

The Scar Runs through the Pupil
An Autoethnographic Inquiry

By
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Abstract

This study delves into the phenomenon of student learning within the context of adversity. Trauma can interfere with the healthy and normal development of academic and cognitive skills needed for students to succeed in school. My own school experience was characterized by ongoing adversity as a result of being in foster care due to a traumatic eye injury. Because there is much to learn from an in-depth exploration of these learning experiences during a lengthy period in foster care due to a traumatic eye injury, I took an autoethnographic approach to the study. In recognition of the diverse ways in which I make sense of the world, and to convey the many layers of hidden hardship that competed daily with my learning, I used the artistic practice of altered books. Using a discarded textbook donated from the Halifax Regional School Board, I embarked on an exploration of altering textbooks with evocative images that represent the intersection between my foster care experiences, a traumatic eye injury, and learning. I explored and represented my experiences visually through development of an art portfolio including other art forms such as book binding, mixed media, drawing, and painting. I situated this altered textbook in the context of a Human Library and Nocturne: Art at Night Festival. This individual exploration has significant relevance for the education system. It demonstrates how lived experience can be not only infused but welcomed in the classroom.

Keywords: foster children, childhood trauma, learning, trauma-informed approaches, altered books, arts-informed research, human library, autoethnography.

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A special thank you to my Nova Scotia Collage of Art and Design University instructors, Joe Landry, book binding; Patrick Rapati, drawing; Vessica Vaughan, mixed media; Charlotte Marble, acrylic painting; Rhonda Millier, book repair; Maria Doering, monotype print and Kate Ward, screen printing for guidance into my emerging creativity and photographers Julie Diebolt-Price, Michelle Doucette, Claire Fraser and multimedia specialist Brett Kibbler.

I would like to thank the Library staff, the Writing Centre staff and Print Shop for assisting with the preparation of materials for the Nocturne: Art at Night and the United Way of Halifax's partnership that made the event so successful. As well, I would like to thank the Halifax Central Library for hosting my Altered Lives, Altered Textbooks Exhibit during Nocturne: Art at Night. Thank you to the Atlantic School of Theology for the space to conduct my artistic practice. A special thank you to my friend Clare Rosenfield for your support throughout this project.

I would like to honour my wounded left eye for its strength and resilience, both of which have sustained me since infancy.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated in loving memory of my biological brother Paul, who grew up in the care of the Nova Scotia child welfare system and committed suicide at the age of 22.

This is also dedicated to all the foster children who navigate difficult lived experiences and to the many teachers, foster parents, and social workers who strive everyday to make a difference in these young people's lives.

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30
 TELEPHONE
 NUMBER

The Children's Aid Society

CARE AND CUSTODY		
08	06	71

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:



Amanda came into Care of this Agency in April 1971 at 19 months of age, and was made a Ward on June 8, 1971, following an eye injury alleged to have been received at her mother's hand

Birth record is not complete.

5 pounds 13¼ ounces.

Casework plan
 Worker feels very strongly that Amanda should remain in this excellent foster home. Return to her family at this age or stage could be disastrous. Adoption cannot be considered at the moment because of her level of functioning, plus defective vision left eye and possibility of serious surgery.

Attached you will find the story

Yours sincerely, Social Worker

Figure 1. "To Whom It May Concern" excerpts from my Care and Custody File (1971-1990). Image Credit: Amanda May

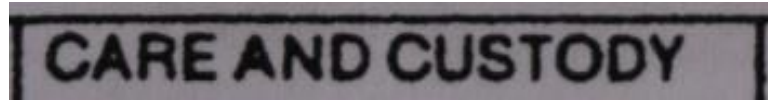


Figure 2. "Care and Custody" refers to children who are removed from their parents' care and have been placed in the care and custody of the government. (Care and Custody File, 1971-1990).

CHAPTER ONE:

CARE AND CUSTODY

Amanda has sight in her injured eye, although the acuity is poor. The cornea, lens and iris all appear to be so distorted that this eye must interfere with the functioning of her normal eye. The foster mother says she would pull her hood over the injured eye, and it makes her look funny. She did not seem to understand that the large pupil would let in too much light, in bright environments, which would interfere with the normal eye's functioning. Although I am certainly not an expert in this field, I would think this needs very careful review.

She reads orally very insecurely, slowly but comprehends well. She needs very pleasant, easy, reassuring reading experiences, rather than being rushed into increasingly difficult material. Her knowledge of simple reading words that show up in most sentences is fairly good, but there are still many quite easy words she does not know.

In summary, her intelligence is adequate, but sometimes hampered by anxiety or lack of stimulation; her reading is mixed, and needs a lot of practice in high interest, low difficulty materials. Schools often arrange the opposite.

(School Psychologist Recommendations, Care and Custody File, 1978).

It is well established that both academic and cognitive skills are necessary for successful learning experiences (Rossen & Hull, 2013; Alistic, 2012; Bell, Limberg, Robinson, 2013). These skills are essential for learning to read, write, listen effectively, speak clearly, think abstractly, process information well, and solve problems. It is also well established that trauma can significantly interfere with the development of these critical skills.

As a person with a history of traumatic childhood experiences, I never questioned or reflected upon my educational experience until recently as an adult. I never before asked, “Who am I as a learner?” Prior to entering kindergarten, I was removed from the care of my mother, suffered a traumatic eye injury, spent six weeks in the hospital, and was uprooted into the foster care system. These were all life-altering events. In this study, I delve into the reality of student learning within the context of adversity. This is a reality I know well: my own school experience was characterized by ongoing adversity, particularly within the foster care system.

I have taken an autoethnographic approach to present the results from an in-depth exploration of my learning experiences over a 19-year period. In recognition of the diverse ways in which I make sense of the world and to reveal the many layers of unseen hardship that constrained and shaped my learning, I have used the art form of an altered book and my involvement in art classes/and workshops to both explore and represent my experiences. Through autoethnography I explored my childhood adversity so it may benefit teachers’ understanding about the effects of traumatic events as well as help advocate for students in foster care who experience these complex life journeys. As part of my personal and pedagogical exploration, I unearthed and delved into various narratives from my Care and Custody File. They provide compelling chronicles that illuminate the intersection between adversity and learning. I reviewed school reports, medical files, court testimony, teachers’ commentary, school

psychologists' recommendations, foster parents' accounts, social workers' statements, and doctors' charts to underscore the complexity of being a foster child with an alleged abuse injury in a child welfare system and a struggling learner in a traditional school system. These documents shine a spotlight on my struggle across the academic continuum: in elementary, junior high, and high school.

To deepen my understanding of students as learners, I wrote a perspective paper in my Assessment for Learners graduate class in 2014. The focus was on my own learning experience, and I concluded that my academic transcripts were a reflection of the adversity I faced and not my academic potential. As a university undergraduate, I still struggled academically; I did not understand who I was as a learner in the midst of recovery from early childhood trauma, and I had yet to appreciate the implications of that realization. As a graduate student, while exploring myself as a learner, I was drawn to Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory (1983) and the diverse ways teachers can present materials to students.

