepting what they cannot change and seeing the positives, devising ways to handle difficulties, and simply taking action. For example, one student (I2) talked about the lack of cultural foods associated with their faith and how they adapted by stating they are vegetarian when going to restaurants and making do with the limited ingredients they could source locally when cooking at home. In this way, circumstance forced the individual to be more flexible. Indeed, in many cases, circumstances have driven individuals to take action and move forward. For the student who was pregnant (I4), having relocated their family here pushed them to do what was necessary. Meanwhile, the lack of opportunities back home compelled another student (I3) to find better opportunities for themselves. Yet another student (I1) talked about how their challenges of isolation and homesickness made them come up with strategies to meet new people. The following quote from a staff member reflects this notion that one has no other choice than to take action:

...a song that I, I feel really, really, kind of, expresses how maybe international students might feel... It's called “Can't go back now” by the Weepies and the first verse is “Yesterday, when you were young, everything you needed done was done for you. Now you do it on your own, but you find you're all alone. What can you do?” (I1)

Challenges in new environments, then, require responses from individuals to navigate them, and the experience of handling these situations can help foster resilience in individuals over time.

As shown in conversations with students and staff in my research, resilience is fostered through navigating changes and challenges. For international students studying at Memorial University, they have encountered some specific challenges in the Newfoundland context as well as added ones during the pandemic in recent years. As noted in the report about mental wellness of postsecondary students in Newfoundland and Labrador by Choices for Youth and RBC Future Launch (2019), international students face additional barriers, and thus have a greater risk of being mentally unwell. Yet, this study has shown that the international student participants and many students the staff participants encountered are resilient and stand out in their capacity to handle change. Their formative experiences help establish their resilience capacity while new changes and challenges abroad help them further such capacity.

Theme 2: Resilience is Influenced by Self and Social Connections.

As noted earlier, researchers who study resilience recognize that there are internal and external factors that impact resilience (Liu et al., 2017; Rybak et al., 2001; Southwick et al., 2014; UBC, 2014). Brown (2010) further notes that resilience is made up of qualities of self such as resourcefulness, the ability to problem solve and seek help, the belief in the possibility to cope and manage feelings, as well as access to social support and social connections. This is in line with research about Social Emotional Intelligence (SEI), promoted through Social Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks that are practised widely in school systems, such as Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning or CASEL 5, which notes the importance of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship skills in human development

(CASEL, 2024; Gonzales, 2022). Indeed, discussion with participants in this research shows that the development of self and the building of social connections can help further resilience.

Basic Needs

Both staff and students pointed out that basic needs must be fulfilled before resilience can be nurtured. One staff member (S3) noted, “it's really hard for a person to feel resilience if they don't know where they're sleeping that night, if they don't have anything to eat, if those kinds of fundamental basic human needs are not met...” For international students, establishing basic needs means finding housing, having finances established, and everything that is generally necessary to feel settled in a place. Having these needs fulfilled will allow individuals to have the strength and stability to move on, as the staff member further explained, “...there's resilience there if you're coping with this [meeting basic needs], but I almost feel like that needs to be supported, oftentimes, for students, so that they can be more independent and resilient” (S3). In other words, connecting international students to settlement support early upon arrival is essential, as explained in the university support discussion later.

Development of Self: Self-Awareness and Self-Management

Self-awareness and self-management are competencies gained through self-development over time. Self-awareness means understanding how one's emotions impact behaviours, which in turn help one understand beliefs, values, thoughts, purposes, motivations, strengths, limitations, etc., while self-management goes beyond awareness and refers to being able to control one's emotions to promote desired behaviours and outcomes (CASEL, 2024; Gonzales, 2022). The qualities outlined below were noted from staff and student conversations in this research. They demonstrate both self-awareness and self-management, which are important to resilience.

Confidence and Agency. Knowing oneself well and being able to self-regulate can lead to confidence and also a sense of agency (Gonzales, 2022). The following student (I1) demonstrates confidence and agency by seeking opportunities to apply their skills upon arrival in St. John's:

I spend time, um, as a referee of volleyball. It's something that I enjoy. It's like a talent that I have. And then I realize here, like, a couple of months ago, there was a big event of volleyball, a national and stuff. And I said okay, I know how to do that... And they told me yeah, we are going to hire you... Yeah, and I was using that talent.

Similarly, other participants explained that one of the reasons for participating in this research was the potential to help others: "I've done research all my life [laugh] and I like to support research projects, because I have received help during my research project" (I3) and "I thought that it's a good thing if I can tell my story...I'm a bit proud of that because I, I did it... And when you published it sometime, there will be someone to get something from my story..." (I4). The willingness to step up and contribute requires individuals to be aware of their own strengths and have confidence in their own abilities. Being offered opportunities to contribute, as shown in these examples, can help individuals further affirm their sense of self and build greater confidence (Gonzales, 2022).

Positivity, Open-Mindedness, and Perseverance. Other qualities of self that can impact resilience include being positive and hopeful, staying open-minded and maintaining a growth mindset, or the belief that basic abilities can grow through hard work, as well as having grit or long-term perseverance despite difficulties (Brown, 2010; Duckworth et al., 2007; Dweck et al., 2014; Segerstrom et al., 2017; Stanford Alumni, 2014; TED, 2013).

One student (I4) demonstrated optimism through how they handled their unexpected pregnancy: “I tried to stay, you know, with the positive mind and through religion and through other kind of success stories... I tried to...get rid of that disappointment and I got some courage and strength through those things.” Staying positive and hopeful, then, could help individuals stay motivated and driven in overcoming challenges as noted by Segerstrom et al. (2017) and Lewis et al. (2020). In this case, student participants recognized something could be done in their situation and sought resources to help themselves, such as through their faith, through social media, and through finding others with similar experiences as role models. As Brown (2010) notes, hope is having the ability to set realistic goals and pursue them, as well as the belief in oneself to achieve them. Fostering hope is important to resilience. Indeed, positivity and hopefulness can help one feel a sense of power and agency to make change during times of much doubt and fear (Brown, 2010).

In regard to open-mindedness, all student participants showed that they were flexible and willing to try and learn new things, demonstrating a growth mindset (Dweck et al., 2014). The willingness to take up new challenges shows the quality of courage, the ability to take risks, and moving out of their comfort zone. As identified by the staff participants, courage is a common quality that contributes to resilience in international students. Moving overseas often means being removed from individuals, places, and things one is familiar with, in addition to facing many unknowns and uncertainties. Thus, for those who choose to study abroad, they must be brave and open to risks:

...undertaking a postsecondary degree of whatever level is a big transition in life and a big adjustment in life. And do that, um, perhaps with English as a second language or an entirely new learning environment...is kind of a certain type of person who, who was

willing to do that... So there's a certain element of bravery and adventure already with international students. (S3)

Indeed, international students can be quite curious and adventurous. Two student participants talked about travelling and living overseas multiple times. As stated earlier, there are also those who see the necessity for changes and opportunities, that there are no other choices than to take risks so as to better their circumstances and reach their goals. With learning and improvement as goals in mind, trying out new things that are challenging can lead to greater abilities and thus sense of satisfaction, fulfillment and agency (Dweck et al., 2014; Stanford Alumni, 2014).

The ability to persevere through challenges and not be willing to give up is demonstrated throughout the various resilience stories that students shared:

I don't like to quit. So, if something is difficult, it's like, okay, it's going to be so difficult, but I'm not going to surrender... So I'm going to try to make it and probably I'm not good in that thing, but at least I'm going to know a little bit about, oh, that, that activity. (I1)

During their discussions, all student participants expressed their desire for and interest in continuous learning, which demonstrates a growth mindset (Stanford Alumni, 2014) and is essential to fostering grit (Park et al., 2018). Such persistence or perseverance can become more powerful in overcoming challenges when coupled with self-management skills like problem solving and critical thinking, which are discussed next.

Problem Solving and Perspective Taking. Age and experience can help individuals build information-finding skills and problem-solving skills, as mentioned earlier. Student participants in the research talked about how they devised ways to resolve their challenges, whether that means being creative and coming up with their own solutions. One student (I4) looked to YouTube for ideas to juggle their home and school responsibilities. Another student

(I1) learned to voice their needs and concerns by pointing out to their instructor that their teaching methods were negatively impacting their learning. A further student (I3) sought counselling regarding their emotional issues.

Moreover, higher-order thinking skills, such as the ability to reflect, think critically and put things into perspective can help individuals cope in difficult situations. How perspective influences motivation in international students is noted by the staff “...most of what you do is that internal work of, like, determining that, okay I got here, I need to get a job. I have to work, or I can't pay rent” (S1) or “...you're here for a set number of years, right? So, you almost come into it with a mindset of I need to do this, I need to survive this. I chose this.” (S4). Students also discussed the different perspectives they took during specific challenges. For example, one (I1) talked about doing what is in one's control:

A few months ago, I, my [sibling] passed away so due to the COVID-19... It is what it is...life is going to continue, so I need to remember [them], but at the same time I need to continue with my life. So, there are things that I cannot change but for sure there are other things that I can change.

and another (I3) spoke about learning to manage their own expectations:

...another thought is that I need to lower my expectations [reading off their book]. I won't save the world. I don't need to, I shouldn't feel like I'm the... Yes, I, I think COVID-19 showed me that we are not essential in a way [laugh]... So, if I don't write the best piece about sustainability, the world won't end, you know.

With the challenges brought by the pandemic, students noted the emergence of new opportunities, which requires positivity as mentioned earlier, as well as the ability to see things from a different perspective. For example, one student (I3) stated that studying in Canada

became more affordable as the program could be partially completed online, while another student (I1) despite their initial dislike of online studies, recognized the upside of having more free time to engage with non-academic activities. The ability to devise solutions or employ different strategies, as well as reflect and think critically and differently are thus important to resilience.

Maturity. Maturity is defined as “a state of completed growth or development, as in adulthood” by the APA Dictionary of Psychology (“Maturity”, 2018), or more specifically, “the quality of behaving mentally and emotionally like an adult” by the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary and Thesaurus (“Maturity”, 2024). As explained in theme 1, experiences can impact resilience. While maturity does not necessarily correspond to age, individuals who have had many experiences are often considered more mature. When individuals gain experiences through life and mature, they have a better understanding and clearer sense of self, in addition to more resources and tools to cope with and navigate change, thus resulting in greater resilience. One staff member (S3) commented on their observations of students:

I think we can hope to encourage that [resilience]. Because I think of students that I've known. Maybe early days in their program, or first, when they arrived and I see, note a certain amount of that may be attributable to just maturity, right. And through just academic growth and knowledge, and what's acquired through just being a student.

Furthermore, mature individuals may have more life roles and responsibilities, which help them build greater capacity: “I have two jobs... I am a full-time student... I have a small business that I need to attend...so yeah. I have a teenager” (I1), and “...the things that I have to do as a mother, and wife. I'm surviving. I'm just getting adjust, I have, like, that strength is quite important... (I4). Maturity can therefore mean greater self-awareness and better self-management.

In sum, resilient individuals are generally mature: they are aware and confident of their own abilities to create change; they are hopeful, flexible and persistent; they are able to problem solve and consider different perspectives. The more individuals develop, that is, the more self-aware they are and the more self-management skills they acquire, the more resilient they become. However, this is not saying that resilience means having all these qualities and maintaining them consistently. The complexity of resilience is noted and explored further with the next theme.

Social Connections

In addition to self-development, social connections are noted to play an important role in resilience through discussions with participants. In order to connect socially, individuals need to acquire social awareness and relationship skills, which are highlighted as two pillars in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework – the ability to understand and empathize, as well as maintain and manage relationships with people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives (CASEL, 2024). Further, they need to maintain positive relationships (UBC, 2014) and access the social support available to them (Brown, 2010). Social connections are not limited to those made during one’s formative years but over time. They may include family, friends, culture, faith, school, work and the larger community. How social connections help develop qualities of individuals that impact resilience and thus foster resilience is discussed below.

Belonging and Inclusion. As stated earlier, the basic needs of food and shelter are important for individuals to feel resilient, and to further develop resilience. It is however as essential for individuals to feel grounded, connected and have a strong sense of belonging (Brown, 2010; Dixit, 2018; MUN, 2014b). Brown (2010) notes that individuals’ sense of

belonging has to start with self-acceptance and self-love, that is, having the courage to recognize their own vulnerabilities, accepting them and loving themselves in spite of them. With a healthy sense of self and self-awareness, relations and communities can help individuals further ground themselves – to feel at home and that they belong, which can in turn help them navigate changes and challenges. This sentiment is echoed by staff and students on multiple occasions. As one staff participant (S4) stated, “...regardless of where someone is in their journey, safe affordable housing, feeling in community with people, feeling like you have family and support here, are kind of central to where we live...”. When asked about what they liked in St. John’s, students noted instances when they felt included and welcomed in their interactions with others: “So, I like how friendly people are here. How inclusive they are.” (I3), and “One thing that I love, like, here is the people's helpfulness and helping to each other and also they are very friendly” (I4). Thus, in addition to having a place to stay, a welcoming community can provide a further sense of belonging and thus inclusion for international students.

Ongoing Influence of Family. Family can be a variable that informs resilience. It plays an important role in formative experiences and has an ongoing influence on resilience as one moves through life. Family can help create a sense of belonging, in addition to being individuals’ inspiration and motivation, safety net and support. Family can also add challenges at times. For international students, family can be the reason or drive to pursue transition. They can be a source of strength and can impact decision making as well as capacity. Family already in Canada can help international students navigate upon initial arrival and provide ongoing support, while family that students bring with them can offer support and present challenges as they adapt together. The life roles students play within the family also matter. For one student (I2), their sibling who first moved abroad to study was their role model: “Yeah, and the pandemic was the

time that I first got to connect with my [sibling] on a more personal level... We haven't been very close our entire lives, but at the same time, I really look up to [them]”. Another student (I4) talked about how their parents’ support for them has influenced how they support their family. In addition to their family of origin, their own nuclear family was their support and driving force to stay positive despite challenges:

And because of them I am here. That every difficulty, they gave me everything. Um, like, my, they spend a lot for my studies and, they did their part well, and they are very responsible parents. So, I got, I saw that from my childhood and that's why I'm here. And I'm doing what my mom did for me, I'm doing that for my children, I want to be a good mom like her.

Families that live away can provide support when connections in new environments are yet to be established. Technology, then, can be used to help individuals stay connected and motivated.

In sum, social connections can help individuals feel included and that they belong. Families of international students can play a role in supporting them whether overseas or in the new environment. New social connections, however, will need to be created when international students establish themselves in the new environment.

University Support

International students may find their transition particularly challenging when support is not in place in the new environment. Universities can help students navigate these challenges and build resilience by offering support that furthers self-development and builds social connections.

While basic needs for international students may evolve over time, connecting international students to settlement resources early on can be particularly important to help them feel grounded. For example, the Internationalization Office at Memorial University offers

information sessions on important topics such as immigration advising, housing, family, jobs and career, as well as health insurance to help new international students navigate the province and the city when they first arrive (Internationalization Office, 2024d). Understanding that there are different programs and support available, such as how health care works and how to access daycare, etc., can help students tremendously with their initial settlement, as noted by one student (I4): “...I think it is the climax. Because uh, after knowing about these things...after having met with these particular things [people and programs], my story changed... I got some courage and, that is where the resilience started.”

Furthermore, one staff participant (S1) noted that in providing ready access to social support, the University can help students feel that they belong there, which serves as a foundation for individuals for further self work. As a former international student, this participant mentioned that employment programming can help individuals acquire new skills and knowledge, which can in turn contribute to personal growth and encourage them to move toward their goals. Indeed, there are dedicated advisors at the Internationalization Office who provide additional support in various areas, such as a career advisor who offers one-on-one career advising and coordinates the Professional Skills Development Program (PSDP) in conjunction with the Student Life Department, to help students further career-related skills (Internationalization Office, 2024a).

As individuals move through life, it is important to build social networks and community outside the family of origin. Ideally, the University can provide a safe space and supportive environment to facilitate these networks, which one student (I2) recognized as a function of the research meetings: “I found it really helpful to have someone to share these stories with. Because these are some things that you can't admit to your parents because they will worry about you

more”. Both staff and student participants also commented on the social programming provided through the Internationalization Office that helps international students feel connected and included. Thus, not only can the University provide resources to navigate the environment, but they can also provide networking opportunities and a sense of community. Social groups at the University are a microcosm and place for students to develop and learn interpersonal behaviours and intercultural skills. Coffee Club and Discussion Group are long-standing informal social groups offered weekly through the Internationalization Office and are open to spouses of students as well as alumni. While the former provides opportunities to connect through playing games, the latter connects individuals through discussing various topics (Internationalization Office, 2024c). For students who come with families, the family program “Sharing Joy” provides support for mothers with young children. While the format is similar to other social groups, whereby discussion, games and snacks are offered, it is run early in the day and provides a safe space for women specifically to gather and to share information and resources that concern them (Internationalization Office, 2024b).

However, University support for international students should not be limited to the work of the Internationalization Office, as international students are part of the larger student community and thus access services outside the Internationalization Office. International students in this study indicated that resilience support does exist outside the Internationalization Office, including and not limited to: academic advising, counselling, staff and faculty. One student (I3) noted her appreciation of a faculty member who has become her social tie and connected her with potential work opportunities: “I don't know it is a MUN thing? But teachers have been really helpful...And in January the director of my program...contacted me... I need someone to do some environmental education stuff on corals, would you like to do that?” In this

case, the faculty member recognized the potential of the student and encouraged them to apply their skills and strengths. Thus, having caring staff and faculty who are well aware of the needs of international students outside the Internationalization Office can help students feel at home and included.

Through the course of education, programming and events, student groups and societies, as well as volunteer and work opportunities offered by the University, then, international students may further self-awareness and self-development, and in turn a firm sense of self. They may become more confident in their abilities, become better self advocates and learn strategies to maintain their well-being. Moreover, such opportunities may allow them to make social connections, build relationships, and be connected to additional resources.

Barriers for Students

When it comes to furthering their sense of self and creating social connections, students can encounter both external and internal barriers. The lack of supportive staff and faculty (in other words, champions, allies and advocates, who fully understand the needs of international students) can create opposite effects as indicated earlier by students and staff:

People who maybe are more distant in terms of their relation with international students or their direct involvement with international students, kind of cast international students in a particular light that I, I don't necessarily agree with... So, a professor will have a student who's struggling, or maybe, you know, and then that one student story becomes the view of what, this is how international students are and that's, this is one person in distress, and you can't necessarily say that this is how the collective experiences the world. (S3)

Better understanding the needs of the international student population should not only be reflected in student support services but should also be demonstrated by all staff and faculty within the University to reduce barriers. Clemens and Robinson (2021) note the importance of creating communities of care within universities whereby students can feel connected and supported in their well-being during and beyond the pandemic. Moreover, Brewer et al. (2021) suggest that development of “change agents” among faculty and staff at universities can help enhance students’ resilience (p. 2). These agents can help implement an inclusive and mental-health-focused curriculum, teaching practices and structure university-wide (Brewer et al., 2021; Clemens & Robinson, 2021). At Memorial University, the creation of the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism (EDI-AR) Office and the appointment of a Vice-Provost as head of the office, as well as subsequent activities implemented by the office, such as the creation of an EDI-AR strategic plan through university-wide group consultations, annual talks with the university community, and hosting an EDI-AR conference, were some steps taken in order to consider diverse needs and inclusive support across the postsecondary institution (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism, Memorial University, 2024; Valleé, 2023). In addition to having caring staff and faculty, then, the University can certainly play a role in supporting staff and faculty with learning about and understanding international students and their mental health.