My graduate courses and research concentrated on the essential issue of students as learners. In many classes we discussed a learning styles inventory that underscored no two students enter a classroom with identical abilities, experiences, and needs. Learning style, language proficiency, background knowledge, readiness to learn, and other factors can vary widely within a single class group. Although student diversity defines today's public school classroom, students are expected to master the same concepts, principles, and skills regardless of individual differences. Balancing these realities and helping all students succeed in their learning as well as developing social skills, expressing empathy, and experiencing personal growth is an enormous challenge that requires innovative thinking if, collectively, educators are to succeed.

Student diversity includes those individuals entering the classroom with a history of trauma. Though the link between trauma and learning is well known, the educational system has largely ignored this issue. Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor (2013) suggest:

Schools are not in the mental health business; their mission is to educate. Accomplishing their mission requires that schools play comprehensive and effective roles in dealing with the broad range of psychosocial and mental health concerns that affect learning. In other words, addressing interfering factors (internal and external) is essential for enabling learning (p.265).

The need to deal with psychosocial and mental health issues, therefore, makes the discussion of trauma very relevant to schools. As a researcher, I explored my own experience with trauma. In my case, I altered an eighth grade math textbook with evocative images and text that visually represented the intersection between my foster care experiences, traumatic eye injury, and classroom learning. Altered books can be used in the curriculum with students to explore themes and social issues and serve as a unique way to represent topics that are important to them.

This study explores the question: Who am I as a learner? The thesis comprises two distinctive elements:

1. Arts-informed methodology. I have taken courses at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD University). These include courses in book binding, mixed media, drawing, and painting. In addition, I completed workshops on book repair, screen printing, and monoprints at the Centre for Craft Nova Scotia. I attended altered books workshops in California and Wisconsin as a way to explore altered book techniques and the complexities of my experiences.

I also took field trips to Value Village, Halifax Salvation Army Thrift Stores and art supply stores for found objects and art materials.

2. A visual narrative: The visual narrative consists of my story as it has emerged from my art workshops and classes. This includes images of backpacks, pockets, and threads as metaphors for a thematic analysis of trauma, adversity, learning, foster care, and resilience, and the significance of these images.

Foster care is a topic of significant relevance from a public policy and an educational system perspective. It is also deeply personal for those who are in and who have experienced the system. With this reality as a foundation, I situate my altered textbook in the context of the Human Library – an international movement created to promote a dialogue among readers while challenging long held assumptions and breaking down well-entrenched barriers.

This study is organized into five chapters. “Chapter One: Care and Custody” sets out the background to this study. “Chapter Two: Re: The Above - Named Child” is an examination of my own emotional learning journey as depicted in the altered pages of a discarded grade 8 math textbook. “Chapter Three: Healing of Wound” outlines the theoretical framework of arts - informed methodology, altered books, Human Library and an autoethnographic inquiry. The second part of this chapter draws on an arts - informed methodology that

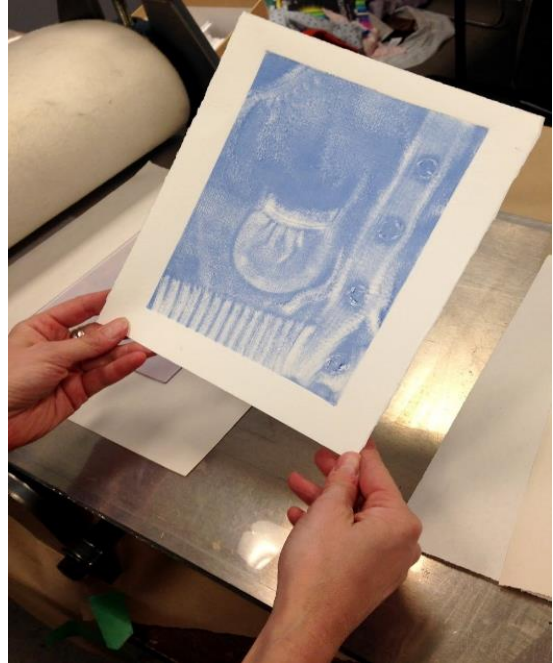


Figure 3. Monoprint of a baby sweater pocket. (2017). Image Credit: Maria Doering.

includes the process of art-making through art workshops and courses and provides a thematic analysis of relevant themes including the whole child, traumatic injury, resilience, and home and family that emerged from the reflexive art-making process. “Chapter Four: Prepared the Wound and Pupil” explores the growing body of literature on trauma in the classroom, specifically foster children, and the debate that centers on giving voice to lived experience of students in the classroom. “Chapter Five: The Scar Runs through the Pupil” explores the implications of the research for the field of education and other professions that work to incorporate and understand trauma-informed care and behaviour. In addition, it examines three ways I have used to share my altered book and other uses of altered books in various curricula; my participation in a Human Library at Illinois State University; and through a public exhibit called Altered Lives, Altered Textbooks at Nocturne: Art at Night.



Figure 4. The Above - Named child. (1978-1989) Collage of childhood portraits age 8, age 14, and age 18. Photographs, Care and Custody File. Image Credit: Amanda May

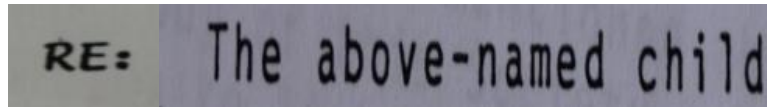


Figure 5. "The above-named child" is the term used to refer to me in my Care and Custody File (1971-1990). Care and Custody File.