It is also important to note that making new social connections can be more challenging for some than others due to context and personality traits. For example, those who are introverted or those who have different cultural practices, etc. One student (I2) stated, “I think it's the common theme even in my story that I'm a victim of my own thoughts a lot and I constantly think that I'm bothering other people... What if they don't want to help me...” Loneliness, which can lead to homesickness and lack of a sense of belonging, as well as the transient nature of

living abroad (that is, not feeling that they will be able to stay, and constant worrying about next steps) can further challenge international students in establishing social connections.

In conclusion, basic needs have to be met prior to individuals feeling resilient. Once met, individuals' sense of self and social connections can help them sustain challenges and foster resilience. Qualities of self that impact resilience may include confidence, agency, positivity, open-mindedness, perseverance, ability to problem solve and take on new perspectives, as well as maturity built through life experiences. Social connections may include family at home and family who moved abroad with them, as well as social ties newly built in the new environment and community that provide help and support.

Theme 3: Resilience is a Fluid, Non-Linear Process.

When asked to define resilience, participants also spoke of the fluid nature of resilience. In other words, resilience is not a consistent state, but rather one that changes over time. Although the primary intention of this study is to discuss examples of resilience in international students at Memorial University since they moved to St. John's, discussion often involved past experiences and challenges, thus showing that resilience is not set at a particular point in time and space.

Resilience is Varied and Complex

Through the group discussion, it is noted that one does not simply either possess or not possess resilience; rather, it is varied and complex. This understanding is noted particularly by the staff participants. Though there are differences in the degree of resilience shown, all staff participants unanimously agreed that international students are a resilient group: "yes [international students are resilient]...in a lot of different ways, for a lot of different reasons, specific to the student and their experience" (S4), and "in my experience, I think I've

witnessed...students who have been, faced with every adversity, every barrier, every challenge and they've come up on top or else it's not the case for other students, right?... It is a continuum...” (S2).

While variation is noted, they also pointed out its complexity. As noted earlier, one staff participant (S3) stated how international students in distress are at times framed too simplistically in a single story. The complexity is further explained in their example of students leaving their studies early:

There are students who recognize in the first couple of weeks that this was a mistake.

That's always an interesting conversation because they often view themselves as I failed at this. When, in fact, it takes a lot of self-awareness and a lot of, again, a lot of courage to say, I want something different, or this is not what I want and to turn back. (S3)

The example above illustrates that resilience does not equate to success or moving forward on the expected path, as changing course in life can also be considered a demonstration of resilience. Georgina Hope (2023) in her investigation of reciprocal resilience through storytelling states that at times “what is seen as resilient in one space or one culture, may be seen as non-conformist or even maladaptive in another” (p. 135-136). Depending on individuals’ circumstances, contexts, size of challenges etc., then, resilience can be looked at differently. This is echoed by another staff member (S4):

It [resilience] doesn’t mean, like, being strong the whole time. It means being able to get through a hard time or many hard times, or challenging and difficult situation, and an ability if not to, like, navigate them perfectly, to at least make it through to the other side.

Indeed, as Brown (2016) suggests, part of learning is failing: “if we are brave enough, often enough, we are going to fall” (p. 3).

Two students changed views about their resilience over the course of the group meetings. One of them (I3) noted that they are not resilient and talked about how they do things because they have to. Through conversations over time, they recognized their strengths and that they are resilient. When concluding their story, they stated: “The last thought is that I have been able, capable of overcoming different challenges, so I shouldn't feel stuck. Like, yes, I have been resilient in other time, place, opportunities. So, um, I should feel proud...” While feeling confident about their resilience initially, the other student (I2) noted in our final meeting that there is room for improvement. This newfound understanding of resilience as not being constant is reflected at the end of their storybook, in which they summarized:

...I finished the book in this cookie cutter way with a beginning and an end. And a happy ending even. But real life doesn't have those kinds of happily ever after. In real life, you'd have to keep on troubling. And my resilience is in the fact that even though it gets harder and harder every time while I shut myself in to go out and interact with people, each time I still end up doing it.

While their perspectives have changed about their own resilience in different ways, they both recognized that resilience building takes time and is a continuous process as explained further below.

Resilience as a Process

Resilience building is a process and not a steady, continuous upward path. As stated by one of the staff participants (S4), it is fluid and non-linear:

I think it can be built on over time, but it might not necessarily be like a, a linear growth. You know, you can be resilient for a period of time, and then not be resilient at another point. So instead of like, of a line of growth and adding experience to build skill, it's

almost like a loop the loop sometimes. You're resilient and sometimes you're not, but it doesn't negate being resilient at one point or another.

In their storybook, the staff member noted the journey of maturation and resilience building of international students during their studies, from learning to finding information, to voicing their needs and advocating for themselves, to gaining confidence and better understanding of themselves (see Appendix J, Figure J1). As one experiences and goes through life, resilience is furthered when one learns more about oneself and continues self-development. Through the overall process, individuals do eventually build greater mental, emotional and social capacities, such as critical thinking, problem solving as well as interpersonal skills. However, there are times when challenges are not followed by growth, and one is simply moving through.

As explained above, resilience is a varied, complex process, that is not only demonstrated through successes but also through the process of trying. Ultimately, the experiences of challenges and moving through challenges are reminders that adversities can be surmountable. Moreover, there is always room for individuals to grow, as Brown (2016) notes: "Failure is not learning gone bad, it is not the opposite of learning. Failure is part of the learning process" (p. 4). In other words, resilience is about falling, getting back up, learning, and doing it all over again.

Theme 4: Group Storytelling and Artmaking Processes can Foster Resilience.

Through the arts-based processes of storytelling and artmaking in this research, participants were able to reflect on the topic of resilience from their respective vantage points. As support people for international students, staff participants were able to step back and provide snapshots of international students' resilience journeys. Student participants, on the other hand, held a subjective stance as they explored their own journeys navigating challenges. Despite their unique perspectives, both groups utilized the creative processes in similar ways. They were able

to express deep emotions, establish and further social connections through in-depth sharing, and gain meaningful insights of international students' experiences and their adaptive responses living in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Book Creations

The final book creations by all participants vary greatly in artistic style and content. Most participants used a combination of words and images in their books. One used only quotes from books and song lyrics, while another used only images. It is also noted that some participants used more words than images. As stated earlier, the researcher encouraged freedom of expression by providing limited guidance and restrictions to the storytelling and book making tasks, in addition to suggesting simple artmaking techniques and supplying art materials that were chosen for their ease of use, to lessen stress experienced in the creative process. Greater value was placed on the artmaking process than on the outcome or the product to mitigate performance anxiety and internal judgement around artmaking, which are issues identified in the Open Studio project by Lewis et al. (2018). Indeed, participants were not required to submit their art book for evaluation. Yet, some participants found the tasks challenging and some were not as engaged with aesthetics. One participant specifically stated that creating their own book is intimidating, while another noted that artmaking has deterred them since they were a child. However, all participants were fully engaged in the creative process and found ways that worked for them. For the two aforementioned participants, one used quotes from books, lyrics from songs, and played with the material provided; while the other noted this artmaking exercise as a personal challenge and test of resilience, they relied mostly on words to describe their story and included simple line drawings, collage and stamps. By confronting their fear of artmaking through this exercise, the latter participant expressed that new doors were opened for them to

explore other art forms. One other participant noted that while visual arts do not deter them, the multi-layered arts-based processes made them realize the therapeutic value of writing, which they leaned into during the book making process.

These variations demonstrate the flexibility of arts-based processes. Just as there is no one way to create art, there are different ways to interpret art. Figure 5 is an image of homelessness from S1's book.

Figure 5

Homelessness (Staff 1's Image)



When I pointed out that the seemingly floating houses showed the temporariness of home for international students, the staff participant clarified that it was not their intent, which led to further group discussion about the image and resilience of international students. This illustrates what Leavy notes (2020): how differences in art interpretation can promote dialogue and allow emergence of new collective meanings.

There are some differences in stories and images shown between staff and student participants. Figures 6 and 7 are examples of staff images: one of a girl with flying hair looking

confident and free, and one with an abstract image of a big(ger) white circle sitting against the night sky on blocks of playful colours and patterns.

Figure 6

Girl with flying hair (Staff 4's image)



Figure 7

Big white circle sitting on colour blocks (Staff 2's image)



Most staff participants pointed out the challenges students face and some highlighted how they persevere and overcome them, as represented by the images shown. In this way, staff showed the big picture in their book creations. Students, on the other hand, spoke more to specific challenges or to struggles in certain aspects of life, such as loneliness and struggles during initial settlement.

The visuals included in the books complement and enhance the stories told as well as the accompanying words or written descriptions. The books included different details than the stories told initially before the final sessions. They also expressed deeper emotions through the inclusion of simile and metaphorical images. An example is Figure 8, which shows various strategies that a student participant employed when experiencing challenges, surrounded by balloons floating in the air.

Figure 8

Balloons around images of strategies that student employed (Student 4's image)



As explained by the student, the balloons in the background demonstrate their sense of relief when they found strategies to handle their issues.

The ability of images to evoke emotions is further demonstrated in the final participant meetings. When asked whether there were any images that stood out to them, those who responded chose either their own images or those represented by others. Often the choices reflected struggles, triumphs, or strengths of individuals. Thus, images can be impactful in evoking emotions and understanding. Figure 9 is a student's book cover titled, "The Cage Called 'Home'" and is a prime example.

Figure 9

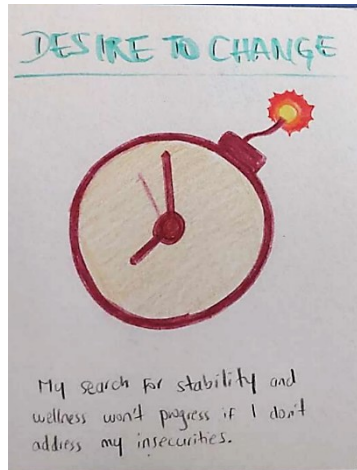
The Cage Called "Home" (Student 2's image)



During the final group meeting, the other student participant in the group noted how it resonated with them. The image of a cage made the student realize that others could experience a similar sense of loneliness despite looking well on the outside. The ability to evoke emotions then echoes what Lin (2019) states about practice-led research that involves artefact making, and what Barone and Eisner (2012) as well as Leavy (2020) say about the evocativeness of arts-based research. Moreover, images allow English learners to present ideas that they lack the vocabulary for. Figure 10 is a student image, representing a time bomb.

Figure 10

Time Bomb (Student 3's image)



While they struggled to come up with the word “time bomb”, I3 illustrated the above image, which is easily identifiable by others and can help the audience understand the urgency the student felt about their issue and their desire to change.

Some participants also shared their intent in choosing specific colours, shapes and patterns, to help draw additional attention to certain elements in their stories. Figures 11 and 12 are examples of intentional usage of the colour red.

Figure 11

Red lettered words (Student 3's image)

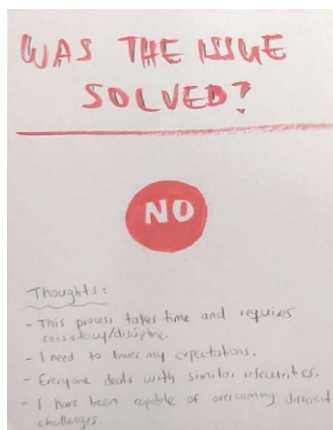
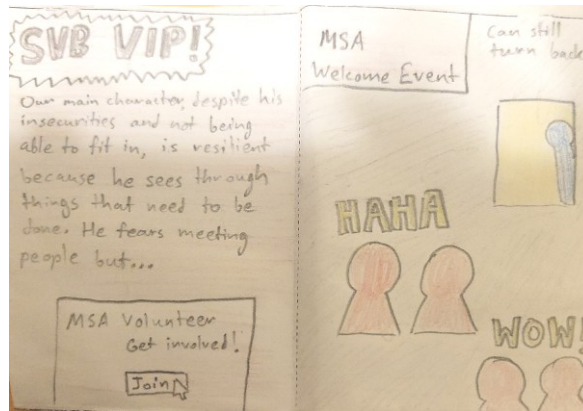


Figure 12

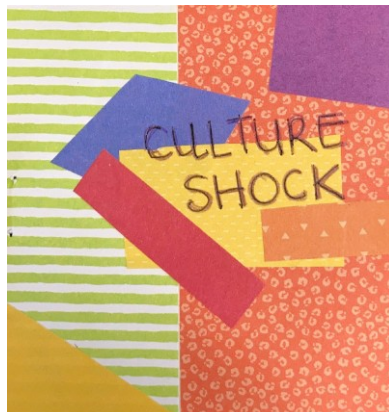
People coloured in red (Student 2's image)



For one student, words were written in red (see Figure 11) to highlight and draw attention to their unresolved issue, while people were coloured red (see Figure 12) to show hostility in another student's story. Figure 13 is a jumble of busy patterns created by a staff member.

Figure 13

Jumble of coloured blocks to represent culture shock (Staff 1's image)



The coloured shapes were used to express the clashing of cultures or culture shock, which was written in the middle of the page. The decision to use different colours, shapes and patterns, and whether to include images or not, then, helped participants reflect more deeply about their experiences. The images, which are further examined below, align with the themes discussed

earlier, namely, that resilience is fostered through navigating changes and challenges, is influenced by self and social connections, is a fluid and non-linear process, and can be fostered through group storytelling and artmaking processes. The images were also incorporated and reflected in my own book creation, which will be discussed in the “Researcher Autoethnographic Reflections and Outcome” chapter.

Through book making, participants were able to create tangible material to remind them of the artmaking process and their understanding of resilience, as one student stated: “so I kept the standard for myself with this book and now I have to actually try to reach that goal myself... Now I have this book to remind myself that I do need to go out. And talk with people...” (I2). The physical books serve as reminders of student participants’ achievements and strengths, of work yet to be done, and their goals and motivation to change and better themselves, which can be encouraging during challenging times in the future. Similarly, the book can serve as a reminder for staff and help them process their interactions with students:

I think I'd like to...hold on to the book and then add more pages to it...just when I need to kind of process some things, or have certain memories or certain themes are emerging, then I can just kind of revisit my book. (S3)

Reflection of Self and Furthering Self-Development

All student participants spoke of the reflective aspect of the storytelling and artmaking activity. Through contemplating, creating and telling their stories visually and verbally, individuals are able to recognize, name and process their experiences. In doing so, it could increase understanding of self, and help with recognizing one’s strengths and weaknesses, which either lead to greater confidence and agency or motivation to further one’s capacity. Below are

examples of different statements that student participants made regarding their reflection and subsequent learning. I4 noted that,

It helps us to get the self-awareness...of how we manage so far... In my case, I was able to overcome at least some of the challenges... So, in a way, it's quite satisfying...we can understand where we made mistakes and...we have to...improve ourselves...we can understand who we are.

Similarly, I3 stated a realization about themselves:

I learned that. I need to express what I think, because. Maybe that's why I'm like this [referring to image of time bomb], because I never express what I'm feeling... I learned that with the book [laugh]. I need to talk about my personal thoughts.

I2 noted changes in their thoughts through the research process:

I realized that maybe I'm not as...resilient as I once thought. Because I am the person in this story, I'm the person who does not go out, who does not talk with people. And if I'm not able to overcome my comfort zone...if I'm trapped within myself so much, then can I really call myself resilient?... So, this session really did make me realize that... I will try to make myself better to become what I initially thought I was.

The reflective aspect of the activity helped one student (I1) not only to contemplate their past but to look forward to their future and consider their goals and dreams: “And that creating this booklet, help me to think about what I want to do, what is going to be my next step, what I want to do here, in a year, when I graduate...” Indeed, reflective moments like these can help individuals refocus on their goals and purposes, work through information and consider alternatives to problem solve and thus strengthen resilience as noted by Gonzales (2022).

For staff, the arts-based processes helped them to reflect on their role in supporting international students and to further *vicarious resilience*, the positive impact on helpers' mental health through exposure to resilience of those being helped (Edelkott et al., 2016; Hernandez-Wolfe, 2018), or *reciprocal resilience*, an interactive loop process that leads to adaptation and growth in both helpers and individuals receiving help (Bratt, 2019; Hope, 2023). Staff talked about how the process helped them highlight the positives and strengths of students, which sometimes may not necessarily be the focus of their work. One staff participant (S3) noted explicitly the concept of vicarious resilience and the importance of promoting it through processes such as this research:

I almost feel like I've learned about resilience from students, sometimes. Like, there's a lot of admiration there for how students get through. So, um, but again, we don't, we don't talk about those things a lot. We just kind of show up, do our job and we go home. There's, it's an important piece of how we keep going, is how do we stay resilient ourselves, especially in times to change.

Reflection is shown to be key for greater self-understanding, including one's identity (Hope, 2023), which can in turn help facilitate self-development and resilience-building as demonstrated by staff and student participants alike in this study.

Fostering Social Connections

The storytelling and book making group sessions worked as a platform for international students to connect, as individuals were invited to share openly and to create with the art materials provided, in a safe, welcoming virtual environment. Participants were able to unload their worries, feel less alone and more supported through conversing with others: "when we tell...what happened to us, when we share that with somebody else... I get a relief and I get a

relaxation...” (I4). Through sharing and interacting with others in groups, as Yalom and Leszcz (2005) state, individuals, in this case international students, could experience catharsis and feel validated when they recognized the universality of human experiences: “All three of us are from different cultural backgrounds, but we're all in the same place together and, um, all three of us have similar stories... It's nice to hear that others have gone through the same” (I2). In this way, a sense of belonging and inclusion was formed, and thus meaningful connections were created to further understanding and empathetic responses.

These opportunities of open and creative exchange also enable participants to give, take and thus reciprocate, which can in turn help develop their sense of self. For example, after sharing how they handled their challenges in the first two sessions, the students in the second group remarked that they felt encouraged and inspired by each other and learned alternative ways to view and confront their challenges in their final group meeting. I3 learned that they could seek support from others, including family who came with them: “I'm dealing with the personal issue and hearing [I4's] story was more like okay, there are ways to find support in other people. Like, communicate, which I don't do...”. I4 noted the use of mental health support at the University as a plausible alternative: “(I3) was talking about the counselling things. So, I got something from that... I'm also interested because I wanted to join a session when I came here”. Hearing positive stories from others can be uplifting while different strategies shared can be inspiring. Furthermore, validation from social exchange can add to individuals' confidence and thus resilience which was noted earlier in theme 2.

Similarly, through these arts-based group processes, stronger connections between colleagues were built. In sharing stories about supporting international students and creating art books to represent these stories using tactile material, staff had opportunities to connect and

exchange with their colleagues outside their regular work context. This may allow them to reflect differently, and in turn help them gain better understanding of the students, the nature of their work, and their colleagues. Indeed, staff noted that they found it reassuring and affirming to learn that their colleagues have similar thoughts and values. As one staff member (S4) stated, “talking about resilience explicitly was interesting and I was so engaged in hearing, like, how folks thought it was... Knowing that we're all kind of viewing it in the same way, I think was really encouraging and affirming...” while another (S3) noted, “...always good to hear from colleagues who work in this field because...not only do you learn about them...you learned about the work everyone's trying to do...maybe professionally, a lot of our values aligned, and that's always really reassuring.”

In sum, meaningful connections can be created through arts-based group processes, which may help further a sense of belonging and inclusion, as well as a sense of self and confidence. For staff, the experiences can help build a sense of comradery and reaffirm the value of the work they do.

Unique Value of Arts Activities

The artmaking processes were noted by many participants as pleasant experiences that helped them relax and destress, thus affirming the therapeutic aspects of arts in promoting the well-being and mental health of individuals as stated in various literature. Fancourt and Finn (2019), for example, speak of arts activities being health promoting; more specifically, the aesthetic and emotional aspects of these activities can help individuals express and regulate emotions as well as reduce stress. Similarly, Lewis et al. (2018)’s Open Studio project demonstrates the ability of community group art sessions to help participants build a sense of belonging and thus have a positive impact on their mental health. One student (I1) noted, “With

this booklet for me was, like, giving me a time for relaxed meditation...”, while another (I2) stated, “And the book is really nice. It got back my artistic side. I've been drawing other things in the meantime as well”. The staff also expressed similar sentiments. When asked to reflect about this experience, one staff member (S2) said, “I love doing arts and crafts... So that was enjoyable and very relaxing” and another member of staff (S4) agreed, “I did the book at my kitchen table, like one night, last week, I guess, and it was just really calming and soothing too.” Thus, other than being fun and pleasurable, the artmaking aspect of this research adds to the learning that verbal exchange alone was able to produce. Whether done individually or in group settings, the requirement to create a book with the art materials provided, offered opportunities for participants to put aside time to intentionally slow down, stay present, decompress and thus regulate.

As explored in the “Methodology” chapter, arts-based methods can transcend limitations of language (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Malchiodi, 2019), and can be particularly relevant in multicultural and multilingual contexts. The pressure of language use is lessened while the experiences of English as Second Language learners can be demystified through alternate ways of expression. In this research, elements of arts have been shown to help participants convey and explore complex emotions and feelings, that may otherwise be confined using language alone. For example, as mentioned earlier, one student (I2) used the image of a cage (see Fig. 4) to demonstrate their feelings of isolation, while another student (I3) used the image of a bomb (see Fig. 5) in expressing an urgency to resolve their issue related to sense of self. Yet another student (I4) used various shapes to represent their feelings, such as balloons (see Fig. 2) to demonstrate their sense of relief when they found solutions to their issues. One of the staff members (S3) layered pieces of paper to show the complexity of the topic (image not shown). In other words,

non-verbal language was used to enhance the verbal and written language, which in turn helped participants better understand themselves and each other's experiences and thus resilience. The few participants that included quotes and lyrics in the creation of their stories were able to present ideas and thoughts that they found difficult to present or describe themselves. For example, in explaining the feeling of homesickness of international students, one staff member (S3) included Karen Dalton's song lyrics in their book:

'If I was where I would be, then I would be where I am not. Here I am where I must be, where I would be I cannot'. So, you want to be somewhere other than here, but you are here. Right? And so that kind of message, that wishing for home and not being able to be at home, and so that is also a theme that follows with so many meetings that you have with students, right?

The usage of arts in representing ideas, thoughts, emotions and emotional responses, that is, internal processes that are nuanced and often difficult to describe, can in turn help the participants, as well as the audience and readers of this research to understand the depth of challenges and experiences of international students.

In sum, resilience can be nurtured by means of conscious efforts through arts-based group sessions that promote self-reflection and group sharing. Arts activities are unique as learning spaces when done in group settings, as S2 further commented, "It's almost like taking a break, a pause from our daily activities to reflect on our experiences and connect with others in the office", and I2 noted, "The best part was talking to you all, especially the last session, where the only thing we did was talked while we did our own drawings, that was the best one". Due to the evocativeness of arts, participants were able to connect at a deeper level during the artmaking

and art sharing group processes, which in turn promoted greater self-understanding and learning from different perspectives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, participant experiences with exploring resilience through arts-based and creative processes in this study profoundly supports the use of arts methodologies and practices to service postsecondary international students in the Newfoundland and Labrador context. It is noted that resilience is developed via the navigating of adverse conditions, changes and challenging experiences. Resilience is a process that is impacted by self and social connections. Perhaps most importantly, in answering my research question, the outcomes of this study suggest resilience can be fostered through creative spaces. Indeed, arts-based practices such as storytelling and book making can provide opportunities for individuals to reflect on changes and challenges, to facilitate self-development and build social connections, and be offered as an ongoing support in building resilience. The findings of this study thus support the pursuit of creative programming to help promote the mental health and well-being of international students studying at Memorial University.

CHAPTER 6: Researcher's Autoethnographic Reflections and Outcome

[Reflecting on my move to St. John's, NL] I remember walking down the main road for half an hour every few days to the closest chain coffee shop just to get some air, while evading stares from passersby and feeling like an alien on earth. I remember the first winter being never ending, the summer was dreary and rainy, and I was wearing sweaters every day... I remember wondering why the adjustments were so hard when moving continents a few years back seemed easier, not to mention I was living in a country that I had lived in for the majority of my life. I wondered if my feelings of loneliness, isolation and being out of place would ever pass. (S. Ho, personal journal, Feb. 11, 2022)

By creating and including my own art piece, I acted as “both observer and observant” (Lin, 2019, p. 155), thus, both the researcher and the researched, in this study. As I considered the experiences of postsecondary international students viewed through my role as a support person, an entry-to-practice counsellor and the researcher, I also reflected on my own experiences of transitions and as a newcomer - first to Canada, then overseas and finally to Newfoundland and Labrador. I documented these reflections both in written and visual forms, which in turn help deepen understanding of my research topic from a critical reflection perspective. Indeed, in their investigation of narrative inquiry in educational settings, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) talked about researchers' roles in telling stories with their participants:

We found that merely listening, recording, and fostering participant story telling was both impossible (we are, all of us, continually telling stories of our experience, whether or not we speak and write them) and unsatisfying. We learned that we, too, needed to tell our stories. Scribes we were not; story tellers and story lovers we were. And in our

storytelling, the stories of our participants merged with our own to create new stories, ones that we have labelled collaborative stories. (p. 12)

In expressing my observations, thoughts and learnings through journal entries (see Appendix K) and an art book, I hope to tell a collective story that provides a fuller picture of international students' experiences studying at Memorial University of Newfoundland. It is essential to view this larger picture, as it disproves the myth of a single story that one of the staff participants (S3) brought up in the group discussions. As the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) explained, a *single story* is a broad generalization, that is not untrue but incomplete, which often has negative connotations, flattens the richness of experiences, and creates stereotypes. In creating a collective story, the hope is to demonstrate the complexity of international students' experiences as well as the resilience shown by them. Adichie (2009) summarizes it most eloquently:

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. (17:27)

In this chapter, then, I will discuss my reflective storytelling processes through journal writing and art book making, followed by detailed descriptions of the art book created so as to infer further insights on the topic of resilience.

Researcher's Reflective Processes as Emergent

As stated in the "Methodology" chapter, arts-based research (ABR) is an emergent process (Chilton et al., 2015; Leavy, 2020). While general plans were made to create parallel autoethnographic reflections, in practice I realized it is not uncommon to encounter the need to change my processes. When experiencing unexpected roadblocks, it simply makes sense to

adjust the course of direction or approach to move forward with the research, as in the case of my journal writing and art book making processes explained below. Indeed, as Leavy (2020) states, “flexibility and openness are critical to the practice of ABR” (p. 30).

Journal Writing

My journal entries were created throughout the research process, from the time I began recruitment, to the group meetings and data collection, to data processing and finally thesis writing. While the initial thought was to take meticulous notes and reflections every step of the way, I was only able to write periodically when I felt prompted and inspired. Some entries were prompted by discussion with participants and written soon after the group meetings. Other times, thoughts and ideas only emerged through revisiting and reflecting on the data collected, for example when I was tidying the transcripts, and when I reread the group meetings multiple times during my analysis. Some conversations with participants brought forth memories of my own transitional experiences as a newcomer to different places. For example, when students talked about their first impression of Newfoundland and Labrador, it brought back feelings of isolation that I sensed when I first moved here. Others reminded me of interactions with international students in my student support roles. An example would be the discussion about support through the University which reminded me of my own attempts to offer social connection opportunities through my work and subsequently the feedback and responses received from the students who participated in these social activities. These memories either echoed or further illustrated the points made and the topics discussed during the group sessions or led to deeper reflections with new insights. In the first example, it reminded me how intense and impossible some of the barriers could feel; and the latter helped me recognize the impact of social support and the role the University can play in supporting students to find a strong sense of belonging. Finally, woven

through all these thoughts were reflections during the COVID-19 pandemic, regarding my experiences in supporting international students and conducting my research about international students. This was a particular volatile time that we collectively, as individuals around the world, experienced multiple challenges in our own specific situations and circumstances.

Art Book Making

When designing my art book, I considered the questions I posed to my research participants during the group meetings and tried to respond to them. Mainly, I asked myself, “what is resilience?”, “what does resilience mean to [me]?”, “do [I] think international students are resilient? Why? In what ways?”, “what struck [me] most about [all the stories told]? Any images/words specifically?”, and “what have [I] learned or discovered about international students or [my] role as a support person for international students, about resilience?” (see Appendix G for further details). I also reviewed the book making instructions I provided to the staff participants and attempted to follow them. Namely, I contemplated how I can “share challenges that international students experience at Memorial University” or “tell a story about how resilience plays a role in the experiences of international students [I] worked with”, by considering “an instance or a series of instances”, such as “what happened”, “what was the issue(s)”, “how was the issue(s) resolved” and “what were the feelings and mood associated with the story” (see Appendix F for further details).

Similar to the journal entries, my art book was originally intended to be made in parallel with the research process. Modeled after the Open Studio (Lewis et al., 2018) and Art Hive (Lewis et al., 2020) community arts-based research projects, I attempted to participate in artmaking at the optional book making group sessions. The purpose for me as the facilitator and researcher to participate in the arts-based process was to encourage community building and to

help reduce inhibitions often associated with artmaking as noted by Lewis et al. (2018). I started the process at the staff book making session but soon realized it was too difficult to focus and work on my own book while providing group facilitation. In the subsequent book making sessions with student participants, I focused on experimenting with book structures, which also proved to be not an easy task. Though technical, it required creativity as well as precision and thus much concentration. In the end, I concluded that a parallel process was not feasible, and decided to create a book after my data analysis was complete, which would enable me to incorporate my reflective findings.

The book remained undone for some time post data analysis for various reasons. On one hand, the creative process of my project excited me; on the other hand, as with some participants, I also felt intimidated by the artmaking process and the end product. This was due to performance anxiety and internal judgement, which were noted as a possibility during artmaking or arts-based processes, according to Lewis et al. (2018) when conducting the Open Studio project. This tension was unsurprising, given the intimate nature of personal artmaking processes. My aesthetic sense as well as my perfectionism got in the way as well. Furthermore, despite understanding that my context and social position had an influence on my perspective and understanding, I struggled with the desire to represent others' viewpoints in authentic ways and worried about how to go about it. While it may be freeing to know that there are few restrictions on how to create and what to include in the book, the lack of parameters can be daunting. I had trouble figuring out how to merge my subjective view as a former newcomer with my more objective stance as a support person, a new counsellor for international students and a researcher. All these factors led to further delay in the process, thus a time limit was set to complete the art book, so as to prevent further delay.

Starting Points: Complexity of Resilience, Circular Pattern and Collective Story.

When I finally began designing my book, I started by considering three ideas that stuck out to me at the time. First, I wanted to highlight the complexity of resilience, which was noted by the staff and underlies many of the group meeting conversations. I started by exploring different book structures that would showcase such complexity. Secondly, I wanted to showcase the cyclical nature of resilience and its positive quality. Figure 14 is a circular pattern that I painted at the staff book making session.

Figure 14

Researcher's Initial Attempt at Art Book Making



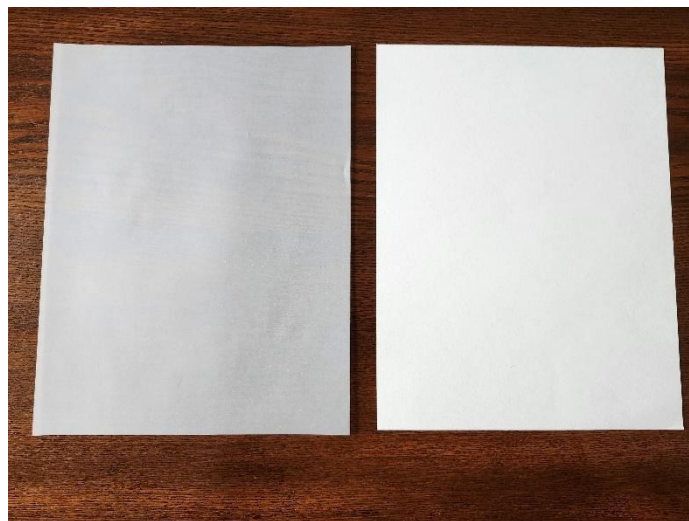
This for me, at the time, represented resilience in individuals, while the rings of colour surrounding the blue circle signified radiance and the possibility of resilience to grow. I understood the image was significant to me, thus I wanted to continue expanding on the concept and image. Thirdly, I wished to tell a collective story, and decided to juxtapose themes and ideas from my reflections, my lived and cultured experiences, with those identified by the participants. For example, I wanted to express that similar sense of loneliness, isolation, and being out of place as the student participants when I first moved to Canada and later to Newfoundland.

Though unclear on how to do so initially, I believed this would serve as my response to the participants' viewpoints.

Book Structure. As mentioned, I attempted to create a book structure that would reflect the complexity of resilience. At first, I toyed with the idea of creating a separate book for each theme but was mindful of the time constraint, so I kept my output to one book only. Inspired by one staff member who layered vellum paper, a translucent paper that I provided, to showcase the complexity of resilience, I decided to adapt this concept and experiment with the material. I created a book with two layers by using two types of paper: vellum as a translucent paper and regular white paper. Figure 15 shows the differences in the two kinds of paper.

Figure 15

Vellum vs Regular Paper



The deliberate use of different paper to build layers helped create contrast and thus depth, literally and metaphorically. Indeed, one layer can represent my perspective, and the second can represent those of the participants. While I can speak to the experience of a newcomer to Newfoundland and Labrador firsthand and, as someone who works closely with international

students, I can speak to some of their experiences as an observer, I was not an international student at Memorial University. Therefore, I could not and would not be able to speak fully to the local experience that the student participants all shared. Creating a two-layered book thus allowed me to include different voices, most importantly, those of the international student participants directly. As Leavy (2020) notes, as researchers in ABR, “we do not speak for others, nor do we give voice to others, as they already have their own voices, but we can use our platform as researchers to amplify the voices of others” (p. 280). Indeed, amplifying voices is what I mean to do: when the layers are taken apart as stand-alone books, they represent different perspectives of similar narratives; and when placed together, the layers represent a complex, collective story.

Book Content. As stated in the “Analysis” chapter, data triangulation was employed in this study to help establish the validity of my results: the recorded discussions with participants, the participants’ art books, and my own reflective processes were the three sources of data. I further applied triangulation to my art book within my reflective processes. Aside from using my own words and images, I included those offered by the research participants, as well as my own interpretations of them.

While strong images can potentially stand alone in an art book, the inclusion of words can further enhance the meaning of visual art. As my journal entries documented thoughts that came up during this study and thus helped expand my understanding of resilience, choosing excerpts from the entries to include in my art book made most sense to me. I reviewed my own journal entries to identify passages that answered the questions posed to participants in group discussions (see Appendix G) and in the storytelling and book making task handout for staff (see Appendix F). Meanwhile, I reviewed all the recordings and transcripts of the group meetings to

identify phrases as well as images from participants that stood out to me. When trying to come up with images that represent resilience and would accompany my words, in addition to the circular pattern I drew, I stumbled upon Dr. W. Thomas Boyce (2019)’s concept of resilient children who thrive in different circumstances being likened to dandelions. Drawing the life cycle of dandelions then seems appropriate because resilience being a process and a cycle surfaced as a theme in this study.

Here is an example of how words and images were placed together in my art book. When discussing with staff participants the transitions international students face, we spoke of students having to be uprooted and resettled, which reminded me of my own multiple moves and how having people I know with me helped tremendously, thus I stated, “connections matter when one is making a home”. This idea of transition fits well with the rooting of the dandelion plant, with rain in the background to support its growth. All images and wordings used in my book are outlined in Table 3 below to provide clarity.

Table 3

Researcher’s Art Book Images and Wordings

| Images | Top Layer (Researcher’s Thoughts) | Base Layer (Participants’ Ideas) |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Rain and Growth of New Leaves | Connections matter when one is making a home | Uprooted and resettled |
| Holes | Fear, then hesitate to act | Storm |
| | How does one see the end of the tunnel when they feel stuck? | Caged, cornered, unstable |
| | Will the feelings of loneliness, isolation and being out of place ever pass? | Alone |

| Images | Top Layer (Researcher's Thoughts) | Base Layer (Participants' Ideas) |
|---|---|---|
| More Holes and Upside-Down Raindrop | Feel inspired by all those around | Be brave and confident Do what is needed Try one's best |
| | Be open minded and take action | Step out of comfort zone |
| | Helping others make things better | Stay instead of go, and ride though it |
| | Tackle issues, the urgent ones first, one at a time | Overcome issues step by step |
| Dandelion Bloom | | Positivity despite adversity |
| | | Room to learn and fail |
| | Learn what it is that one needs | Change what you can and accept what you can't |
| | Be mindful of what one is thinking and feeling | Desire to move further and forward |
| | Be creative and pivot | Seeking goals and seeing hope amidst uncertainties |
| Sun Shining on Dandelions | Roots and Sense of Belonging = Social Networks, Connections and Community | People in your corner Feeling heard and not judged Ask for help |
| | Community outside school can be as important in forming new roots | Feeling home |
| Dandelion Field (Back Cover) | ...there is no longer an old normal, rather...we need to look ahead and try out new things | Process journey loop to loop |

Art Materials and Techniques Used. As I am most familiar with painting and drawing techniques, the images were either painted or drawn on paper. Watercolour was used for the circular patterns on the base layer, while brush pens, colour pencils and markers were used for the dandelion images on the top layer. In incorporating the written words with the visuals in my art book, a collage approach was taken, whereby printed passages, phrases, and words were cut out and pasted against the corresponding images. Since multiple copies of the book are to be

distributed to the participants, printing helped reduce the amount of time in reproduction. My original intention was to explore different printing methods such as screen printing, relief printing using wood or linoleum blocks or even employing a printing press, which would require much experimenting; however, my time constraint helped eliminate these choices. The collage approach allowed me to play with the placement of words against the images thus creating interesting effects and potentially new meanings for the readers. Moreover, despite the technique being simple, the end results were aesthetically pleasing. Other than satisfying my own aesthetic sense, as Leavy (2019b) notes, aesthetic matters in creating deep impact for the audience. Indeed, “good” art can reach and move audiences, evoke thoughts and ideas, and create meanings as one intended, thus achieving “aesthetic power” (p.581).

Base Layer: Resilience as an Abstract Form. The image of the circular pattern serves as the basis and the bottom layer of my book. It represents the inner strength and resilience of individuals, that also serves as hope, goals and guiding light for individuals.

Top Layer: Life Cycle of Dandelions. The top layer of the book was an illustration of the life cycle of dandelions. Not only does the dandelion represent resilience, but its life cycle can be likened to the experiences of transition for international students. As a living thing, a dandelion can grow and blossom with nurturing. Similarly, resilience can be fostered under the right conditions.

Front Cover: Dandelion Spreading Seeds.

Figure 16

Researcher's Art Book Cover



The dandelion life cycle starts with it spreading seeds. The mature dandelion sits on top of the circular pattern that signifies the strength and resilience of individuals. This in turn emphasizes the resilient nature of dandelions.

Page 1-2: New Growth and Struggles as Holes.

Figure 17

Page 1-2 of Researcher's Art Book



Following the seeding of dandelions is the step of rooting. A dandelion seed needs nourishment such as rain to help it root, not dissimilar to newcomers, international students included, needing some support initially in establishing their new roots in a new place. Holes of different shapes and sizes were cut out to represent the struggles and challenges individuals experienced. The

shapes as a group look like an abstract cage, echoing the image created by one of the student participants (see Figure 9 above).