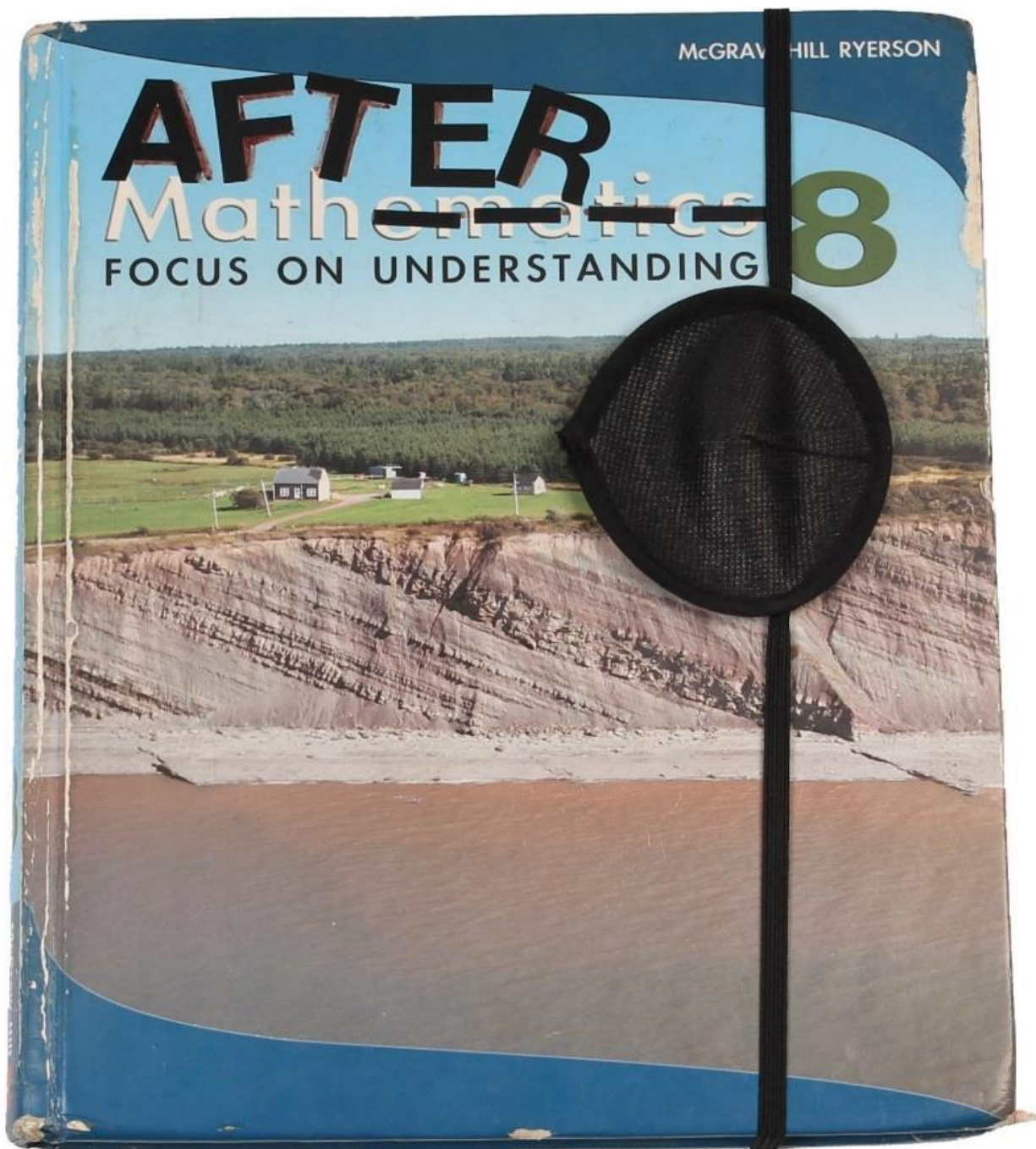
CHAPTER TWO:

RE: THE ABOVE - NAMED CHILD

This chapter describes my early childhood experiences of trauma through an altered textbook framework, and explores the impact of that trauma as I navigated my way through elementary, junior high and high school, as well as post-secondary and now as a graduate student. This autoethnography is the intersection between my journey as a foster child and the background of the altered math textbook. Also, excerpts of third-party narrative from my Care and Custody File evoke a written reflection of foster care through the use of collages. For protecting privacy, the names of individuals and locations have been changed or omitted.



Figure 6. Amanda looking at her wounded eye in the mirror. (2016). Image Credit: Julie Diebolt-Price.



*Figure 7. Altered textbook cover to read *Aftermath: Focus on Understanding*. (2016) Textbook, eye patch. Image Credit: Amanda May.*

The Child Learner – A Learner Amidst Adversity

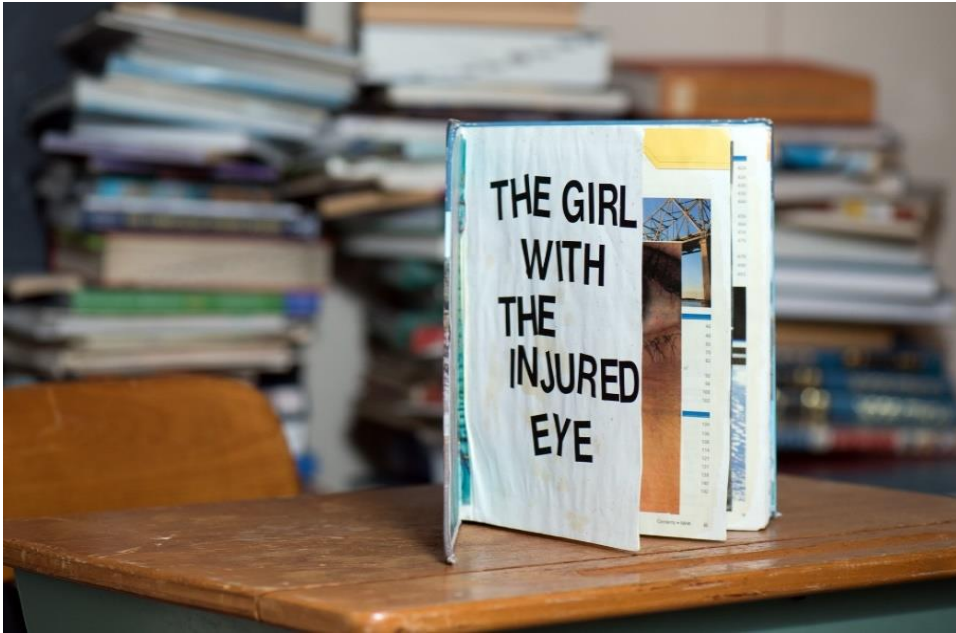


Figure 8. “The Girl with the Injured Eye,” an altered page in the textbook. (2018). Textbook, images, vinyl letters. Image Credit: Michelle Doucette.

My life story is embedded with images in the context of a grade 8 math textbook. It represents the intersection between the adversities faced during my time in foster care and my struggle as a learner. This textbook is the backdrop for my autoethnographic study that delves into the phenomenon of learning in the context of adversity. The cover title was altered from *Mathematics 8: Focus on Understanding* to *Aftermath: Focus on Understanding* (See Figure 7). As you open the book cover, there is a photograph of a fabric tapestry on the inside cover (See Figure 10). Each individual thread represents the messy, chaotic and often hidden yet indelibly significant parts of one’s life. The opening page, Figure 8, introduces “the girl with the injured eye” and represents the entry point of my learner’s narrative.



Figure 9. Altered textbook page of my baby portrait. (2018). Textbook, photographs. Image Credit: Michelle Doucette.

The following page in *Figure 9*, the Table of Contents, was altered with a black and white photograph of myself at 10 months of age while I was living with my biological family.

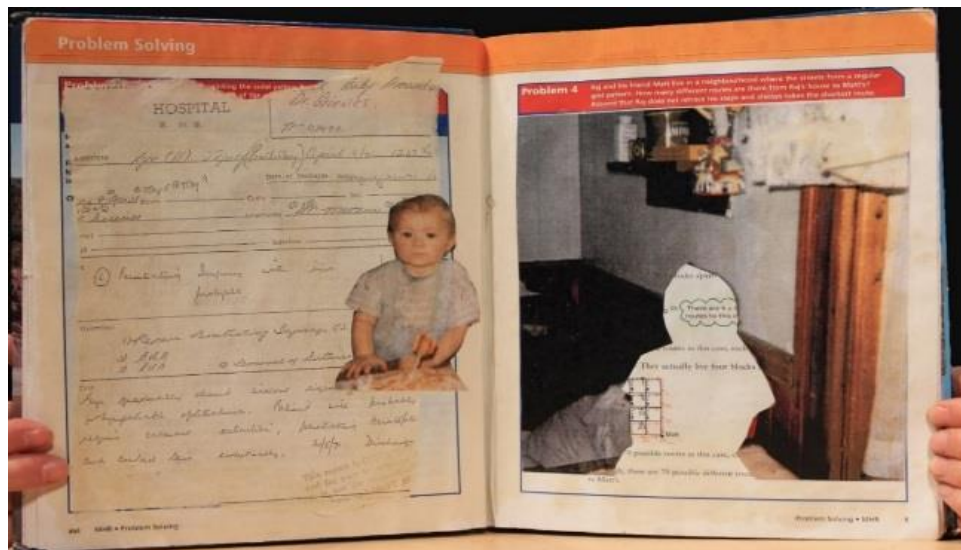


Figure 10. An altered textbook page that illustrates my removal from my biological family and placed in the hospital. (2018). Textbook, childhood photograph, hospital report. Image Credit: Brett Kibbler