Page 3-4: More Holes and Upside-Down Raindrop.

Figure 18

Page 3-4 of Researcher's Art Book



Additional holes, including an upside-down teardrop, were cut out of the base layer. Figure 19 shows a similar teardrop shape. Indeed, the image was adopted intentionally from a student participant's book due to its resonance with me.

Figure 19

Upside-down Teardrop (Student 4's Image)

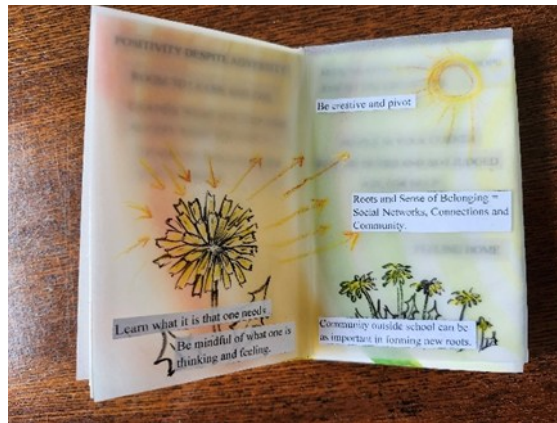


This represents the transition from feeling cornered to feeling relieved. Similarly, it is displayed here to show the transition and process of overcoming challenges. Both the struggles and learnings from overcoming challenges are summarized in phrases spread out across these two pages.

Page 5-6: Dandelion Blooms and Sun Shining on Multiple Dandelions.

Figure 20

Page 5-6 of Researcher's Art Book



Finally, the dandelion seedling blossoms into a flower with ray-like petals. It is here that I highlighted the need for individuals to look inward for further development and outward to connect with others. As with the sun providing nutrients for the dandelions to continue their growth, individuals need further support from others to foster resilience. Indeed, making social connections gives individuals additional fuel to soldier on in their journeys.

Back Cover: Dandelion Field.

Figure 21

Back Cover of Researcher's Art Book



On the back cover of the book, the process, journey and looped nature of resilience are noted against the backdrop of a blooming dandelion field. This signifies individuals overcoming challenges, settling and flourishing in their new environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, themes identified from the research and explored in the previous chapter, such as resilience being fostered through navigating challenges and resilience as a process, are reflected in my art book creation. The visual components of my art book, such as the two-layered structure as well as the metaphorical images, helped express the complexity of my research subject, and in turn helped me and my research audience deepen our understanding of the topic. Further, through engaging in the same artmaking exercise as the participants I was able to witness and experience firsthand the mental health benefits of arts-based practices and thus its potential as a mental health tool. Indeed, the undemanding and tactile process of collage making allowed me to slow down, be mindful and contemplate the topic that I was studying, which mimicked and extended my thought process during journal writing, and echoed what participants stated about arts-based practices as relaxing and calming.

I sought and found new connections through exploring my interests in artmaking. Sharing my lessons learned, such as interesting places to visit and things to do, with other newcomers through my work helps ground me. At times I still feel somewhat an outsider, but perhaps that is just the feeling and experience of being an immigrant, a newcomer, a come from away. (S. Ho, personal journal, Feb. 11, 2022)

CHAPTER 7: Discussion, Implications and Concluding Thoughts

My world continued to stay close and small, as with the raised bed garden I created in my yard. Prepping and tidying the garden in between the seasons kept me busy, while watching my garden grow and blossom every day brought joy when I was not inclined to travel. Then I slowly stepped up to do more... (S. Ho, personal journal, May 23, 2023)

International students are key players in Canadian postsecondary academic institutions. According to a recent report from Statistics Canada, international students' enrollment at public postsecondary educational institutions has more than doubled from 2010 to 2019 (Choi & Hou, 2023). As noted earlier, in 2023 it was recorded that there were more than one million international students at all levels studying in Canada (CBIE, 2023; ICEF Monitor, 2024). While Newfoundland and Labrador is hosting a small share of international students compared to other parts of Canada (CBIE, 2023; ICEF Monitor, 2024), the number of international students is significant within the province's small population. According to CBC News (2024), Memorial University, the only university in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, is currently hosting approximately 5,100 international students, which comprises a quarter of the total student population. This has increased the cultural diversity of the student population, and a close examination of their diverse needs and support is required. The mental health needs and support for Memorial University's international students, particularly regarding resilience, was the focus of this study. Through engaging staff and student participants in storytelling through discussions and book making, thus using a visual narrative inquiry or arts-based research, the unique experiences and perspectives of international students studying at Memorial University, including their mental well-being, were explored. This chapter will provide a more in-depth

discussion regarding the results of this research, which includes observations and insights regarding resilience and arts-based practices as tools to support mental health and well-being, limitations such as the scope and depth of the study, implications for the University and those who support international students, suggestions for future directions, and will conclude with my thoughts regarding the goals and hopes of this research.

The global pandemic was a core feature of this study – something that cannot be overlooked when discussing the mental well-being and experiences of postsecondary students at the time. Not only did the COVID-19 pandemic create “more challenges” as noted in my discussion with Staff 2, but it was also a time filled with many uncertainties (Rashid et al., 2021). The pandemic brought forth unpredictable changes and thus unexpected challenges that are much more difficult to handle. They created a ripple effect that often had a pervasive and profound impact on individuals’ lives. Indeed, as Rashid et al. (2021) state, there were “widespread and unprecedented disruptions in the way we work, socialize, play, access health care, and attain education” (p. 137). We were unable to say when another lockdown might happen, when COVID-19 would end and what that would look like, when we would be free to do what we wanted to do again, etc. Participants were in a constant state of awareness that life circumstances may change due to public health rules. The pandemic thus exacerbated circumstances that challenge individuals' resilience, which sets the stage of this study.

International Students and Resilience

It is noted throughout the research – in the group discussions, the verbal storytelling and the art book creations – that the international student participants in this study and many international students staff participants interacted with, demonstrate resilience due to changes and challenges they are required to face while studying abroad. Such experiences can help

nurture and develop qualities such as confidence, open-mindedness, hopefulness, persistence, as well as abilities to problem solve and take up different perspectives, in addition to forming new social support and connections. While staff commented on students' resilience based on observations and interactions with them, not all student participants were confident in naming that out loud. As such, staff perspectives are particularly valuable due to the positioning of their supportive role: they are exposed to a wide range of circumstances, including difficult and at times crisis situations, that international students face at various stages of their academic career. In other words, staff can offer an objective stance regarding resilience from a bird's eye view that students themselves may not be able to speak to. Furthermore, staff had a wealth of experiences and specific skillsets that added to the conversation on how to best support international students.

It is also important to note that the fluidity and complexity of resilience has surfaced as a theme in my findings. As noted in the literature review, resilience is not static: it can be taught and developed, and can evolve over time (Barton et al., 2020; Rybak et al., 2001; Southwick et al., 2014; UBC, 2014). Staff and student participants in this research not only showed that resilience is a process that continues to change over time, but it is also varied and complex. Different individuals can have different capacities of resilience. Depending on individuals' context and circumstances, their capacity may vary. Furthermore, what one might not consider as a demonstration of resilience may be seen as resilience from others' perspective. Such understanding of resilience (and in turn resilience of international students) may not be recognized at times by international students themselves or by others in the Memorial University community outside of those who work closely with international students.

Benefits of Arts-Based Activity in Exploring Social-Emotional Themes

Arts-based activities as potential tools to support mental health and well-being was also explored in this research. The activities in this study provided opportunities for both student and staff participants to reflect on their own and connect as a group. They were able to practice and build Social Emotional Intelligence or capacity as identified by the Social Emotional Learning frameworks such as CASEL 5 (CASEL, 2024). In reflecting on their own experiences through the arts-based activities, participants became more self-aware, and as emotions were elicited during their reflection, participants learned to negotiate, manage and regulate such emotions. This then was replicated in group settings, whereby participants gained social awareness through interacting with others. Hope (2023) notes the importance of emotion exchange with others in story sharing:

What we know, however, those of us who invite and witness storytelling, is that the rigour lies in the unpredictable and in the spontaneous; the rigour is in the deep emotional and psychological work that the story-share elicits in both the teller and the receiver; it takes energy and mental stamina to re-tell a story, especially if one is to recall challenges to resilience. (p. 147)

By sharing emotions through the safe containment of storytelling and book making in groups, participants were able to deepen connections and establish supportive relationships. The informal and more relaxed environment created by the arts-based activities thus acted as a safe space to explore, reflect, share, connect and, as noted by some participants, practice self-care. In doing so, arts-based practices were able to bring forth the strengths and positives of individuals, which were noted as important by staff.

Indeed, staff expressed explicitly their appreciation for the strength-based approach that this research took. Rather than focusing on challenges and struggles that students face, this research investigated resilience. Staff noted that while it is important to affirm students' challenges and difficulties, seeing the strengths and positives can help students and staff to support students in moving forward. Indeed, focusing on how to better support students during the downward dips and help them strengthen skills or protective factors that they already possess can enhance efforts to help students build coping skills that they lack. The importance of offering strength-oriented support will be further discussed in the implications section later in this chapter, which speaks to the call for methodological designs that engage participant agency.

It is important to note that student participants in this study generally recognized the importance of mental health and well-being, and were receptive to support available. Indeed, students spoke of accessing counselling and leaning on their faith for support. They were not stigmatized by mental health based on previous research on international students by Popadiuk & Arthur (2004) and Robertson et al. (2015). While it is possible that mental health and wellness discussions are generally more widespread and accepted these days, open-mindedness being one of the qualities related to resilience may also be the reason for students' openness on this topic. Students' commitment to this research also demonstrated their interest in their mental well-being. In other words, students in this research showed that they were open to learning, to contributing and to seeking help and support. In any case, arts-based activities are less intimidating and a culturally sensitive alternative to more traditional mental health support such as counselling. Further discussion about potential mental health support, such as including students in the process and diversifying and being creative in the types of support offered, as

well as opportunities for further study in this regard will be discussed in the implications section next.

Vicarious or Reciprocal Resilience Observed

Vicarious or reciprocal resilience was shown throughout the meetings with research participants. As explained earlier, vicarious resilience refers to the positive effects on helpers, resulting from witnessing and hearing resilience from those being helped (Edelkott et al., 2016; Hernandez-Wolfe, 2018). Reciprocal resilience goes further and speaks to the feedback loop of resilience between helpers and those receiving their help, through which resilience is maintained, and growth is fostered (Bratt, 2019; Hope, 2023). Similarly, Brown (2018) speaks of perspective taking, a learned skill to see things from others' perspectives, being essential to empathy, the ability to feel with others and thus lead to trust and connection. During the group exchange through arts-based activities, student participants demonstrated reciprocal resilience and perspective taking as they cheered each other on and noted being inspired by others' journeys of resilience. Staff participants showed support for each other in their sharing, while also commenting that they felt inspired by the students they met. Such feelings of inspiration were shared by me. They were noted throughout my written reflections and presented in my autoethnographic output through my art book creation. Figures 22 and 23 show the two layers of the book separately and overlapping.

Figure 22

Researcher's Art Book Taken Apart



Figure 23

Researcher's Art Book Put Together



The base layer represents the resilient mindset of international students, which feeds into the thoughts and mindset of staff such as myself and my colleagues at the Internationalization Office, represented by the top layer of the book. While the impact of arts-based activities on student participants was expected, the effect on staff participants was unintended and thus not

anticipated in my original research design. This in turn reinforced the understanding of the benefit of arts-based activities conducted in groups: that resilience, in this case, vicarious or reciprocal resilience, can be fostered through social-emotional experience incited at a site of interpersonal and relationship building space.

Implications of Study

There are existing support services provided by the University that further self-development and help build social connections, which in turn impact the resilience of international students. For example, the Internationalization Office at Memorial University offers initial settlement support as well as social groups that provide networking opportunities. Other services that student and staff participants mentioned include volunteer and work training programs and opportunities, academic advising, counselling, and general help from supportive staff and faculty at the University. Support to help meet basic needs during emergencies is also in place. Yet there are a few areas where the University could improve their services. The findings of this research show that there are opportunities in taking a collaborative approach to student support and leaning on the strengths that students possess, as well as in the use of more diverse and inclusive practices, such as arts-based activities in group settings, as forms of mental health support. The University needs to consider how students can be better supported by individuals and the environment the University provides, in addition to how some programming and processes can be barriers to accessing support and seek ways to reduce them. This means expanding support outside of established student support services, and providing additional training and support to all who are in position to support international students within the University community as explored below.

Reconceptualize Resilience and Learning

As noted earlier, this study highlights the fluidity and complexity of resilience. Memorial University therefore can be more supportive by helping international students recognize resilience as a fluid, non-linear process and that success can be shown in different ways. As one of the staff members (S4) noted,

...we think about university in a very linear way, because there are a certain number of years we attribute to programs, there's a kind of progression that's built into this experience, um, that learning that self-discovery and resilience don't follow and so it can make it really difficult to equate that particular path with resilience... So, someone going home might actually be the biggest demonstration of their resilience... But it's something that the university would chalk up as, like, not a success and it's really hard to reconcile students' stories and experiences with what is expected in a like, very traditional Westernized environment.

Resilience is neither have nor have not; rather, it is affected by multiple variables, such as the size of challenges, contexts, as well as individual needs and goals, etc. Once recognized, this could potentially shift the focus of support provided. Rather than ensuring that students achieve high grades and complete their degrees in time, the University should ensure students become self-driven lifelong learners who are up for challenges and discomfort in their learnings, gaining skills in how to navigate discomfort when it arises. Indeed, educators hold the power to change culture. Brown (2016) encourages educators to normalize the discomfort of learning by helping students normalize failing and getting back up. Similarly, Park et al. (2018) note, "An environment that facilitates learning and mastery may lay the foundation for students to develop their passion and perseverance for their future goals, which in turn will help them to flourish in

school and beyond” (p. 126). In other words, the University can help students understand learning for learning’s sake, which can build grit and long-term motivation in seeking and achieving goals within their specific contexts and circumstances. They can promote a growth mindset within students, whereby greater emphasis is placed on processes that lead to growth rather than short-term outcomes; for example, by encouraging collaboration rather than competition as suggested by Dweck (2016). The findings of this study thus support this nuanced shift in supporting international students, that is, helping students achieve success on their own terms.

Investing in Students’ Strengths

As mentioned earlier, focusing on students’ strengths and positives is important. The University can support students by placing emphasis on these qualities and help them develop their potential as noted by one of the staff participants (S3):

Because sometimes when we look at just throwing resources at people. And we don't think about how we pull from people what they're able to do with their own potential. And really if we talk about what a student experience should be, it should encapsulate more about their, their own potential.

Students’ expertise should be used to inform the planning and designing of services and programming, both in their development and evaluation during and after implementation. For example, in the international student context, this could mean leaning on their cultural lens to ensure diversity and inclusivity is implemented in the University’s practices. Their qualities, skillset, life experiences as well as knowledge and expertise in various fields can be harnessed to improve the programming and support provided. A case in point is the arts-based activities in this research, whereby participants shared their own experiences to encourage each other, which

in turn informed this study to improve practices at the University. In eliciting students to help themselves and each other, these opportunities can in turn lead to greater confidence and agency. As noted in this research, possessing such critical sense of self can help further interpersonal competency and thus development of resilience.

Ensuring Diverse and Inclusive Support

There should be continuous efforts to provide a wide range of support that meets the unique needs of the diverse international student population. As Yu and McClean (2022) state, “to work effectively in a culturally diverse context requires us to treat students as individuals belonging to a culturally constructed group with individual traits due to personal experience, education, social class, and so on” (p. 125). Inclusivity should be considered when creating support services, perhaps as part of the University’s Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism initiatives. This means considering the needs of individuals from various cultures, of different age groups, with a wide range of experiences and different help seeking behaviours, to name a few, when designing support services offered within the various aspects of university life and throughout the academic journeys of students. Participants noted gaps in services at Memorial University include a lack of social activities suitable for mature students, and availability of family housing or affordable on- and off-campus housing in general. Designing services using a culturally sensitive lens, such as employing arts-based activities in group settings to support the mental health and well-being of students in this study, can be one way to practice inclusive support. Employing scaffolding techniques in teaching and learning experiences, such as drawing on students’ prior knowledge and providing academic language support alongside their studies (Yu and McClean, 2022), can be another way to meet the needs of international students. Adopting the Universal Design of Learning (UDL) principles, namely,

offering various means of engagement, representation, as well as action and expression (CAST, 2024), in and outside of the classroom, are additional ways to practise inclusive support that is accepting of all individuals regardless of their abilities and circumstances.

Training Champions All Around

Ideally, support should be shown throughout the University, and not limited to staff at the international offices. Other departments, staff and administrators of various capacities as well as faculty should be better informed of the needs and challenges international students face. For example, this paper can serve to provide some understanding of them. It has the potential to reach different audiences and create a deep and entrenched impact by amplifying the voices of students. Indeed, learning from the experiences of international students transitioning to the Newfoundland and Labrador context can help Memorial University support this student population in more relatable and empowering ways, as Brown (2016) suggests:

So I think that we need to re-conceptualize universities and colleges as learning partnerships. And when I say learning partnerships, I don't mean the students are there to learn and I am there to teach. I mean I'm there to learn, they are there to learn, I'm there to teach, they are there to teach... we have to all be learners, we have to all be teachers. We have to all be knowers, and we have to all be open-minded inquirers. I think that could fundamentally change us. (p. 6)

In other words, rather than considering themselves as those holding expertise in their respective areas, there are considerable opportunities for staff and faculty to learn from international students. Additional learning opportunities regarding supporting the diverse needs of students should also be sought by staff and offered by leadership regularly. Such opportunities should

help the University personnel become allies and advocates for international students, as trusting relationships need to be established before help and support can be provided.

Creating Space and Opportunities to Reflect

The University can also intentionally create space and opportunities for international students as well as staff and faculty to reflect on the students' university life and experience. While students can reflect on their transition and learning journey, staff and faculty can reflect on their interactions with students and the support they provide. This in turn can facilitate co-learning as Brown suggests (2016), that staff and faculty can play the roles of learners alongside students.

Although much attention has been paid to mental health and wellness support for students in university contexts recently, support for staff and faculty to maintain their mental health and well-being is seldom discussed (Arnold et. al., 2021). As S3 explained, "There's so much of our work that is reactive... and maybe we don't process a lot of that, for ourselves, right? We're just yeah, we just keep moving. We're moving ahead, but I don't know that we're moving forward." Arts-based activities such as those explored through this study, do not only offer opportunities for individuals to learn about themselves and connect socially but also to reflect on how experiences shape strengths. While artmaking may be intimidating for some, it may open doors for others. For staff and faculty specifically, arts-based processes can be used to support their mental health by eliciting empathetic responses regarding work stresses and strengthening bonds between colleagues, which can in turn mitigate potential burnout.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the major limitations is the research being conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic; others include my social position as the researcher, the focus on the University

context, and a lack of in-depth discussion regarding equity, diversity and inclusion. As a master-level thesis, the scope of this research is also limited. This, however, means that there is much room for further expansion of this study in future.

Impact Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the data was collected between Fall 2021 and Spring 2022, when the COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing, changes in public health measures as well as travel regulations and immigration policies intensified the experiences of international students. The research process of this study was also influenced by the pandemic in other ways as detailed below.