As you turn to the next page of the textbook, in *Figure 10*, you see my infant self — cut out of the photograph. On Good Friday, April 9, 1971, I was admitted to hospital with a “penetrating” eye injury (Hospital Report, 1971). While I was hospitalized, court documents, testimony and letters to government officials showed how lawyers, doctors, and social workers were contemplating the fate of my older brother Stephan and myself. My mother said a piece of pottery fell in my eye accidentally, however, the history of traumatic injury to my eldest sibling, Paul, who had already been placed in foster care, led to the belief that Stephan and I were not safe in my mother’s care. When I was 7 months old, she poured boiling hot water over my older brother — Paul was placed in foster care, and Stephan and I were sent to live with my mother’s sister for five months while my mother was being treated in the Nova Scotia Hospital, a mental health facility in Halifax. Nine months after she returned home from the hospital my eye injury occurred. A social worker sought advice regarding our case:

It is ironic that in today’s paper, a piece appears about the study of battered children and, of course, we welcome this. That article mentions the battered child and the emotionally deprived child as almost two different syndromes. But our experience is that sometimes these are mixed and when they are mixed, it is extremely difficult. I suspect this case is the latter, that is, a mixture; but with the emotional aspects not nearly as obvious, not nearly as clear-cut, even though the physical angle is a little unclear at the moment. To make a long story short: What would you do if you were faced with the decision I have to make? That is, apprehend and go to court or let the child go home and try to keep a close eye trying to prevent another such episode.

(A letter from the Children’s Aid Society to the Minister of Child Protection, 1971)

The eye surgeon testified in court:

The child had a massive corneal wound on her left eye. There was a cut a half-inch going through the eye through the posterior aqueous chamber and central pupil and the iris was coming out and sitting outside. The lens was also involved and she had a partial cataract and the outer chamber was filled with blood. There will be a cataract and the eye will never be very pretty to look at. The scar runs through the pupil and the cataract will have to be removed and an eventual corneal transplant. There was no material of the pottery found in the eye and the eyelid was not involved. There had to have been force to cause that kind of injury. I never saw anything quite like it in 25 years.

(Eye Surgeon, Court Testimony, Care and Custody File, 1971)

My brother Stephan remained in the custody of my parents/grandparents, I was apprehended by Children's Aid Society and I was made a ward of the court June 8, 1971. Although discharged from the hospital under "post-operative cataract care," I spent much of my early years in room 526 at the hospital as numerous admissions reports attest. I was often admitted and readmitted for care of my left eye. The social worker's report stated:

On admission to the first foster home her behaviour appeared typical of a child who had been in admitted to hospital for six weeks. She was whining and slightly fearful. She was demanding of attention. No contact with natural parents.

(Social Worker Summary Report, Care and Custody File, 1971)

What does it mean for a 19 - month old child to be removed from the care of her mother and to be hospitalized with a traumatic eye injury? I often wonder who I was prior to this traumatic event. Moreover, who I would have been without it. At 26 months of age, I was

tested for my developmental milestones using the Gesell Developmental Schedules which is a developmental metrics that outlines the ages and stages of development in young children developed by Dr. Arnold Gesell and colleagues. The School Psychologist reported:

Her language behaviour was found to be similar to a 15 month old. Her adaptive behaviour to an 18 month old and her motor, personal and social behaviour to a 21 month old. She was unable to pass any of the tests on the Stanford - Binet at year 2. Present results of Stanford - Binet, Amanda demonstrated the beginnings of the particular intellectual skills being measured, although credit could not be given. Present results almost in the low average range.

(School Psychologist, Care and Custody File, 1972).

The Stanford - Binet test is another examination meant to gauge intelligence through five factors of cognitive ability. These five factors include fluid reasoning, knowledge, quantitative reasoning, visual-spatial processing and working memory (Standford-BinetTest.com, 2018). The results indicated I lagged behind other children my age.

As I entered kindergarten, I brought my traumatic childhood experiences to the classroom. In addition to being removed from the care of my mother, undergoing several eye surgeries and hospitalizations, and entering the foster care system, I had a number of other medical issues including a history of bladder infections with elevated temperatures, orthopaedic problems resulting from being knock - kneed, orthodontic work for missing teeth, and enuresis (bedwetting until the of age 11). I saw many doctors and other healthcare professionals: an orthodontist, optometrist, orthopaedic surgeon, urologist, and a school psychologist.

My teachers' reports documented my learning difficulties in summary reports to the Children's Aid Society. My grade 2 school teacher wrote in correspondence:

Amanda has a very short attention span making it difficult to get and hold her interest. She is often quite restless in class. She is weak in vowel sounds but does quite well when working with consonant sounds. I do not feel she uses her decoding skills. I feel she gets her vocabulary from sight. Oral comprehension is good but weak in written comprehension. Amanda usually tries but is very careless about bringing things back to me - tests, worksheets, etc. She is working with a slow group in reading.

(Elementary School Report, Care and Custody File, n.d).

My grade 4 teacher wrote in correspondence to the Children’s Aid Society. *“Amanda is a good worker though slow finishing. She finds it hard to cope with spelling and math. I would say that she has certain learning disabilities though not really serious.”*

(Elementary School Report, Care and Custody File, n.d).

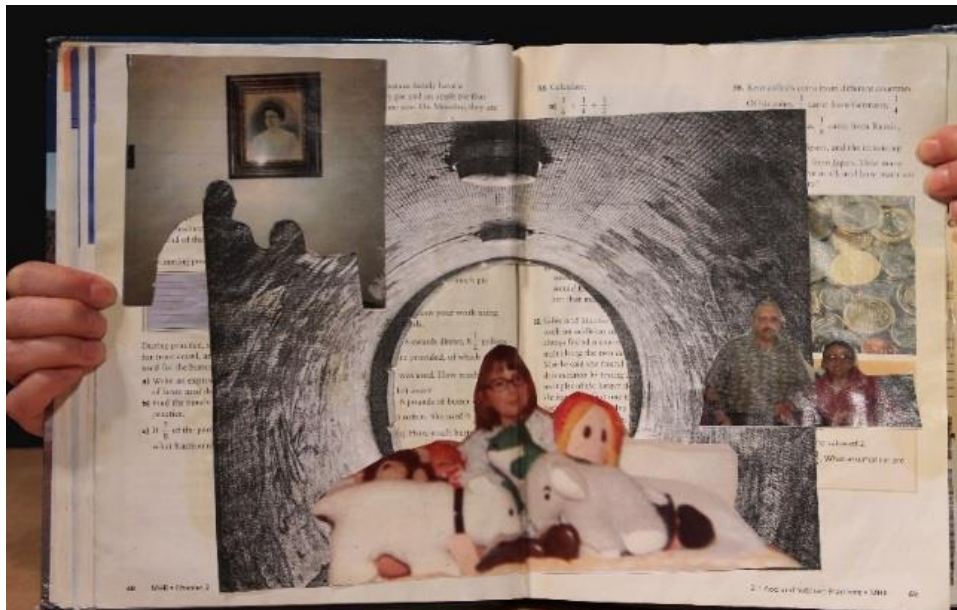


Figure 11. An altered textbook page that illustrates my removal from my foster family after 10 years.(2018). Textbook, photographs and tunnel image. Image Credit: Brett Kibbler.