Recruitment and Participants Recruited. The recruitment process took quite some time and changes were made to hasten the process. As recruitment began in the midst of COVID-19, uptake for research participant recruitment was slow. Participant criteria were therefore broadened to accommodate more individuals in meeting the requirements. Student participants were originally required to have lived in St. John's, Newfoundland, for one year in order to ensure that they could speak to their lived experiences in this province. This was reduced to six months, then later to four months. For staff participants, the requirement to have worked at the Internationalization Office for at least one year was reduced to six months. Despite these changes, only the minimum number of participants were recruited in the end. Moreover, all student participants had been in the city for less than one year and most were only in the first year of their academic studies when the research was conducted. Thus, the student participants had experienced studying in St. John's for a limited time and only within the COVID-19 context. Yet data saturation was achieved through having identified repeated themes in the discussions that took place and in the art books created by the small number of participants. Despite small numbers, the outcomes drawn from the participants point to rich themes that support expanded

study of this context. For example, future studies may wish to recruit a larger number of participants, including staff and faculty supporting international students outside the Internationalization Office, to ensure that perspectives and experiences of the diverse international student population are accounted for. Follow-up interviews with these individuals or a longitudinal study may also be beneficial in understanding the further development of resilience over a longer period, during a less unpredictable time post-pandemic. Indeed, differences were noticed between the first and second groups of students. The latter group, who had been in St. John's longer, were more settled in their new lives and noted having made some friendly and helpful connections. Including international students who have lived in St. John's for a wide variety of durations could potentially capture a more comprehensive picture of resilience development that better reflects its changing nature and fluidity.

Virtual vs. In-Person Meetings. The research design was also devised specifically to meet the public health measures at the time. The group meetings were conducted virtually rather than in person. Since arts-based practices often privilege in-person facilitation and interactions, the results of this study may be somewhat impacted by the virtual mode of delivery. Having said that, deep emotions were evoked in participants, resulting in rich data, despite meeting virtually. The virtual format also had the added advantage of making the study more accessible for some individuals. Thus, a mixed format study, whereby individuals are offered the opportunity to meet virtually as well as in person, may allow the study to be more inclusive. Furthermore, while this research did not seek the participants' input in its design, what the participants reflected and provided as feedback in this study can become input for the design of similar studies in the future. Indeed, by involving students in the design of studies that impact them directly, students

are recognized for their strengths and given opportunities to contribute and thus build agency. Taking a participatory approach will therefore help promote more equitable research practices.

Researcher's Social Position

As stated in the introduction of this paper, I recognize my social location informs my study. Being a person of colour, an immigrant and a former newcomer, a staff member at Memorial University who supports international students, in addition to being a master's level student studying at the University, I hold a multi-faceted perspective regarding the transitional experiences of international students at the University. On the flip side, the context and roles that I hold also affect my perspective and how I conducted this study. During my meetings with the research participants, I donned the hats of the researcher and the discussion facilitator. While staff participants would view me as their colleague, the student participants might see me in a counselling role, thus potentially someone that holds expertise and greater power. Due to the small group size and the casual format, I also participated in the discussions held during the mandatory group meetings and optional artmaking sessions. As a researcher, I followed my curiosity and posed follow-up questions based on the answers provided by the participants, thus taking the discussions in different directions at times. Though mindful of what I shared and how much I shared, I brought up personal experiences that helped me connect to the experiences of international students. In doing so, I attempted to not only flattened the potential perceived power hierarchies, but to help create a comfortable environment for equitable exchanges. While traditional research approaches view subjectivity as a limitation, ABR methods embrace and value it. Being intentional and transparent about my social context and position thus helped ground and validate my research. Taking a similar approach in future investigations of deep human experiences will therefore continue to be valuable.

Focus on University Context

This study was heavily focused on the experiences of international students and the support they receive within Memorial University. This is understandable since their role is to study and the University is the destination and thus the place where they spend most time, theoretically. Students, however, do venture out of the University vicinity to access resources in the larger community. As such, focusing on the University context was a missed opportunity. Future studies may wish to include student support outside the University context, to consider supporting international students' resilience from a community-wide or community-partnership perspective and in more holistic ways. It will be important to know what types of support students have been accessing in the community, if there is past and existing collaboration between the University and the larger community to provide support, and if so, how effective they are and if there is room to expand on these collaborative efforts. Furthermore, I recognize that there are entrenched and larger systemic issues outside the University at play, which would have also influenced resilience and the fostering of resilience in international students. Studying these larger systems and their impact on resilience may be yet another direction that future studies can take.

Lack of In-Depth Discussion on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

By placing subjectivity at the forefront, inviting international students to collaborate in knowledge making, and employing arts-based methods that aim to lower barriers, this study attempted to consider and examine the experiences of international students using an equitable and culturally sensitive lens. Yet, due to the particular scope of experiences explored in this study, I am aware that it only scratches the surface of important considerations regarding equity, diversity and inclusion. For example, though not discussed explicitly, international students may

hold certain disadvantages compared to local students due to differences in their countries' currencies and access to resources. In their book creation, a staff person (S1) mentioned that some students experienced homelessness and poverty firsthand for the first time, while a student (I3) pointed out noticing that other students had significant technological and academic challenges in online learning due to lack of access to infrastructure and prior training. These challenges can impact individuals' ability to foster a sense of self and social connections in their new environment, and in turn resilience. Other important considerations related to equity, diversity and inclusion that could be further explored include aspects of *intersectionality*, a term coined by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, that refers to the intersection of multiple identities, such as race, gender and sexuality, resulting in the converging and compounding of multiple inequalities and disadvantages (National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), 2018).

Racism and discrimination. The brutal death of George Floyd in the United States during the pandemic brought racial inequalities and injustices into the limelight (Cobb, 2020), while the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in anti-Chinese sentiment and racist acts within Canada (Jain, 2022; Zeidler, 2020), including Newfoundland (Cooke & Roberts, 2020); yet, racism and discrimination were not explored in depth within this study. Racism and discrimination were not named explicitly by the participants, however instances that can be traced back to systemic and structural racism did surface in the group discussions. For example, the researcher and participants talked about how ineffective classroom management and lack of inclusive classroom practices originated from institutions overlooking the needs of international students and failing to provide adequate support. Unfair rental practices and unsafe housing conditions point to inadequate regulation or enforcement thereof in the housing and rental

market. Indeed, these day-to-day challenges can have profound impact on resilience and thus warrant further and deeper investigation in larger-scale studies.

Gender and Sexuality. There were aspects of individuals' identities that I did not look into intentionally in this study, such as gender and sexuality. Since the focus of this study was on exploring international students navigating general challenges, information about gender and sexuality were not requested specifically. Moreover, there were no disclosures made regarding individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. In maintaining participants' anonymity and privacy, gender was neutralized in the reporting and analysis of the data, except in instances when participants referenced motherhood, which I deemed important in preserving the additional layer of meaning to the data collected. Future studies may wish to explore resilience through a gender-based lens and how intersectionality including gender and sexual identities can impact resilience. Being more intentional in studying gender and sexuality may thus mean studying how the experiences of marginalization and stigma of international students within the LGBTQ+ community can impact resilience and resilience-building. Indeed, it is noted that LGBTQ+ international students often face the challenges of a *double barrier*, whereby they feel alienated from other international students due to their sexuality or gender identity and isolated among other LGBTQ+ students because of their status as international students (Chatterjee, 2023). Such feelings of being outsiders may therefore impact their resilience building. Differences in gendered life roles can be complex and are worth further investigation. An international student mother who brings along their children, alone or with their spouse, or decides to leave their family behind in their home country, may also experience and demonstrate resilience differently than an international student father. Thus, neglecting to discuss gender and sexuality is certainly a limitation of this study, but it also poses immense opportunities.

One effect of the pandemic was increased awareness of social inequalities and marginalization of racialized individuals. Inequalities and injustices that were often masked by the façade of a functioning society bubbled up as various infrastructures and systems failed during COVID-19. As a result, there has been a rise of new initiatives in support of newcomers and racialized groups within the University and in the larger local community. Some examples include the Black Student Association at Memorial University sharing videos that showcase stories of Black people and the diverse Black Culture in the province; the Association for New Canadians in Newfoundland and Labrador offering an arts-based newcomer youth group (Journey of Hope) and a painted door project that helps human trafficking survivors tell their stories; and TODOs Productions, a newcomer-owned theatre company in Newfoundland and Labrador, putting on a play focused on newcomer experiences (Association for New Canadians, n.d. 1, n.d. 2; Muslim Network TV, 2022; Stokes, 2021; Wilhelm, 2022). CBC N. L. also offered a video series “N.L. in Colour” that explored diversity within the province (Sharvendiran, 2020). All initiatives mentioned above involved some form of storytelling using different arts practices to help marginalized individuals explore their identities and transitional experiences and in turn amplify their voices. While it is noted through this research that arts-based practices can be employed to support individuals’ mental health, this further highlights their potential in exploring intersectionality. Indeed, ABR as a low-barrier research method is well-positioned to explore topics related to equity, diversity and inclusion, including intersectionality, in relation to mental health and wellness.

Other Possible Directions

Throughout this study, it is noted that the University works as an ecosystem, whereby international students are supported by others who also need additional support. A healthy

ecosystem can only remain so if all its elements are well taken care of. Thus, future studies may look into how to best support those who support international students. For example, a study by Arnold et al. (2021) looks at how poetry and prose can be used to support the mental health and wellness of university faculty during COVID-19. Focusing on how arts-based practices can be used to foster vicarious or reciprocal resilience in staff and faculty who support international students post-pandemic is, then, one direction that research could take.

As discussed earlier, intercultural training can support equity, diversity and inclusion in institutions. Moreover, I have noted previously the role that social adjustment can play in supporting the mental well-being of international students. Future studies may look at the possibility of using arts-based processes in fostering intercultural learning and invite local students at the University to participate. As mentioned earlier, Leavy (2020) talks about arts-based research (ABR) being participatory and able to promote dialogues. Other than inviting local students to consume this research as an audience, opening arts-based processes to include them can potentially encourage dialogue between the different student groups, foster empathy, challenge stereotypes, deepen intercultural understanding and potentially build stronger communities.

Concluding Thoughts

I feel like I am suddenly waking up from a dream... How are these three years a blur to me? How can it feel so long and yet so short? Why does it feel like one long year blended together? I can hardly tell apart what happened in which year... The time that has slowed down for me to start this thesis and research, seems to be running out quickly. It is urging me to open up and, to try new things again. (S. Ho, personal journal, May 24, 2023)

This study has explored arts-based practices, in particular, storytelling that involves discussions and artmaking in group settings, as ways to foster resilience in support of the mental well-being of international students studying at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Three major findings resulted: 1) resilience is noted in many international students by the research participants, which is fluid and evolves based on contexts and circumstances; 2) arts-based activities are valuable in their ability to elicit emotions and in connecting with others; 3) supportive relationships foster reciprocal resilience. Despite demonstrating resilience in different ways, the transitional experiences of international students often mean that additional support is required. Universities as hosts hold the responsibility to provide such support. Key takeaways in offering support include both top-down and bottom-up approaches that involve all individuals and all aspects within the University. These are changing university culture to focus on learning for learning's sake, supporting students on their own terms and highlighting their strengths, ensuring diverse and inclusive support such as arts-based practices is included, and providing training and support such as reflective spaces for support people. While this study provides rich data, it draws on the experiences of a small number of international students studying at Memorial University of Newfoundland; as such, there is much room to explore further opportunities.

COVID-19's Impact on Support at Memorial University

The sudden onset of the pandemic forced institutions to pivot in a short period of time. In addition to providing lectures online, various services were also adapted to support individuals. The greatest task for support people in education institutions was to help students connect (Clemens & Robinson, 2021), which in turn could help them navigate resources and build their social network. At Memorial University, a team of individuals was formed to provide additional

support for international students under the lead of the Internationalization Office. The focus of the team was to help meet the quarantine requirements and mandatory isolation. Student-led teams were to help new students learn about settlement resources when they first arrived, in addition to offering a virtual social environment. While the University's policies and regulations to isolate and keep distance were relaxed to some degree at the time of the research, social opportunities remained rather limited. The group storytelling and book making sessions conducted for this research thus provided an additional venue for individuals to connect and build community, in addition to reflecting on their experiences. These new measures demonstrated that the University has the capacity to change and respond at times of need and when students needed the support.

Moving Upward and Forward: Lessons from Dandelions

Those few years when the pandemic was rampant were a trying time for everyone's resilience. On the surface, the COVID-19 pandemic may seem like a whirlwind of events in the distant past – I remember vaguely wondering at the time when it would pass and when we would be able to travel and move about as before. Yet, the media today continue with stories regarding the increasing mental stress that individuals, international students included, face post-pandemic (The Canadian Press, 2024), noting the dire need of support for mental health and wellness. This study thus continues to be of great relevance.

While the pandemic has drawn out the worst in many ways – stressing economic and social systems, social inequalities and injustices continue to surface – in the spirit of this resilience study, one may also notice the opportunities and possibilities that emerged through such troubled times. For one, across the globe since the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an increase in discussions and studies regarding mental health and well-being, including ones that

place particular focus on resilience in education contexts like the edited volume by White and McCallum (2021) named *Wellbeing and Resilience Education*, as well as Thannhauser et al. (2024)'s study on resilience in the Canadian post-secondary context. Further, the stories shared by the participants in this research, the students I crossed paths with, and stories my colleagues relayed, show that there is much hope, like a sea of yellow dandelions blooming in the spring after a long winter, as seen on the back cover of my art book (see Figure 21 above).

To conclude this paper, I would like to reference one of my favorite movies, a movie coincidentally called “Dandelion” or “Tampopo” in Japanese. Tampopo is the name of the heroine and owner of a ramen noodle shop, who toils to keep her shop open with the support of the friends she makes on her journey in the movie. When Goro, the other protagonist, asks Tampopo why she tries so hard, she responds, “Everyone has their own ladder. Some do their best to climb to the top, while others don’t even realize they have a ladder. You came along...and helped me find my ladder” (Itami, 1985, 1:15:31). Resilience may be likened to climbing ladders. As shown through this study, it is often built upon support from others. Postsecondary institutions, such as Memorial University, can provide support to their students, in this case international students, by helping them find their ladders and holding onto them as students reach for the stars. Furthermore, if equity is what we are aiming to achieve, postsecondary institutions can help individuals find ladders that fit their specific circumstances.

In addition to helping my work and helping others who already support international students at the University, my hope is that this paper and the accompanying ethnographic art book will also be reviewed by others who interact with these students. The stories shared can provide a glimpse of the experiences regarding this student population and potentially foster greater empathy and understanding from the readership. Philpott et al. (2014) note that Memorial

University has a minimization orientation when it comes to understanding cultures. To move forward on the continuum of intercultural competency, it will be important for individuals to take a closer look at their own cultures and examine the differences with other cultures (Philpott et al., 2014). By sharing these unique stories, the hope is that deeper understanding and intercultural competency can be achieved within our organization, from top to bottom, and potentially in the larger community, which can in turn facilitate changes that support the social adjustment of international students and their mental well-being. As Clemens and Robinson (2021) state, “Institutions must promote and replicate equitable practices, breathing in oxygen; and eliminate inequitable practices, breathing out carbon dioxide, if they plan on surviving” (p. 20). So, let’s breathe and keep moving! There is much work to do.

I learn what it is that I need. I am learning to better cope with uncertainties, to wrap my mind around not knowing what will come next and not knowing when the next step is coming. I am learning to be more mindful of what I am thinking and what I am feeling. My faith, my art, my talks with family and friends from far away, my circle of 10 are there to help me through. Those were lessons learned. It’s time to move onto the next adventure, to continue to jump to the next loop. (S. Ho, personal journal, May 24, 2023)

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Appendix A

Student Recruitment Poster

YOUR STORY OF RESILIENCE

Seeking undergraduate or graduate international students who currently study at Memorial University or completed their studies at the university within the last 6 months, AND have lived in the St. John's area for at least 4 months, for a study that explores resilience and storytelling.

Participants will:

- Share and tell stories in 2 virtual group meetings with up to 7 other student participants (1-1.5 hours per meeting in the span of 2 weeks)
- Create a personal story book (1-2 hours in between meetings - in participants' own time or at a virtual artmaking group session)
- Complete an online survey post-activity (optional) (0.5 hour)
- **Total time required: approx. 5.5 hours**

Interested?

Contact the researcher, Sonia Ho (she/her), at:
sonia.ho@mun.ca

The researcher is a Master of Education student in Counselling Psychology at MUN, supervised by Dr. Leah Lewis in the Faculty of Education.

This study is the researcher's Master thesis project, and not a MUN, course or program requirement. It is not a requirement of the Internationalization Office, other departments or student associations at the university.

Participation is voluntary.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr.chair@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Appendix B

E-mail script for Staff Recruitment

Dear colleagues at the Internationalization Office,

I am conducting a research study for my MEd thesis in Counselling Psychology, titled “Storytelling as a tool to foster resilience: An arts-based study with Postsecondary International Students in the Newfoundland Context”, under the supervision of Dr. Leah Lewis at Memorial’s Faculty of Education. The objective of this study is to explore storytelling as a potential tool to foster resilience, and in turn support the mental health and well-being of postsecondary international students.

In addition to hearing from the students directly, I am interested in your perspectives as service and support providers for this student population. I am seeking 3-5 staff volunteers to meet with me virtually as a group. Two group meetings will be conducted two weeks apart during the month of X, in a format similar to a talking or a story circle. They will focus on building and sharing stories of resilience based on challenges experienced by international students. Volunteers will be shown how to create a simple book structure to present their stories visually. The book making can be done independently in your own time or at a virtual artmaking session with your colleagues in between the group meetings. A final optional survey will be sent to participants to provide additional input and/or clarifications after the data collected has been analysed.

Time commitment will be approximately 5.5 hours in total: 1 to 1.5 hours for each of the two storytelling group meetings, 1 to 2 hours for the book making in between meetings, and approximately 0.5 hour for the survey.

Please note that, this is not a job requirement, and participation is voluntary.

If you are interested in participating and/or have questions about the study, please do not hesitate to email me at sonia.ho@mun.ca. Any concerns regarding my program can be forwarded to my supervisor, Dr. Leah Lewis, at leah.lewis@mun.ca. Thank you in advance for your participation.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University’s ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr.chair@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Yours sincerely,
Sonia Ho

Appendix C

Student Consent Form

Student Participant Informed Consent Form

Research Title: Storytelling as a Tool to Foster Resilience: An arts-based study with Postsecondary International Students in the Newfoundland Context
Researcher: Sonia Ho, MEd Counselling Psychology candidate (sonia.ho@mun.ca)
Supervisor: Dr. Leah Lewis, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education (leah.lewis@mun.ca)

As an undergraduate or a graduate international student who currently studies at Memorial University or has finished studying at the university within the last 6 months AND has lived in the St. John's area for at least 4 months, you are invited to take part in a research project entitled "Storytelling as a Tool to Foster Resilience."

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand the information provided. If you have any questions or require more information about the study before you consent, please contact the researcher, Sonia Ho.

It is entirely your decision to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction: As part of her master's thesis, Sonia Ho is conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Leah Lewis, at the Faculty of Education at Memorial University. The researcher is interested in resilience and wellness in the international student population, as well as the connection between wellness and the arts through storytelling and artmaking.

Purpose of study: This study is to explore storytelling as a way to build resilience, and in turn support the mental health and well-being of postsecondary international students in Newfoundland and Labrador.

What you will do in this study: You will attend two virtual group meetings via Webex with up to 7 international students, tell your story through group sharing and artmaking, and fill out an optional survey. Art material may be provided, and contactless pick-up can be arranged.

- 1) First group meeting (1-1.5 hours): You will explore themes of resilience, be introduced to the storytelling and book making task, and begin brainstorming and creating your story.
- 2) Book making (suggested time spent: 1-2 hours): You will have two weeks in between the group meetings to work on your storybook. You can do so independently or participate in

an optional virtual artmaking session with other participants. A digital image of your book should be sent to the researcher before the next group meeting.