I was told I had a biological brother named Paul in foster care. I learned about my biological parents and other brother, Stephan. I remember staring out my bedroom window wondering where were my biological parents. Would I know them if I met them? Did they live next door? Would they know me if they met me on the street?

As *Figure 11* shows this page in the altered textbook shows my aging foster parents on the right side cut from a photograph on the left side and pasted on the page. In the middle of grade 5, I was abruptly uprooted again from my foster family of 10 years. My foster mother, Mildred, was terminally ill and could no longer care for me. For the second time in a decade, I lost my family. The social worker reported in my case file that:

Amanda has had a very difficult time since last recorded. Amanda has had many serious adjustments from town to country life, from organized activity available in her hometown to a different sort of recreation. She separated from previous good friends, from her pets, and most seriously, from her foster parents.

(Social Worker Case Summary, Care and Custody File, 1981)

I first met my biological brother Paul at the Children's Aid Society Office. We were alone together. He was tall and slender with big brown eyes and brown hair. His smile revealed crooked and missing teeth. He wore a denim jacket with jeans, cowboy boots and hat. He was 15. Seeing my brother for the first time was like looking into the eyes of a stranger - because he was. He said I looked different than he had imagined. He thought I would have flowing long blonde hair and blue eyes like my mother. I wondered if he was disappointed.

When my foster mother, Mildred, became terminally ill, the Children Aid Society decided that I would go live with Paul and his foster family. The life I once knew

disappeared in the rear-view mirror. Everyone around me became strangers. The familiar had suddenly become foreign. As an 11-year-old, I had to navigate an unfamiliar house, a new foster family, biological family members, community, church congregation, school, classrooms, peers and teachers. I do not know where I landed between school curricula; I remember that I was lagging behind in reading and math at my new school.

I failed grade 5.

After a few months had passed, I remember sitting under the weeping willow tree in my new front yard and it was in that moment, I realized I was never going home again. This was my life now. My new foster dad told me that my biological father was working on the highway not far away and asked if I wanted to meet him. Within minutes, I was meeting yet another stranger – my biological father. Although I did not know it at the time, my biological father and his family lived in the area. When I met my father, I saw myself in him. He had hazel green eyes just like mine. He looked into my eye and said my injury did not look that bad. He had not seen me since the day I went into the hospital.

It was my 12th birthday and I entered grade 5 again when I met my biological mother, grandmother, and other biological brother Stephan. We sat in the car in the driveway outside the house while they gave me birthday presents. After living with my brother for over a year, the foster placement broke down due to family issues in the home.

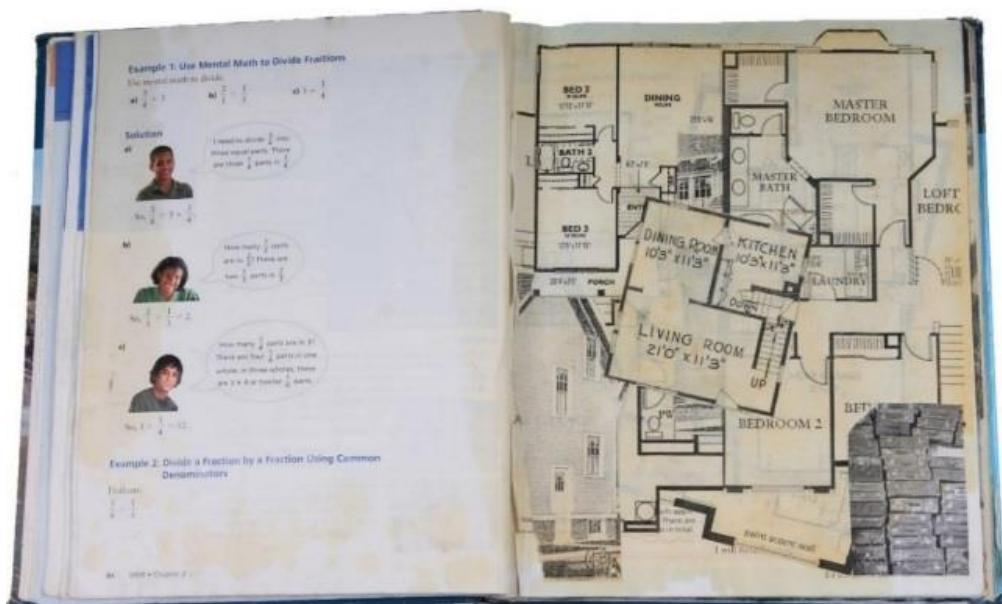


Figure 12. Floor plans, parts of houses, and stacked suitcase in altered textbook page.(2018). Textbook, floor plans, houses, suitcases. Image credit: Amanda May.

I moved through several foster home placements over the next several years. This altered textbook page, as shown in *Figure 12* illustrates layered floor plans and an image of stacked suitcases to exemplify multiple foster home placements, cumulative layers of loss and unresolved trauma. During my first foster home placement, the social worker reported: *Adoption cannot be considered at the moment because of her level of functioning, plus defective vision left eye and possibility of serious surgery.* (Social Worker Report, Care and Custody File, 1972).

I journeyed through 11 foster home placements after I was abruptly removed from my foster parents of 10 years. Navigating through new homes, finding my way through new floor plans - dining rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, bathrooms, and laundry rooms, entries and stairways. I wanted to run away from the life that catapulted me into darkness. The

grief unspoken but deeply embedded; words that could not speak.

In the summer I before I entered grade 12, I received news that my biological brother Paul could not be found. His wallet and keys were on the bedside table; his gun was missing. It would be another two weeks before his body was discovered with a gunshot wound in a cornfield. I went to Paul's funeral and sat alone with him staring at his closed casket. I struggled through grade 12 with grieving eyes. Although I graduated from high school, my grades would not allow entry into university. I returned to grade 12 to upgrade but I missed many classes and ultimately dropped out.

graduation portrait



Figure 13. This high school grade 12 graduation photograph is a photocopied version from my Care and Custody File and symbolically depicts the portrait of adversity during the course of my K-12 learning journey. (2018). Graduation portrait. Image Credit : Amanda May.

Contents

Summary of Case

A Tour of Your Textbook

her family of origin.

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Amanda remains in the foster home where she is firmly entrenched.

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(b) Indicate the child's adjustment to this situation. Following almost ten years in very good foster home child had to be moved abruptly because of acute, serious and long-term illness of foster mother.

subsequent death of her foster mother



the badly cut eye
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Figure 14. Summary of case: collage with third-party excerpts, as well as document excerpts. (2018). Care and Custody File. Image Credit: Amanda May.

Amanda had many serious adjustments, from town to country life, from organized activity such as available in her home town to a different sort of recreation. She separated from previous good friends, from her pets, and most seriously, from her foster parents.

number of placements child has had since care and custody Two

(a) Possible return to biological family:

i. What is the nature of the child's contact with his/her family Recent meeting with

Leather (15).

the child's current living situation. New foster home

fifth home

number of placements child has had since care and custody Seven

separated

foster parents

biological family



Figure 15. Case summary collage with third-party excerpts, as well as document excerpts. (2018). Care and Custody File, stacked suitcase and a childhood photograph at age 14. Image Credit: Amanda May

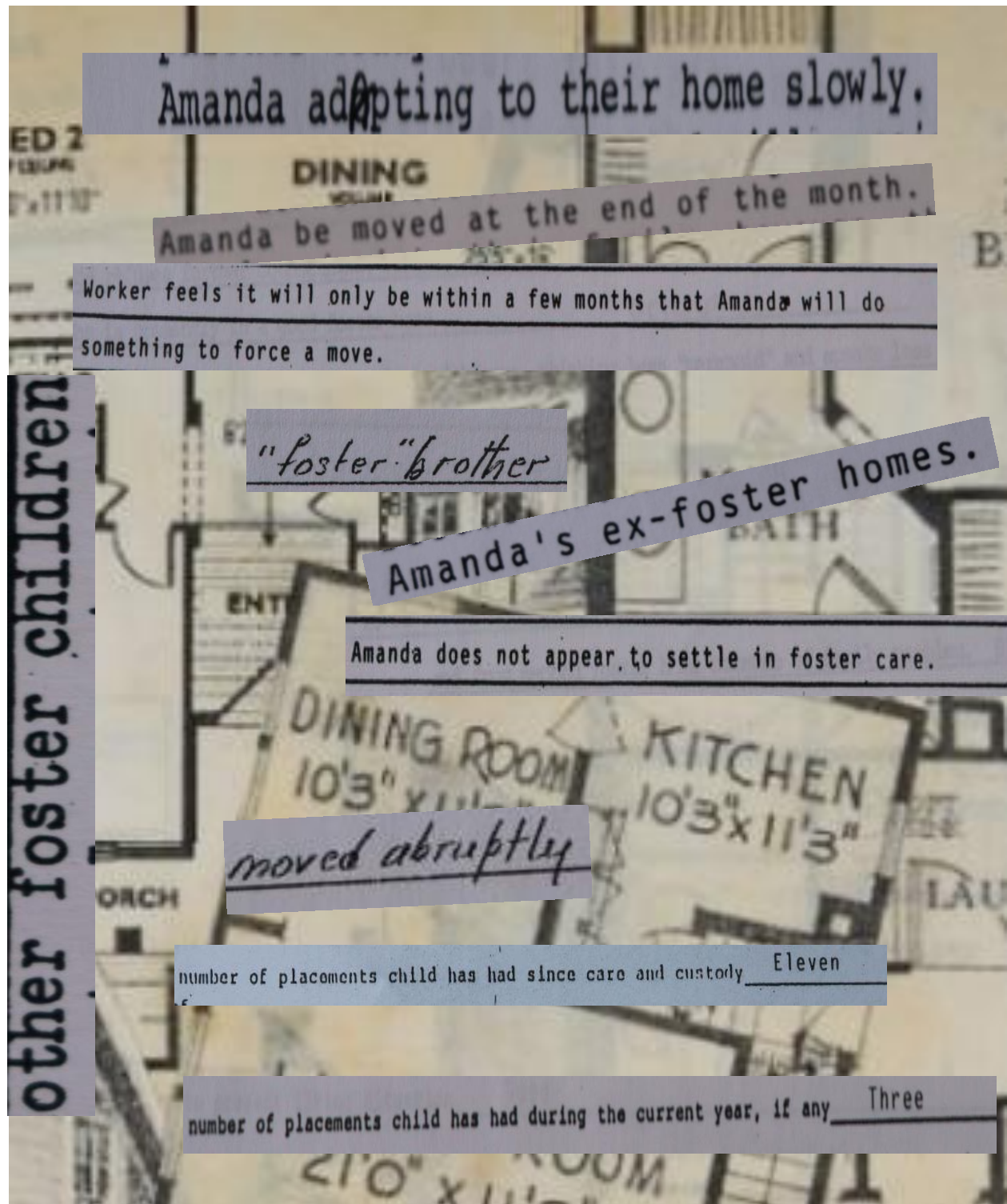


Figure 16. Case file collage with third-party excerpts, as well document excerpts. (2018) Care and Custody File, images of suitcases, floor plans and houses. Image Credit: Amanda May.