- 3) Second group meeting (1-1.5 hours): You will finalize and show your storybook, share your story and discuss your storytelling/artmaking experience.
- 4) Survey (0.5 hour): You will be asked to complete an optional survey online once the data is analyzed, approximately 2-4 weeks after the second meeting.

Length of Time: The time commitment will be approximately 5.5 hours in total.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal: Participation is voluntary. You may stop participating by exiting or withdrawing from the online sessions, but it will not be feasible to remove your contribution in the recordings up to that point due to the group nature of the study. You may withdraw your artwork from the study up to 2 weeks after the second virtual group meeting.

Benefits: These may include increased creative skills as you learn to construct a simple story book. Through reflecting on your personal experiences in storytelling and book making, you may learn more about yourself. Some may also enjoy and benefit from connecting with others at a deeper level and/or helping improve support services for international students at the university.

Risks: While the storytelling will be facilitated by a counsellor, some difficult experiences may surface and at times create emotional responses that are both pleasant and unpleasant. As a counselling psychology student, the researcher possesses the skills required for facilitating groups of this nature. If additional support is desired, current students can contact the university's [Student Wellness and Counselling Centre \(SWCC\)](#). Graduates and current students may also connect with [community and online mental health resources such as those suggested by the SWCC](#).

Data collection, storage and access: For research purposes, the group meetings including the optional virtual artmaking group session, will be audio and video recorded using Webex (Webex's privacy policy is available at: <https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/about/legal/privacy-full.html>), and later transcribed. Digital images of the story books created by you will be collected. These data will be stored in encrypted/password secured platforms, devices and/or memory drives. Except the original recordings which will be erased after the study is complete, all other data (including the transcripts of recordings) will be kept for a minimum of 5 years after the study, as required by Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. Only the researcher and her supervisor may access these data.

Limitations of confidentiality and anonymity: Group participation is not anonymous. Creative artwork can also be identifying in ways one cannot anticipate, in addition to the small population in Newfoundland and at Memorial University. While the researcher will respect anonymity and confidentiality, she cannot guarantee it. She will encourage respectful exchange that respects the privacy of each participant at the group meetings. In addition, she will store contact information and data separately, as well as keeping transcripts of recordings, artwork and surveys anonymous.

Reporting and sharing of results: Themes identified from the data collection will be shared in the final survey, allowing you as participants to review and provide additional feedback. A hard copy of the researcher's collective story/art book will be sent to you upon request. Her book and thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library, and can be accessed online at: <http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses>.

You are welcome to ask questions about this study at any point. Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Sonia Ho (sonia.ho@mun.ca). For any questions and concerns about the researcher's program (MEd Counselling Psychology), you may contact her supervisor, Dr. Leah Lewis (leah.lewis@mun.ca).

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been given various opportunities to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that withdrawal from the study does not require you to give a reason and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that your artwork can be withdrawn up to 2 weeks after the second virtual group meeting, and that any submission made up to that point will be destroyed.
- You understand that all other contribution cannot be removed from this study once you have begun participating in discussion at the first group meeting and will be retained for use in the study, as the researcher will not be able to separate and remove individuals' input from the audio and video recordings.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researcher from her professional responsibilities.

I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.

I agree to be audio and video recorded in the virtual group meetings.

I agree to provide a digital image of the artwork (story book) I produced, and the researcher's use of the image. If I wish to be credited for the use of my art, I would have discussed with the researcher before the study begins.

I agree to the use of direct quotations from the meetings and the feedback survey. If I wish to be credited for the use of my words, I would have discussed with the researcher before the study begins.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in their participation, any potential risks of the study and that they have freely chosen to participate.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D

Staff Consent Form

Staff Participant Informed Consent Form

Research Title: Storytelling as a Tool to Foster Resilience: An arts-based study with Postsecondary International Students in the Newfoundland Context
Researcher: Sonia Ho, MEd Counselling Psychology candidate (sonia.ho@mun.ca)
Supervisor: Dr. Leah Lewis, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education (leah.lewis@mun.ca)

As a current staff member who has supported international students at Memorial University for at least 6 months, you are invited to take part in a research project entitled “Storytelling as a Tool to Foster Resilience.”

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand the information provided. If you have any questions or require more information about the study before you consent, please contact the researcher, Sonia Ho.

It is entirely your decision to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction: As part of her master’s thesis, Sonia Ho is conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Leah Lewis, at the Faculty of Education at Memorial University. The researcher is interested in resilience and wellness in the international student population, as well as the connection between wellness and the arts through storytelling and artmaking.

Purpose of study: This study is to explore storytelling as a way to build resilience, and in turn support the mental health and well-being of postsecondary international students in Newfoundland and Labrador.

What you will do in this study: You will attend two virtual groups meetings via Webex with 1-4 of your colleagues, tell stories through group sharing and artmaking, and fill out an optional survey. Art material may be provided, and contactless pick-up can be arranged.

- 5) First group meeting (1-1.5 hours): You will explore themes of resilience as shown in the experiences of international students, be introduced to the storytelling and book making task, and begin brainstorming and creating your story.
- 6) Book making (suggested time spent: 1-2 hours): You will have two weeks in between the group meetings to work on your storybook. You can do so independently or participate in

an optional virtual artmaking session with your colleagues. A digital image of your book should be sent to the researcher before the next group meeting.

- 7) Second Meeting (1-1.5 hours): You will finalize and show your storybook, share the story of international students from your perspective and discuss your storytelling/artmaking experience.
- 8) Survey (0.5 hour): You will be asked to complete an optional survey online once the data is analyzed, approximately 2-4 weeks after the second meeting.

Length of Time: The time commitment will be approximately 5.5 hours in total.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal: Participation is voluntary. You may stop participating by exiting or withdrawing from the online sessions, but it will not be feasible to remove your contribution in the recordings up to that point due to the group nature of the study. You may withdraw your artwork from the study up to 2 weeks after the second virtual group meeting.

Benefits: These may include increased creative skills as you learn to construct a simple story book. Through reflecting on your personal experiences in storytelling and book making, you may learn more about yourself. Some may also enjoy and benefit from connecting with others at a deeper level and/or helping improve support services for international students at the university.

Risks: While the storytelling will be facilitated by a counsellor, some difficult experiences may surface and at times create emotional responses that are both pleasant and unpleasant. As a counselling psychology student, the researcher possesses the skills required for facilitating groups of this nature. If additional support is desired, you may access the university's [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) or other [community and online mental health resources available through the province](#).

Data collection, storage and access: For research purposes, the group meetings including the optional virtual artmaking group session, will be audio and video recorded using Webex (Webex's privacy policy is available at: <https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/about/legal/privacy-full.html>), and later transcribed. Digital images of the story books created by you will be collected. These data will be stored in encrypted/password secured platforms, devices and/or memory drives. Except the original recordings which will be erased after the study is complete, all other data (including the transcripts of recordings) will be kept for a minimum of 5 years after the study, as required by Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. Only the researcher and her supervisor may access these data.

Limitations of confidentiality and anonymity: Group participation is not anonymous. Creative artwork can also be identifying in ways one cannot anticipate, in addition to the small population in Newfoundland and at Memorial University. Moreover, due to the public nature of your job position, informed readers, particularly those within the university community, will likely be able to discern your identity by process of elimination. Individual contribution, particularly direct quotes, may be identifiable. While the researcher will respect anonymity and confidentiality, she cannot guarantee it. She will encourage respectful exchange that respects the privacy of each participant at the group meetings. In addition, she will store contact information and data separately, as well as keep transcripts of recordings, artwork and surveys anonymous.

Reporting and sharing of results: Themes identified from the data collection will be shared in the final survey, allowing you as participants to review and provide additional feedback. A hard copy of the researcher's collective story/art book will be sent to you upon request. Her book and thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library, and can be accessed online at: <http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses>.

You are welcome to ask questions about this study at any point. Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Sonia Ho (sonia.ho@mun.ca). For any questions and concerns about the researcher's program (MEd Counselling Psychology), you may contact her supervisor, Dr. Leah Lewis (leah.lewis@mun.ca).

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been given various opportunities to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that withdrawal from the study does not require you to give a reason and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that your artwork can be withdrawn up to 2 weeks after the second virtual group meeting, and that any submission made up to that point will be destroyed.
- You understand that all other contribution cannot be removed from this study once you have begun participating in discussion at the first group meeting and will be retained for use in the study, as the researcher will not be able to separate and remove individuals' input from the audio and video recordings.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researcher from her professional responsibilities.

- I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.
- I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.
- I agree to be audio and video recorded in the virtual group meetings.

I agree to provide a digital image of the artwork (story book) I produced, and the researcher's use of the image. If I wish to be credited for the use of my art, I would have discussed with the researcher before the study begins.

I agree to the use of direct quotations from the meetings and the feedback survey. If I wish to be credited for the use of my words, I would have discussed with the researcher before the study begins.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in their participation, any potential risks of the study and that they have freely chosen to participate.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix E

Book Template

| Page 4 | Page 3 | Page 2 | Page 1 |
|--------|--------|------------|-------------|
| Page 5 | Page 6 | Back Cover | Front Cover |

Appendix F

Storytelling & Book Making Task Instructions

Storytelling + Book Making Task for Student Participants

Please answer ***one*** of the following prompts, using a combination of words and visual images in a simple book structure. You may use the template provided (print, cut the solid lines and fold the dotted lines) or other book forms of your choice.

Prompt 1: Tell a story about yourself going through a challenging time since you have started at Memorial University,

OR

Prompt 2: Tell a story about yourself as a student at Memorial University, in which resilience plays a role.

You may use the following to help your process along:

- Consider a particular instance, or a series of instances:
 - What happened?
 - What was the issue(s)?
 - How was the issue(s) resolved?
 - What were the feelings and mood associated with the story?
- Think about how you can use colours and/or images to represent your story – they can be photos, drawings, or a collage of cut out images, clippings, small objects, etc.
- Think about what words, phrases, poetry, prose or song lyrics you can incorporate – they can be in any language(s). Reference the writers/songwriters if you are including quotes.
- For your book structure, you can fill in page by page (plan ahead – each page can present a theme, or a scene from your story), or create one large image then assemble the book.

Remember to enjoy the process!

NOTE: Remember to send an image of your book creation to sonia.ho@mun.ca prior to the second group meeting in two weeks' time.

Storytelling + Book Making Task for Staff Participants

Please answer ***one*** of the following prompts, using a combination of words and visual images in a simple book structure. You may use the template provided (print, cut the solid lines and fold the dotted lines) or other book forms of your choosing.

Prompt 1: Share challenges you have seen international students experienced at Memorial University,

OR

Prompt 2: Tell a story from your perspective how resilience plays a role in the experience of international students you work with at Memorial University.

You may use the following to help your process along:

- Consider a particular instance, or a series of instances:
 - What happened?
 - What was the issue(s)?
 - How was the issue(s) resolved?
 - What were the feelings and mood associated with the story?
- Think about how you can use colours and/or images to represent your story – they can be photos, drawings, or a collage of cut out images, clippings, small objects, etc.
- Think about what words, phrases, poetry, prose or song lyrics you can incorporate – they can be in any language(s). Reference the writers/songwriters if you are including quotes.
- For your book structure, you can fill in page by page (plan ahead – each page can present a theme, or a scene from the story), or create one large image then assemble the book.

Remember to enjoy the process!

NOTE: Remember to send an image of your book creation to sonia.ho@mun.ca prior to the second group meeting in two weeks' time.

Appendix G

Group Discussion Prompts

Group Meetings – Discussion Framework/Prompts

First Group Meeting (60-90 minutes):

- Discuss informed consent – questions, concerns, any additional rules should be established within group
- What is resilience? What does resilience mean to you?
- Do you think you (addressing students)/international students (addressing staff) are resilient? Why? In what ways?
- Is there programming that exists in the university that either directly or indirectly influence resilience in students?
- Explain storytelling and book making task (provide options to complete in their own time or meet as a group)

Optional Virtual Artmaking Session (approx. 60-120 minutes – participants are welcome to drop in):

- No specific prompts are created for this session. Participants will be encouraged to talk freely as they work on their own story books together in the virtual space. They may ask each other questions, share stories, and show their artwork in progress through their cameras if willing.

Second Group Meeting (60-90 minutes):

- Tell us about the story presented in your book.
- What strike you most about this story? Any image/words specifically?
- What have you learned or discovered about yourselves (addressing students)/international students or your role as support persons for international students (addressing staff), about resilience?
- What did you think about this experience?
- What was it like to hear everyone's stories? Any surprises?
- Is there anything you would like to add to what has been said?

Appendix H

Member Check Survey Content

Research Title: Storytelling as a Tool to Foster Resilience: An arts-based study with Postsecondary International Students in the Newfoundland Context
Researcher: Sonia Ho, MEd Counselling Psychology candidate (sonia.ho@mun.ca)
Supervisor: Dr. Leah Lewis, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education (leah.lewis@mun.ca)

Research objective: The purpose of this study is to explore storytelling as a way to build resilience, and in turn support the mental health and well-being of postsecondary international students in Newfoundland. The researcher's hypothesis is that storytelling can be a culturally sensitive, resilience building, mental health tool for postsecondary international students at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

This short survey (3 questions in total) is provided as an opportunity for you to further reflect, clarify and provide feedback regarding your experience. It is optional to complete this survey, so feel free to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer.

1) Based on the group meetings attended, below are the major themes that emerged:

- Resilience is a capacity fostered through navigating changes and challenges.
- Resilience is influenced by one's sense of self, self-awareness and self development, as well as social connections and support through these connections. Social connections include those made during formative years and over time. Some examples are family, friends, culture, faith, school, work and the larger community.
- Resilience or resilience fostering is a fluid, non-linear process.
- Personal storytelling and book making sessions in group settings (such as the sessions you participated) help individuals understand and potential foster resilience. This is done by offering individuals opportunities to reflect on their own capacity of resilience and that of others, through creative thinking and social connections.

Do you agree, disagree or have anything to add (if applicable, please elaborate on why you agree or disagree, and/or provide any additional comments)?

2) Do you want to add anything to the following?

- i. The story that you told:
- ii. The story book that you created:
- iii. The digital image that you shared:

3) Do you want to add anything regarding the overall storytelling and group sharing experience? For example, any surprises or disappointments with, what you shared and what you heard from others.

You have come to the end of this survey.

Additional Resources: Please note that some difficult experiences may surface after this storytelling experience, and at times create emotional responses that are both pleasant and unpleasant. If you are experiencing difficulties in processing unpleasant emotions, you may contact the university's [Student Wellness and Counselling Centre](#) (SWCC) as a student, or access the [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) as a staff. You can also access other [community and online mental health resources](#) available.

Research Results: Upon completion of this project, you will find the researcher's thesis and collective story/art book made available for review at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library or online at <https://research.library.mun.ca/>.

If you wish to receive a hard copy of the researcher's collective story/art book, you may email the researcher, Sonia Ho, at sonia.ho@mun.ca. Further, if you have questions about this project in the future, please do not hesitate to contact her directly.

Thank you for completing this survey and for participating in this research.

Appendix I

Member Check Survey Results

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Q1#1_1 | Themes - Do you agree or disagree? - Resilience is a capacity fostered through navigating changes and challenges. |
| Respondent 1 | Agree |
| Respondent 2 | Agree |
| Respondent 3 | Agree |
| Respondent 4 | Agree |
| Q1#1_2 | Themes - Do you agree or disagree? - Resilience is influenced by one's sense of self, self-awareness and self-development, as well as social connections and support through these connections. Social connections include those made during formative years and over time. Some examples are family, friends, culture, faith, school, work and the larger community. |
| Respondent 1 | Agree |
| Respondent 2 | Agree |
| Respondent 3 | Agree |
| Respondent 4 | Agree |
| Q1#1_3 | Themes - Do you agree or disagree? - Resilience or resilience fostering is a fluid, non-linear process. |
| Respondent 1 | Agree |
| Respondent 2 | Agree |
| Respondent 3 | Agree |
| Respondent 4 | Agree |
| Q1#1_4 | Themes - Do you agree or disagree? - Personal storytelling and book making sessions in group settings (such as the sessions you participated) help individuals understand and potential foster resilience. This is done by offering individuals opportunities to reflect on their own capacity of resilience and that of others, through creative thinking and social connections. |
| Respondent 1 | Agree |
| Respondent 2 | Agree |
| Respondent 3 | Agree |
| Respondent 4 | Agree |
| Q1#2_1_1 | Themes - Anything to add? - Resilience is a capacity fostered through navigating changes and challenges...- (If applicable, please elaborate on why you agree or disagree, and/or provide any additional comments.) |
| Respondent 1 | |
| Respondent 2 | I do think the more that people experience, the better their capacity towards challenges is. |
| Respondent 3 | |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Respondent 4 | |
| Q1#2_2_1 | Themes - Anything to add? - Resilience is influenced by one's sense of self, self-awareness and self-de...- (If applicable, please elaborate on why you agree or disagree, and/or provide any additional comments.) |
| Respondent 1 | I'm not sure that individuals always can perceive themselves as resilient. In that case, social connections help to have individuals reflect that back to them. |
| Respondent 2 | This is mostly what I remember talking about in my sessions. My family and friends play an important role in helping me stay resilient. |
| Respondent 3 | |
| Respondent 4 | |
| Q1#2_3_1 | Themes - Anything to add? - Resilience or resilience fostering is a fluid, non-linear process. - (If applicable, please elaborate on why you agree or disagree, and/or provide any additional comments.) |
| Respondent 1 | |
| Respondent 2 | |
| Respondent 3 | |
| Respondent 4 | |
| Q1#2_4_1 | Themes - Anything to add? - Personal storytelling and book making sessions in group settings (such as th... - (If applicable, please elaborate on why you agree or disagree, and/or provide any additional comments.) |
| Respondent 1 | |
| Respondent 2 | The group sessions were important because they made me think more about what resilience means, and how it applies to me. |
| Respondent 3 | |
| Respondent 4 | |
| Q2.1 | Story Told |
| Respondent 1 | |
| Respondent 2 | The story mentioned having resilience meant getting things done, such as volunteering for a cause, despite any insecurities the character had. While that may be one form of resilience, I think there is a lot more to it than that. My struggles back then were all about dealing with loneliness and adjusting to this new country. These days, I find myself facing many struggles both academics-wise and career-wise. Faced with different challenges, my definition for resilience has also changed. Resilience is now all about taking another step forward despite getting disappointing results again and again in assignments, exams, job applications, and so on. It would be so easy to give up, but I still keep trying. I still do think that the support from my friends and family are what remind me to be resilient. So at least that has not changed since the group sessions. |
| Respondent 3 | Resilience is a collaborative process. |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Respondent 4 | I liked the idea of creating a story. It is very helpful to remember those moments that are important in our lives. Even if you are having a bad day, when you bring those memories may can change your mood and be more resilient. |
| Q2.2 | Storybook Created |
| Respondent 1 | |
| Respondent 2 | |
| Respondent 3 | |
| Respondent 4 | Creating the story it was not difficult. I've had many stories in my life and I didn't know which one should be shared. Crafting the book was a little bit challenging. |
| Q2.3 | Digital Image Shared |
| Respondent 1 | |
| Respondent 2 | |
| Respondent 3 | |
| Respondent 4 | Honestly, this part was out of my comfort zone. I am not good in drawing or crafting things, but this activity gave me also the opportunity to be out of the box and ty new things. |
| Q3 | Storytelling and Group Sharing Experience |
| Respondent 1 | |
| Respondent 2 | Having group sessions seemed daunting at first, but my group was supportive enough that I was able to share things that are difficult to say. X's stories relating to resilience were also very inspiring and made this experience memorable. |
| Respondent 3 | The experiance provided the peer support that was lacking during the pandemic. |
| Respondent 4 | I was disappointed that we were not more students in the session. However also gave us the opportunity to spend more time together and know about each other |