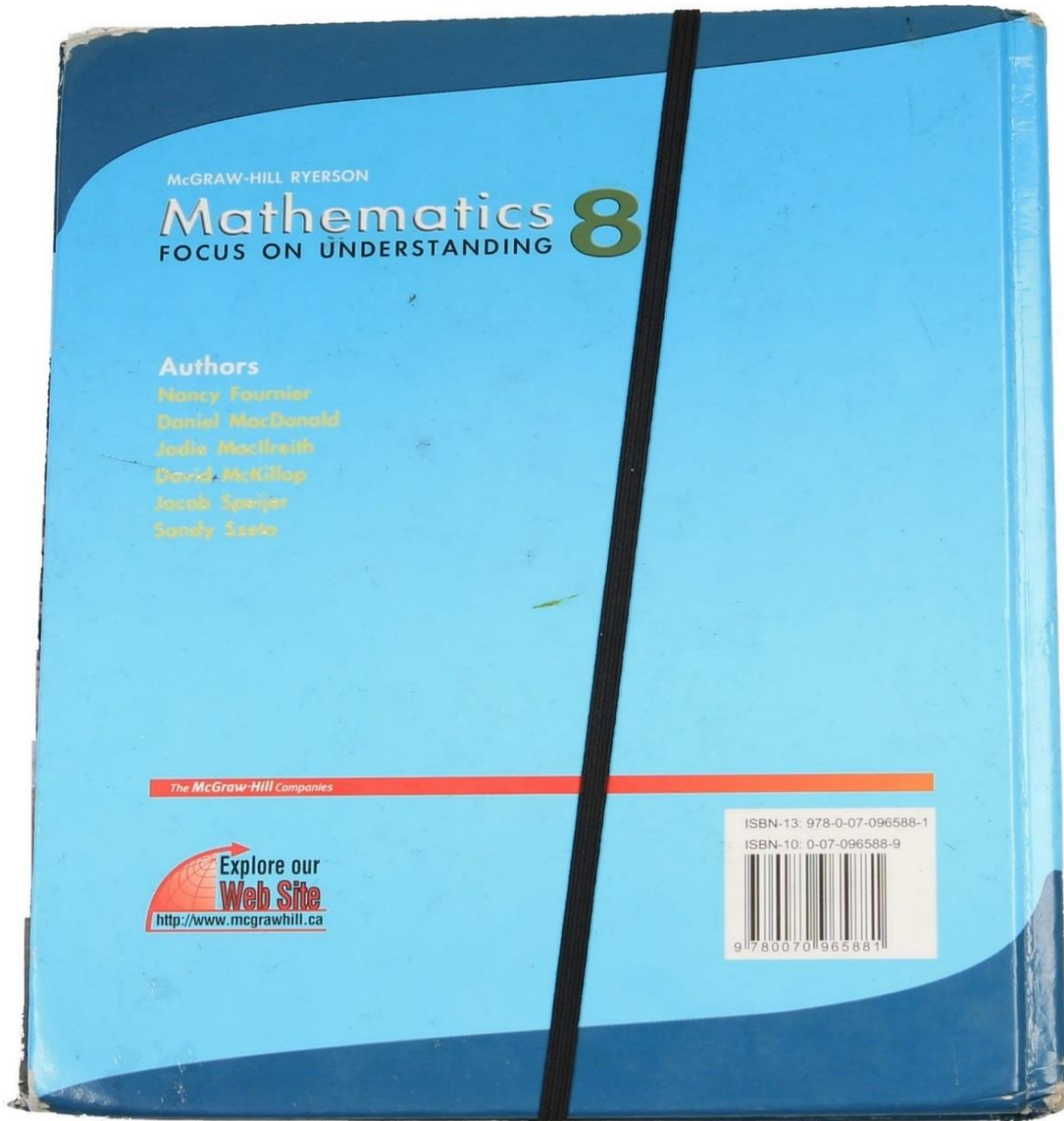


Figure 17 Back side of the altered textbook bound with an eye patch. (2018). Textbook, eye patch. Image Credit: Amanda May.

Amanda's Care and Custody terminated with the Department of Community Services, as she reached twenty-one (21) years of age. Amanda is residing in Ontario, presently living with her aunt. She can be reached at area code . She is taking a Social Service Worker course at a community college.

VM:am

December 27, 1991

Figure 18. Social worker's case notes closing my Care and Custody File, 1991. (2018) Care and Custody File. Image Credit: Amanda May.

The Adult Learner – A Learner Amidst Recovery

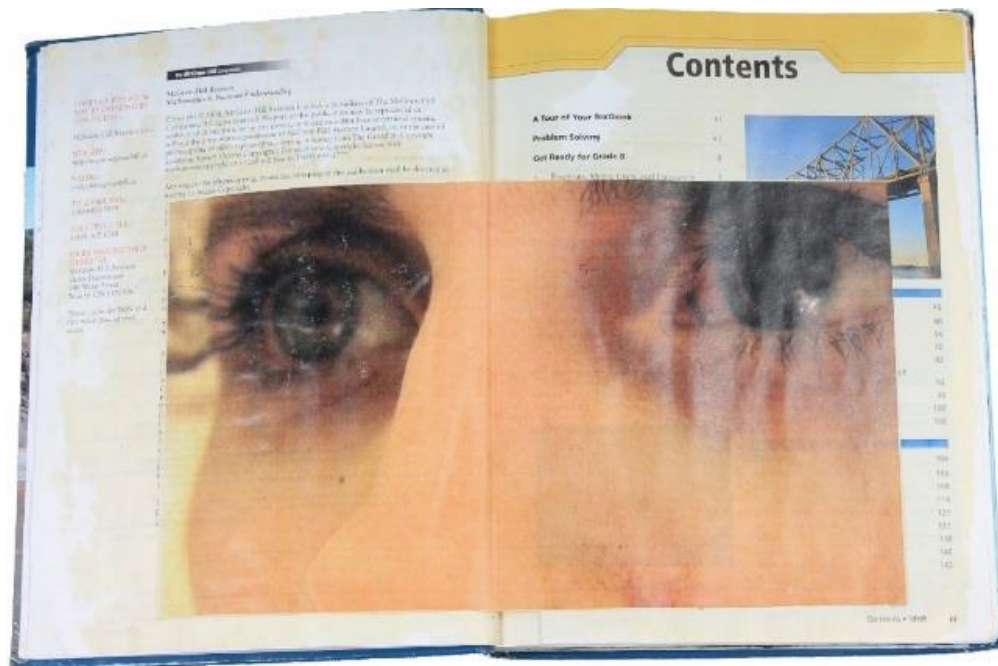


Figure 19. A photograph of my eyes looking in the distance pasted in the textbook. (2018). Image Credit: Amanda May.

My care and custody was terminated on my 21st birthday whether or not I was emotionally or financially ready. Luckily, I went to live with my biological uncle in Toronto

whom I met briefly in my adolescence, and he offered me a place to live for the three years I spent at Centennial College of Applied Arts. In my first year, I hesitated to open my report card, afraid I would see an F. Much to my delight, I received straight Cs! I continued to improve academically. During my third year of college, I was required to conduct an in-depth research project and apply my findings in a community presentation. The idea of doing a presentation terrified me — during high school, I began crying during a class presentation and ran from the room. I had no idea how I would complete this project. I considered dropping out of the program. I decided to research attachment, separation, and loss in foster children. During my research, I came upon a word that had somehow eluded me: the word “grief” now entered my vocabulary. I finally had the word for my despair. One night I cried myself to sleep, and in the morning when I opened my eyes tears raced down my face. My eyes had held the tears all night. There was so much to unearth, so much to heal. Grief came in so many forms. I grieved my brother’s death, but also his life; I grieved the loss of my childhood, and the loss of my eye.

I took the train home to Nova Scotia and presented my research project to the Foster Family Association of the county where I grew up. I talked about my research on attachment, separation and loss in foster children. It was well received by the foster parents. I graduated from the Child and Youth Worker Program at Centennial College of Applied Arts and finally got accepted into university. I returned to Nova Scotia to enter the Child and Youth Studies Program at Mount Saint Vincent University at age 25. There I took a course called, “Cultural Perspectives on Childhood and Adolescence,” which piqued my interest in international work. Throughout my 20s, I was confronted with mourning the loss of my childhood, the loss of eleven foster families, and the loss of my biological brother Paul. Although I was struggling to move forward through college and university slowly achieving my goals, I continuously found myself

unearthing the past. The knotted and often tangled threads that bound me required that they be examined stitch by stitch, making the process of healing and moving forward painstakingly difficult.

I left Mount Saint Vincent University with a few courses shy of completing my degree, and travelled to Australia to try to make sense of the past. At the age of 30, still grieving losses, I was faced with an impossible choice - to live in despair or to die in despair. I was emotionally and physically exhausted from grieving for well over two decades. I was hopeful that I would eventually “get over it”, but this hope never materialized. I was still reeling from grief and loss. About six months after arriving in Australia, a tendril of hope began to re-emerge. I discovered in the depths of my despair I was grieving the loss of myself. Suddenly I stumbled head first out of the darkness and into the light. This breakthrough radiated through my soul, generating tears of joy. I was certain that, with the touch of a magic wand, my brokenness had been transformed into wholeness. The life that had been waiting in the wings for me was now ready to unfold.