Appendix J

Book Creations of Research Participants



Figure J1. Book created by Staff 1 (S1)



Figure J2. Book created by Staff 2 (S2)

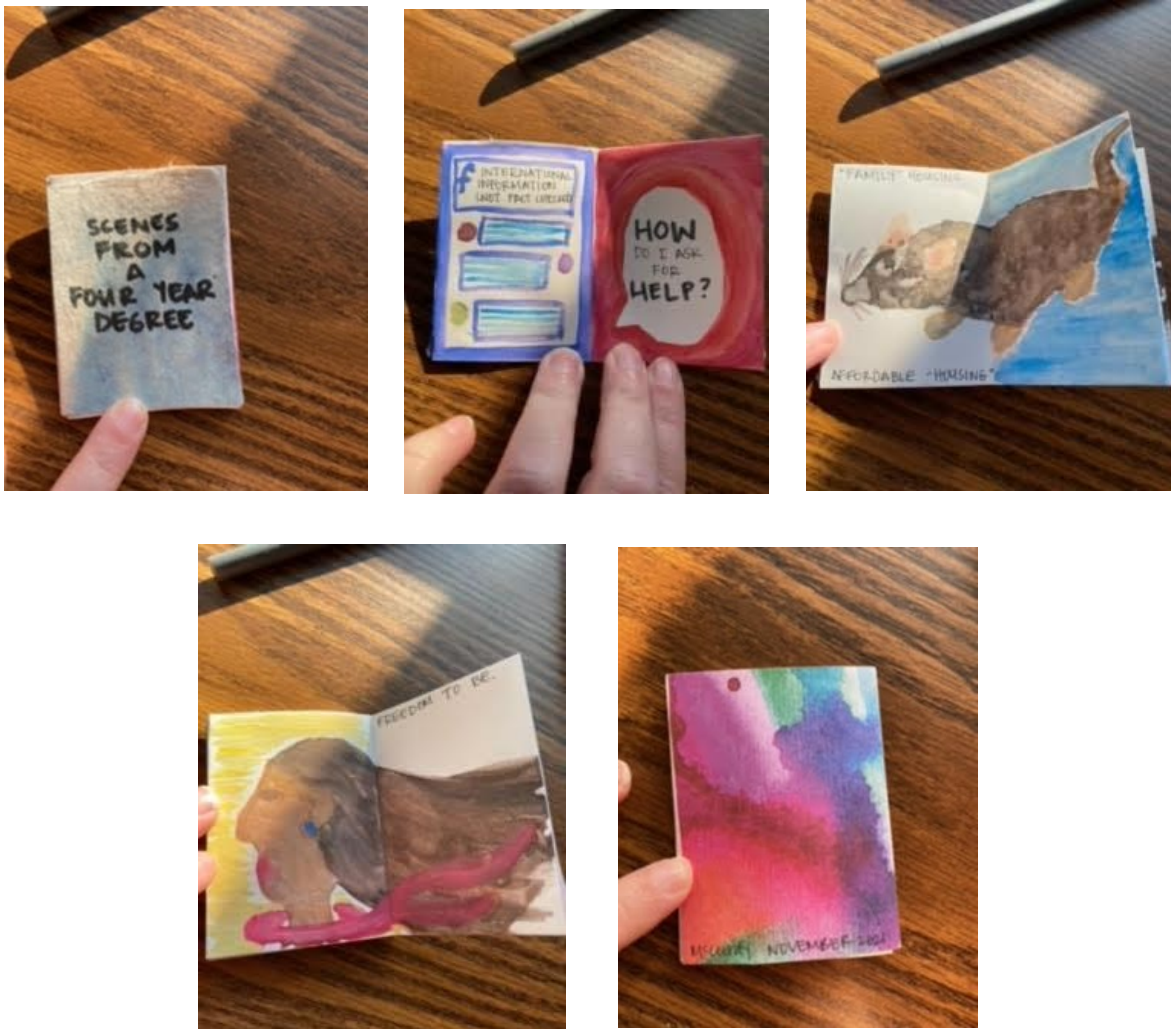


Figure J3. Book created by Staff 4 (S4)

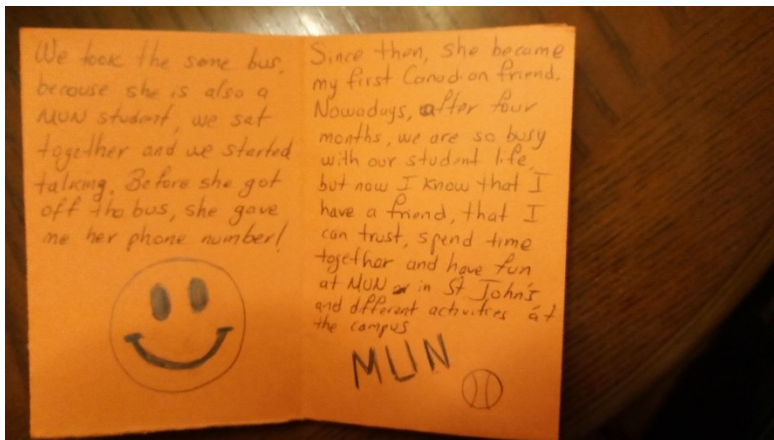
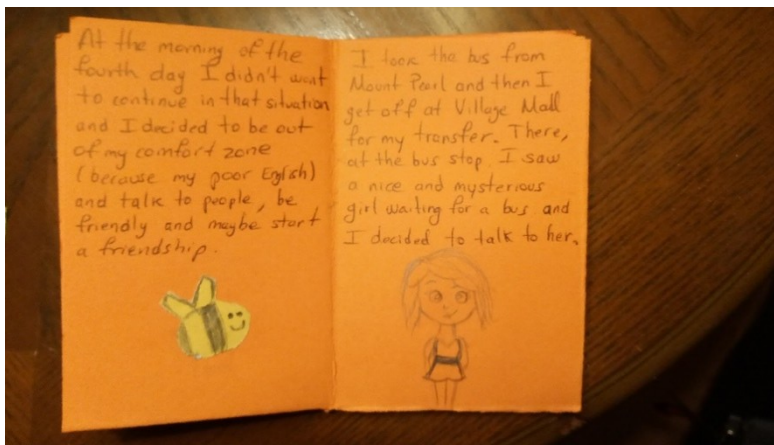
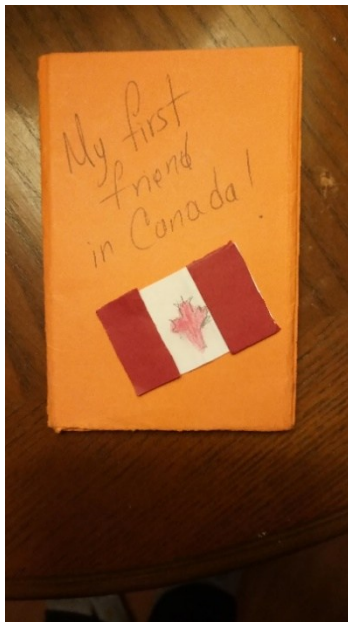


Figure J4. Book created by Student 1 (I1)

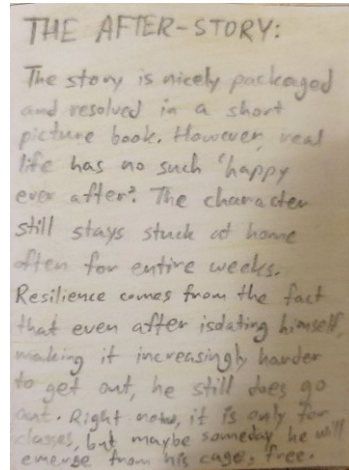
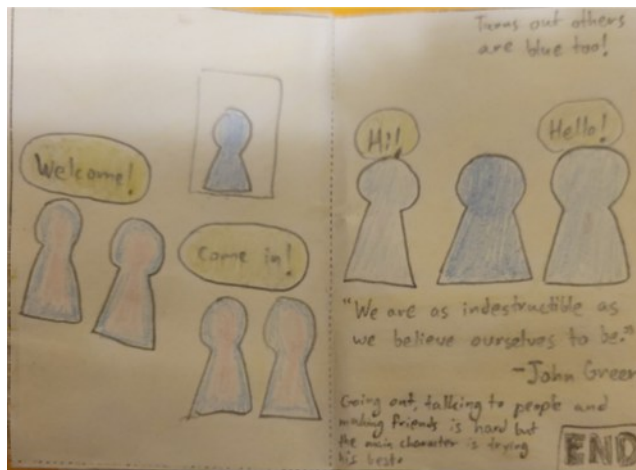
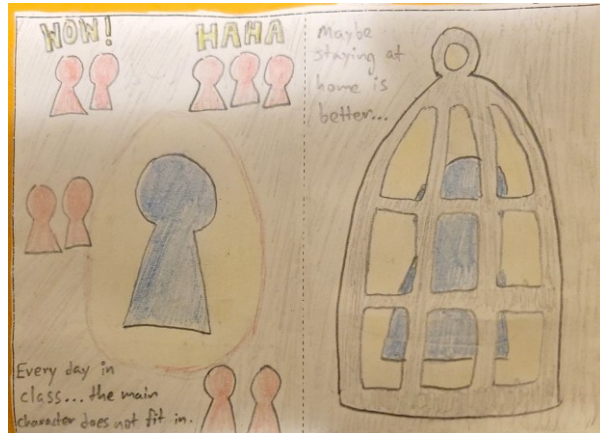
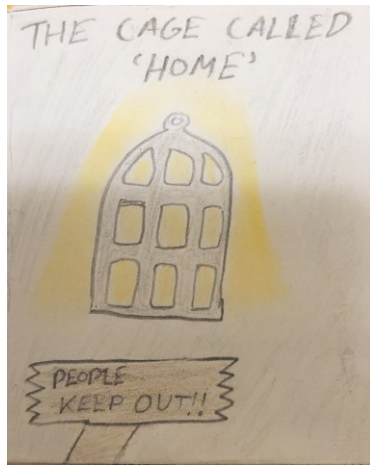


Figure J5. Book created by Student 2 (I2)

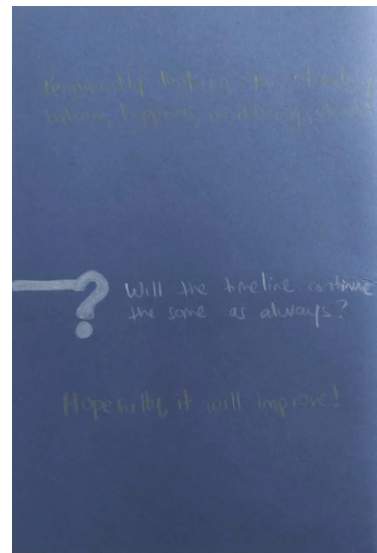
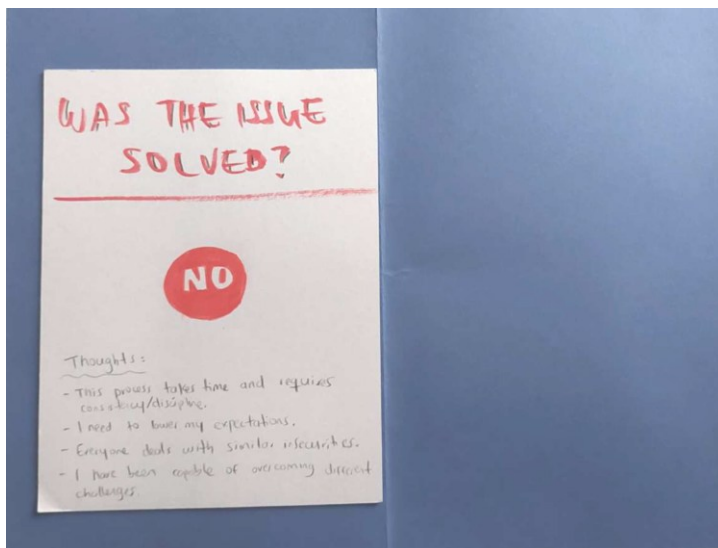
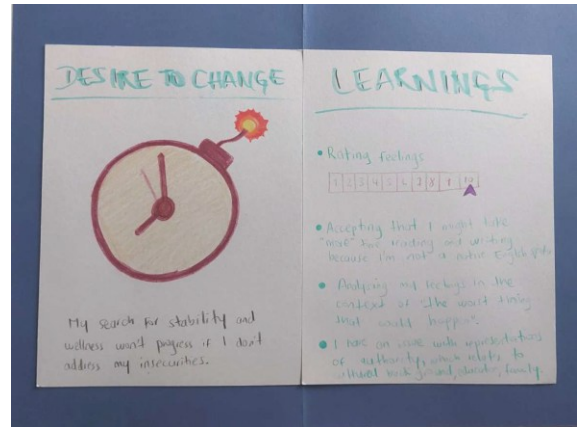
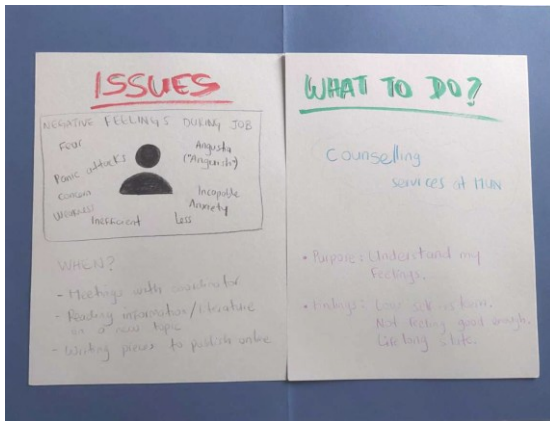
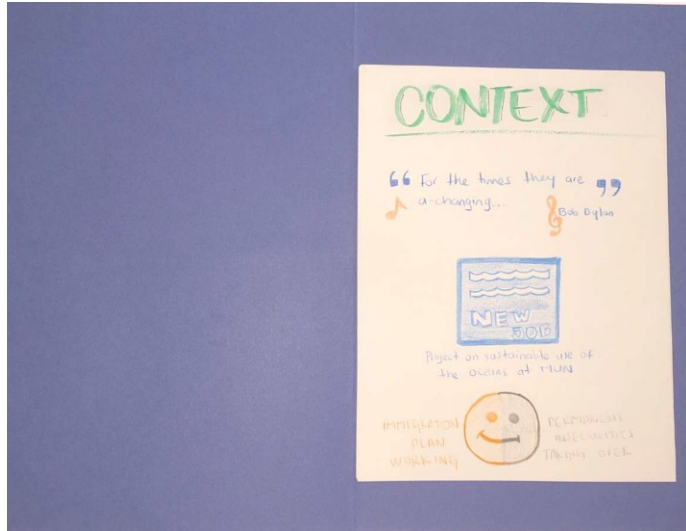
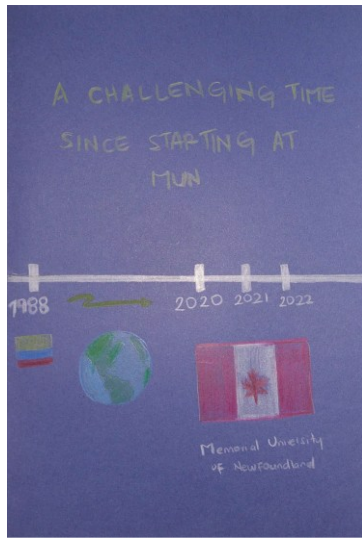


Figure J6. Book created by Student 3 (I3)

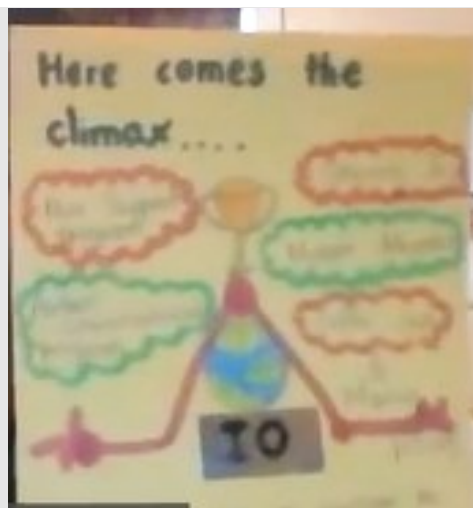
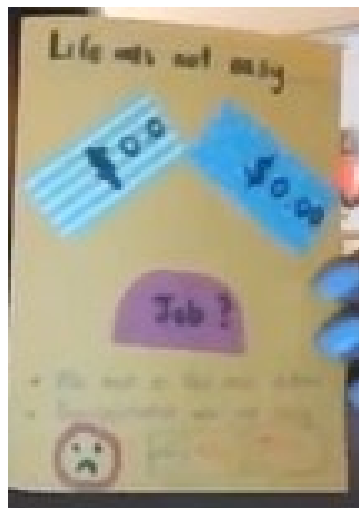
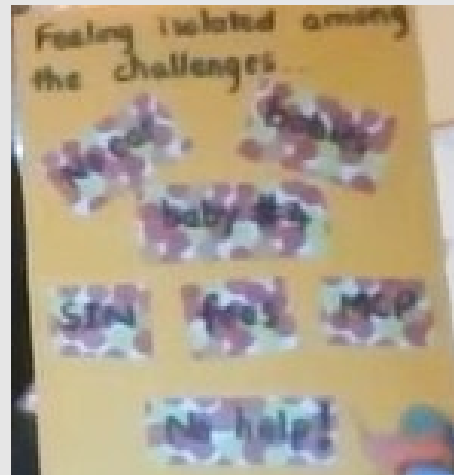
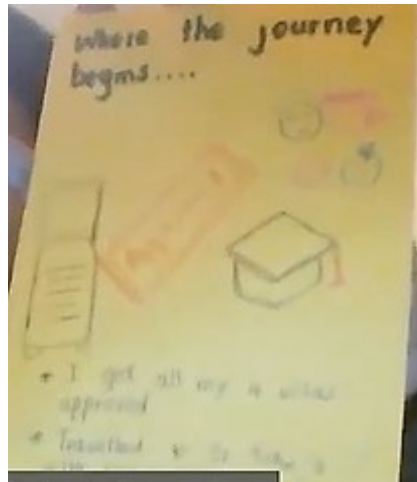


Figure J7. Book created by Student 4 (I4)

Appendix K

Researcher's Journal Entries

Personal Reflections

April 2020

Thoughts about COVID

A friend living far away asked on Facebook how am I feeling. I remember as a child I have been told over and over again not to cry. Extreme emotions are not something I experience often, so with everything that is happening around me, I feel things are not quite right but I have trouble pinpointing what I am feeling. I feel okay...most times...but am I?

Despite picking up all the worksheets and exercises from the resilience, self-care webinars attended, I am still drawn to making art. It always makes things feel better and gets me excited. So, if I am to tell a story about my own resilience...how would I do it?

July 2020

About Art

Art is something that I often lean on. For me, to make art is to learn to slow down and to be intentionally creative and thoughtful. The process of artmaking helps my mind to quiet down and provide space for it to wander freely. As thoughts take form in my mind, the act of writing or explaining them verbally help me further process these ideas. Images and words then have to go hand in hand for reflection to take place.

Late 2020

Further thoughts on COVID and work during COVID

I was told that good enough is enough but I want to do more...helping others make things seem better and make me feel better during these days, these uncertain times.

People said we are running a marathon during COVID. How am I reserving my energy for this marathon?

Nov 18, 2021

On thesis writing, pivoting during COVID

Feeling restless these days. Research has finally begun. It seems like things are moving along and I am excited.

Yet, with COVID and as time progresses, it seems like I am losing my confidence. I wonder every now and then if this (writing a thesis) is something I can do. At times I feel like I am not sure what I am at and where I am going.

How else is everyone holding up and getting on? Am I experiencing compassion fatigue, COVID fatigue, or information overload? Am I just tired because I haven't had much of a break for a really long time? I feel like I can never get caught up with everything that is happening around me.

I don't feel like myself lately health-wise. My sleep schedule is all over the place. I feel tired getting up. Am I getting a flu, a cold, COVID? Is it time change, weather change?

I feel I am letting all sorts of opportunities slipped by. I would like to try out new things but am hindered by all the practicalities and unwillingness to take risks. That's what I lack, action! I fear, and then I hesitate to act.

On the other hand, I feel inspired by all those around me: the students, people from other networks and the community. Despite how much is on their plate, they stand up, then make things work, whether through their hope and faith, sheer motivation, sense of pride or achievement, passion, family expectations and responsibilities...

It's hard to focus on my strengths these days. I am at the stuck stage but how do I get out of this? How do you see the end of the tunnel when you feel stuck? Especially when you feel that there isn't any real barrier and you should be moving along.

Reflecting on Staff Group Meetings

At the staff meeting we were discussing resilience in international students and our limited role in supporting resilience.

Often when students succeed in completing and graduating from their programs, it feels like that's proof of resilience. As support people, we are there to provide info and to be advocates in helping them lessen or remove some of the barriers that may be along the way.

Confidence was brought up as a potential element for resilience...maybe I am looking for ways to do that with students? But how does one do that if it differs from person to person?

Dec. 12. 2021

Concluding Staff Meetings

The last staff meeting was over this past week.

One point stuck with me through these conversations is how often international students are discredited and considered at risk. I have been thinking during this pandemic the uncertainties that we feel and face daily have tipped my balance. Meanwhile, I have noted international students having the courage to embark on journeys with more unknowns and uncertainties than ever before to come study here.

Another point stuck with me is that in creating a supporting environment for students, we sometimes create additional barriers. Perhaps rather than focusing on providing services, we need to consider how to help ourselves and others be better advocates, within the University and in the larger community, so to help collectively reduce barriers.

Having that space among staff to simply talk about the work we do feels important as well. The meetings provide a space for student support staff to reflect collectively and individually of what we do, to think of resilience from the perspective of support people, and to consider how we can handle burnout. While originally I thought of gaining a better understanding of international students through my colleagues, I am learning more about my colleagues as well. Further, I am learning to be more empathetic and to step deeper into the shoes of students.

Transitions play a big role in international students' experiences, which require courage, curiosity and willingness to change.

Self-awareness and confidence were also brought up in staff meetings when discussing resilience. As students transition to study abroad, some may be transitioning from youth to adults, while mature students may be transitioning to a new home and a new life with their families. Thus, human development through life stages will need to be accounted for when considering resilience and international students.

Dec. 29, 2021

Reciprocal resilience as support people

As I reviewed the staff meetings' transcripts, I was reminded how staff talked about resilience in students can impact staff's resilience. While students have often inspired me in my supportive role, whether as an international student coordinator or entry level counsellor, I never really considered that from a resilience perspective. I have also noticed being back on campus and being able to provide support in more tangible ways (as opposed to working remotely), help uplift and sustain me.

Jan. 1, 2022

Reflecting on encounters in my supportive role

As I listened to the staff meetings once again, it reminded me of some students I supported over the years. In particular, there are two main supports that I recalled having helped many students through some their tough moments. The first one is the staff and faculty who stood by the students when they needed encouragement or someone on their corner. The second is the social groups and gatherings organized by the staff, which helped create a safe space and community.

Jan. 2, 2022

Reflecting on my year as exchange student abroad

The staff talked about international students making a brave step as they go abroad. This reminded me of my first time going abroad on my own for exchange. Though interested, there were a lot of hesitancy in me. Cost was one of the concerns, but perhaps more so being far from home felt like a big step to take. I remember I was living in an off campus student residence at the time (with students from different postsecondary institutions) and was speaking to my housemates about this opportunity. Many of them were international students and they were the one who urged me to go and have that experience. They talked about how eye opening and

enriching the experience can be, that being able to o try and do different things that I was not able to do at home and to gain greater confidence.

At the end, I went ahead and applied despite not feeling competent in meeting the requirements and was glad that I was given the opportunity. I remember mostly the good times, but there were certainly struggles, mostly academically. I was not particularly confident of my language ability and my academic work. It was the first time learning from primary sources and I struggled with understanding some theoretical works as well as meeting deadlines. My housemates, few I met prior to going on exchange, became my support network, my cheer leaders, and resources when I needed help to navigate. While I studied and lived on my own prior to exchange, being far away from home and doing all the travelling to different places taught me to be more independent, mature. And the thought that all the money my parents spent to support me on this endeavor, I felt that I cannot fail.

January 4, 2022

Resilience during COVID

COVID has intensified the challenges student face. Despite supporting them through it, it is hard for me to imagine the additional precautions students need to take to travel to Canada, and for some, travelling back and forth between home and Canada during the pandemic. I remember colleagues saying at the staff meetings about how they were humbled by the resilience students shown and this is certainly how I feel these days when supporting students.

Jan.5, 2022

Getting through stuck

Back to work. With all the new changes brought forth by COVID, government policies, happenings around the world, all the issues and barriers that students face - ones that we discussed at the staff meetings and ones that we didn't, I am hearing and seeing them again. COVID certainly brought out more challenges.

I am holding tightly onto the stories of those who managed, who coped, who moved themselves to the other end. They keep me focused and centred when supporting those who need that. A good reminder for me to tackle issues, the urgent ones first, one at a time, as well as listen, be empathetic and be an advocate too.

Jan. 12, 2022

Thoughts on students' meetings and students' resilience

The meeting with student participants today reminded me that one of the reasons for doing this research is to gain a deeper understanding of students' perspectives: how the system works, what they have to go through to sustain momentum and complete their studies.

At work, I am hearing some students are finding their ways in getting through their stuck. Despite the help we can offer is limited, hearing these stories from students are encouraging and give us hope to continue our work.

Students are often more than capable in finding their ways. In some cases, they may not have the necessary tools or experience and simply need to acquire some new skills and the opportunity to apply what they learned. At other times, feeling heard and not judged, as well as receiving some encouragement are helpful too.

There can be so many barriers piled on top of each other, whether it is the system, or the whole endeavor of uprooting and starting a new life. I think being at the corner of students is a given as a support person, and having people in your corner can help fuel resilience.

Jan. 26, 2022

Thoughts about the first set of student meetings and this research

The last session for the first group of students were completed two days ago. Very grateful the students have stuck with me the whole time and trusted the process. Despite having three short sessions, students noted that they felt connected and wished to continue. In addition to feeling connected, the sessions also elicited some deep emotions, in particular, it is noted that COVID has made things much harder for students.

The slow recruitment and the small number of participants may be the limitation of this study. Having said that, those participated were open to share, perhaps due to the small group.

As predicted, the sessions have helped me think deeper and gain a better understanding of what students are going through. In these student sessions, the image of the cage one student depicted in their book was particularly powerful to me.

I also noted the peer to peer talk is more effective than me speaking as the researcher or facilitator. Altruism was shown throughout the sessions. Students were cheering each other on.

In reflecting on this thesis, it feels at times this is a project testing my own resilience and patience, as with COVID. From the beginning, I felt unsure if the conceptualization of my idea and the writing of my proposal would work. Confirmation from my supervisor and approval from the ethics committee provided assurance. When there were few up take with recruitment, once again I felt deflated. COVID gave me a head start, but soon after work became busy and I lost track again. Every step seemed to take time and I easily got lost in the slow process. People around me kept nudging me on however, reminded me why I said I wanted to do this, what my goals are...I keep pivoting to think of new ways to study when my usual study habits no longer seem to work.

Feb. 11, 2022

Reflecting on my own transitions in new settings

I continued to review my data and worked through my thematic analysis. One thing I would like to reflect on is my own lived experiences as a newcomer: coming to Canada, then studying abroad during my undergrad, working abroad after graduation and more recently moving and settling in Newfoundland mid-career, in my thirties. While in some instances stronger

connections were made than others, finding a faith community has been a common thread in all these transitions, in addition to various social connections made.

I was a teenager when I first immigrated to Canada with my family. We followed other family and friends and chose Canada, which I noticed other newcomers do too. I remember despite having learned English since kindergarten, using English every day was exhausting and continued to be a challenge throughout my high school years. Studying in a different country with different culture came with challenges as well and required lots of adjustments. For one, it was not easy to make English speaking friends. I also remember feeling stuck and bored at times as I could not venture too far on my own in my neighbourhood. There was hardly anything to do in the suburb, unlike the busy city of Hong Kong where I came from. I adapted though with the support of family, guidance from family friends and the new connections I made at school.

Fast forward to my third year as an undergraduate student, I went on exchange and studied abroad in England. As with my journey to Canada, I have established some social support prior to my departure. The exchange office at my home university facilitated the exchange process while the international office at the host university provided additional support. I went with a good friend and other students from the same university I met at the orientation. It was not an integrated experience in the sense that I did not make any local friends and my network was limited to students from my home university and other international students who shared similar experiences.

After graduation, I applied to work in Japan out of my own interest. Though I was not hired the first time I applied for the teaching abroad programme, I tried again after further studies. When accepted, I was determined not to repeat the mistakes from my last abroad experience. I made special efforts in meeting and interacting with locals. My curiosity also drove me to explore more local places. These helped me battle homesickness which I struggled most with. Similar to my study abroad experience, risks were mostly managed through the programme organizer. We were well supported by our supervisor and the staff that worked at the local school board and schools. There were also many opportunities to meet different people. In addition to being invited to events and activities locally, we met regularly with other English teachers with the same programme through conferences and language training sessions. I feel that moving home required more adjustments than working in Japan as I had to consider my career and re-establish my roots.

Then, when I moved to Newfoundland more than 10 years ago, to my surprise I struggled quite a bit. Mostly due to the lack of diversity, but also the quietness of the place, the lack of seasons and long winters. I remember walking down the main road for half an hour every few days to the closest chain coffee shop just to get some air, while evading stares from passersby and feeling like an alien on earth. I remember the first winter being never ending, the summer was dreary and rainy, and I was wearing sweaters every day. I remember visiting downtown and walking along the three main streets to check out the handful of shops weekly simply to change up scenery and be entertained. I remember wondering why the adjustments were so hard when moving continents a few years back seemed easier, not to mention I was living in a country that I had lived in for the majority of my life. I wondered if my feelings of loneliness, isolation and

being out of place would ever pass. Despite having the advantages of an already established social network through my partner, securing a job and purchasing a car soon after arrival in my new home, it took me awhile to feel and call this place home. I had to leave my family of origin and other long-established networks. Building my own relationships and immersing myself in the new culture took quite some time. I sought and found new connections through exploring my interests in artmaking. Sharing my lessons learned, such as interesting places to visit and things to do, with other newcomers through my work helps ground me. At times I still feel somewhat an outsider, but perhaps that is just the feeling and experience of being an immigrant, a newcomer, a come from away.

March 11, 2022

Home and Belonging

There were a lot of talks about home in the students' sessions, not simply in the sense of finding housing but also planting roots and sense of belonging. That need to settle in and feel established in a new environment is important for newcomers isn't it? It helps one to feel grounded, and isn't it part of basic need or at least second to that? I often see students bring along their family or bring them over once established. One can hope and anticipate to settle well, but there is no telling. For international students, settlement is often transitional and temporary due to their immigration statuses. Establishing roots and sense of belonging mean forming social networks, making connections and creating a community. This is difficult during the pandemic as opportunities to social are few or unavailable.

I have heard students talked about classmates as their support system, family, and community. In my own experience, having a home, a job and a car helped me settled in Newfoundland quicker but people certainly played a huge role. We initially stayed with family and I hung out mostly with my partner's friends before I found my own community. Indeed, connections matter when one is making a home.

Thus, as support people we can play a role in creating and facilitating space where connections can be made, even virtually.

April 29, 2022

Extrovert, introvert, open-mindedness

My supervisor and I talked about introvert versus extrovert. Does that make a difference on how people interact, socialize and create networks? The difference seems to be, those who are more outgoing may try to create opportunities to network, while those who are not may simply wait for these opportunities to come. I am certainly a less outgoing person, yet I do seize the opportunity to meet others when I come across them from time to time. Perhaps being open minded and taking action is all that matter, no matter one is an extrovert or not?

May 5, 2022

Reflecting on student sessions: Themes, limitations, diversity and inclusion

My thematic analysis continues. There are so many variables and factors: students' upbringing, social networks and systems back home, how are students supported back home versus how those supports are being offered here. Did these themes show up in the group sessions students attended?

I attended the national roundtable on Postsecondary Mental health today and it is mental health week this week. I felt that everyone is tired. It was noted in the session that over the past couple of year students are tired, but staff are too. I was reminded that students' mental health go hand in hand with that of staff and faculty. During the staff sessions, the staff expressed they enjoyed having the time and space to share and reflect. Is this something we can offer and recreate for staff regularly? How to foster reciprocal resilience in the University may be something important to look into.

Considering the data I collected, I wonder if ensuring having diverse groups of international students represented is important. Again it may be a limitation that not a large group of individuals participated in this study, partly due to the study design and partly COVID, While it was not in my original plan, I think it will be important to talk about COVID in my analysis. The roundtable today noted that there is no longer an old normal, rather, we have moved on from the pandemic, and we need to look ahead and try out new things.

I think it will be important to incorporate an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion lens in this study. For example, recommending inclusive practices in the work that we do. What does inclusivity mean anyway? How can individuals feel included and become part of their community? I think international students often note their differences, but how often do they feel the diversity they brought is valued in the classroom, in the community. And by identifying them as international students is it doing them a disservice? And does this have an impact on their mental health?

When reviewing the transcripts of the student sessions, it is interesting to note the different dynamics within the two groups, which are likely impacted by age, gender, life stage, personality etc. The second group noted that they feel connected in St. John's and find people here friendly and helpful, which may reflect the length of time they have been here, positive settlement or having had different experiences and encounters than the first group. This may imply potential for a longitudinal study in the future.

I think the student participants generally felt that the meetings were empowering, that they all have something to contribute. I also noticed they used the sessions as an information hub and to gather information from each other.

Sep. 4, 2022

Language as a barrier for students

As I am assembling the data, I am realizing language has a greater impact than I thought. I have always thought that it was my own issue that I always wonder whether I have achieved the level of language similar to native speakers. I noticed students in the sessions have similar thoughts,

despite them being able to communicate and articulate their thoughts and ideas quite clearly. When it comes to performing academically or in the working world, they may not feel confident about their language abilities, despite the education they have received and the places they have lived, studied and worked.

Being confident in a second language takes time. Even when one can function well day to day, having to use that in academic and career settings pose greater challenges. It may create doubts and impact one's confidence when there are miscommunication, when messages are misinterpreted or misunderstood.

Sep. 11, 2022

Space to share and tell stories

As I review the transcripts again I wonder if there are room to create more opportunities for students to gain self-awareness and confidence. The storytelling space seems to be a unique place and perhaps particularly useful during the pandemic when students feel disconnected.

I also wonder about mature students, if there are times they feel out of place being in the classrooms, when their knowledge, skills and experiences may not be recognized. Can spaces like this become a different space for them? That they feel they can participate and contribute more?

Sep. 24, 2022

Helper can be unhelpful and students' view on mental health

I continue to review my transcripts and consolidate my themes. Despite COVID adding barriers for people to make connections, I noticed students still managed to do so, whether in virtual settings, through faith groups etc. Isn't this a demonstration of how resilient they can be, that individuals can be creative and pivot when needed?

The conversations with colleagues and students during my research is helping me reconsider my role. While I am eager to help, sometimes the help provided may not be helpful. I wonder despite having the best intention, if being helpful as support people can have the opposite effect and become a barrier for others to further resilience? Can doing things for others to help lessen barriers be in fact taking away opportunities to learn to figure things out? Where do we draw the line from helping? How can we help people build capacity instead of blindly doing things for them?

I am a bit surprised to see students being open to seek mental health support. It seems to me that they have heard good experiences from others they know. They also recognized and noted the importance of mental health. Is this only the case as students have signed up for this particular study and was informed of my role as a counselling psychology student?

Oct. 3, 2022

Community outside school

As I go over the book making sessions and reread parts when students discussed about food, suddenly I remember how community can be built in informal spaces, at restaurants or places one frequents. I remember the coffee shop I frequented when living in Japan. Overtime, I established a routine to visit it after work every Friday, to have a treat and to chat with the owners as well as other locals. Indeed, it became my go to place and my community. Community built outside of school then, like in workplaces, worship places, volunteer places etc., can be as important during transitions, in immersing in a new environment and in forming new roots.

Oct. 10, 2022

Empathy, Maturity and Perspective Taking

I am noticing from the students' sessions a lot of empathy students were showing toward each other. Is this what these types of sessions bring out from individuals? Is this partly why students look forward to and feel motivated to attend the sessions? For most, the art and crafting aspects of the sessions is what draws them too.

I think more thoughts need to be put into mature students. Students who brought family with them and those who came with much lived experiences, how do these aspects of them alter their perspectives? And how do we help support these individuals?

Oct 22, 2022

Stepping back

As I try to come up with the major themes in my research, I am starting to see things a bit differently. It is often too easy to focus on the issues in front of our eyes, and neglect to step back occasionally and see the big picture. Similar to when I paint, rather than fixating on the detail, I need to step back and see how it fits in the overall picture. As a student support person and a researcher on student support, I am noticing the struggles of students, but I also need to see how these struggles fit into the grand scheme of things. Are the small pieces negligible, do they stand out and add to the overall picture?

May 24, 2023

Few more thoughts on COVID-19 and research

It was a whirlwind of a month. I came back from visiting home with my family and now I have changed jobs. While my thought of completing a course instead of my thesis keeps resurfacing every now and then, I think the job change is my final push to the finishing line.

I feel like I am suddenly waking up from a dream. How has it been three years I am working on this? I vaguely remember when lockdowns began we were speculating when things would reopen again, when would we be able to travel again. How are these three years a blur to me? How can it feel so long and yet so short? Why does it feel like one long year blended together? I can hardly tell apart what happened in which year. Even when more travelling started happening last year, I was conservative about it. My world continued to stay close and small, as with the raised bed garden I created in my yard. Prepping and tidying the garden in between the seasons

kept me busy, while watching my garden grew and blossomed every day brought joy when I was not inclined to travel. Then I slowly stepped up to do more: I joined more group activities and tried out new things again.

When there was an opportunity to travel back to Hong Kong with my family in February, I took it despite some hesitation. It was the first international trip I took since the pandemic. I was shocked how easy I got used to being on public transit again (though still masked). I was feeling and living the big emotions when I met loved ones I haven't seen for a long time. Going around without a mask seemed the natural next step. And I started looking for new career opportunities again but with a bit more rigour. My world that shrank during the pandemic seems to be expanding again, gradually, one step at a time.

The time that has slowed down for me to start this thesis and research, seems to be running out quickly. It is urging me to open up, to try new things again. The pandemic, the research, have helped me to learn about myself, about my emotions: how uncomfortable I was with my sense of sadness and hopelessness at times and how I look for ways to bring myself up – whether it is watching something more uplifting, staying away from sad news when I really struggle, taking walks, being outside and staying active almost daily and especially on the weekends. I learn what it is that I need. I am learning to better cope with uncertainties, to wrap my mind around not knowing what will come next and not knowing when the next step is coming. I am learning to be more mindful of what I am thinking and what I am feeling. My faith, my art, my talks with family and friends from far away, my circle of 10 are there to help me through. Those were lessons learned. It's time to move onto the next adventure, to continue to jump to the next loop.