It was in Australia that I heard Nelson Mandela speak at a World Reconciliation Day Event, and his words inspired me. Throughout my journey after foster care, I had to redefine my concept of family and home to include the broader sense of my brothers and sisters in humanity. My loss of self in foster care propelled me to find connection elsewhere in the world. I found family and home in the most unlikely of places. When I arrived at the gate of the SOS Children’s Village in rural Zimbabwe to volunteer with 180 orphaned children, I knew I was home. When I arrived at the Vietnamese Friendship Village, a rehabilitation centre for Agent Orange victims, and saw the Canadian flag swaying in the wind, I knew I had found my place in the world. I journeyed to Northern Ireland, meeting those trying to reconcile the past. I travelled to Afghanistan to hear the voices of women and their struggle to have a voice. I travelled to North

Korea to experience a grieving nation, secluded and withdrawn from the world. It is no doubt that the Korean War has left a devastating scar. In South Africa, I learned about the apartheid while travelling to Robbin Island, seeing where Nelson Mandela spent 27 years of his life in a small prison cell. My time with World Vision sponsored children in Romania showed me the generosity of the human spirit, and I was astonished at the incredible beauty even amidst poverty. I knew I was seeing the world for the first time through the wonder of children. I travelled to all these countries to discover the “truth,” to learn the meaning of forgiveness and reconciliation, and to draw together strength and courage in my own life.

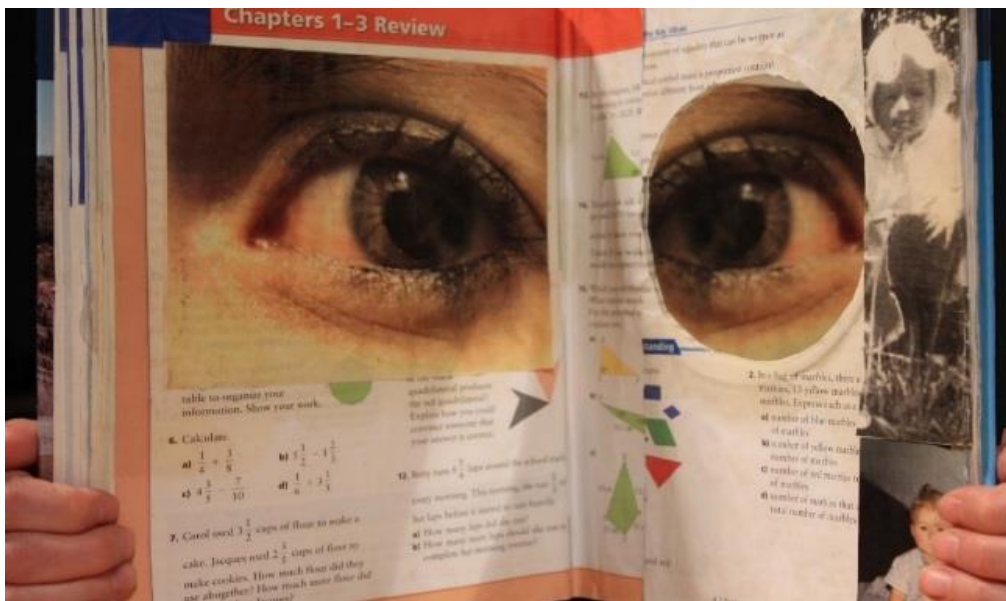


Figure 20. A mirror embedded in the pages of my altered textbook. My wounded eye see its own reflection. (2018). Textbook, photograph, mirror. Image Credit. Brett Kibbler.

In my altered textbook, *Figure 20* shows a mirror embedded in the 30 pages I glued together; my wounded eye sees its own reflection. For much of my life, the appearance of my wounded eye staring back at me was unbearable. Although in my 20s and 30s, I saw my eye as

problematic, I spent much of my adult life planning and plotting against my left eye. I did not accept my life in foster care, nor did I accept being constantly confronted by my wounded eye. It stared back at me and was a daily reminder of my reality. In my 20s, I went to an eye surgeon and asked that he remove my eye. I wanted a glass eye prosthesis that looked like my right eye. The doctor refused because I still had some sight in that eye, and he said I might need it someday. I assured him I would not, but he still refused to do the surgery. Defeated, I went to another eye surgeon who gave me a colour contact lens, but it would not sit properly on my eye because the surface of my eye is damaged. I was determined to make it work – I wore it out one day, and it moved to the top of my eyeball. Someone asked me, “What’s wrong with your eye?” Defeated again, I sighed and walked away. Next, I met a woman in Ottawa during an internship as part of my Rotary Scholarship, who had a scleral cover ocular prosthetic. The Scleral cover is a thin eye cover. When I returned from Ottawa, I found a place nearby that made them. It seemed meant to be! I had measurements done to be fitted for the prosthesis, but the doctor told me that, normally when you have an eye injury your eye shrinks, but mine had not! I was not eligible for this procedure because there was not enough space in my eye for the prosthesis. Defeated again, I begrudgingly accepted my eye, for the time being.

In May 2012, I took a refresher first aid course as required for my place of employment at the time. The first aid instructor started the section about eye injuries by explaining that the human eye is sensitive and easily damaged, she said, that careful

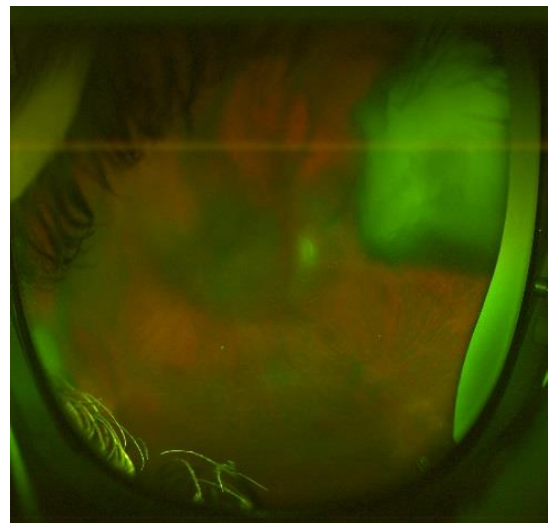


Figure 21. Wounded left eye. Optomap ultra - widefield retinal image. (2012). Image Credit: Insight Optometry.

examination of the eye is critical, as permanent loss of vision can result from seemingly minor injuries. In that moment, I started crying. As the first aid instructor was talking about eye injuries, teardrops fell from my left eye, one splashed on my first aid handbook, and the other rolled down my cheek into the crack of my lips. I opened my lips, and the teardrop fell into my mouth, forcing me to taste its pain. That was the moment I became aware of the trauma my eye had. I understood it was my eye that experienced the trauma more so than I.

After this, the narrative I had with my eye changed, and I began a more meaningful relationship with this wound. Previously, I went to the doctor to ask how I could remove or disguise my eye; now I went to the ophthalmologist wanting to know how my left eye was impacted by the injury, the doctor showed a three dimensional image of my eye and explained the injury and shared with me the Optomap Retinal Map taken during the eye examination. I saw for the first time inside of my eye's wound. The ophthalmologist explained my eye's trauma, and I came to recognize its resiliency and strength for being able to see despite its devastating trauma and adversity. The eye doctor said that people had lost their vision for much less of an injury. My eye did not shrink. It did not die, rather, it remained whole. The optomap ultra - wide digital retinal imaging system captures more than 80% of the retina in one panoramic image allows the doctors to detect early signs of disease that present on the retina. An emerging standard for eye health, the optomap ultra-wide view enhances doctors ability to detect even the earliest sign of disease on the retina and is a key diagnostic tool.



Figure 22. Right eye. Optomap ultra-widefield retinal image. (2012). Image Credit: Insight Optometry.

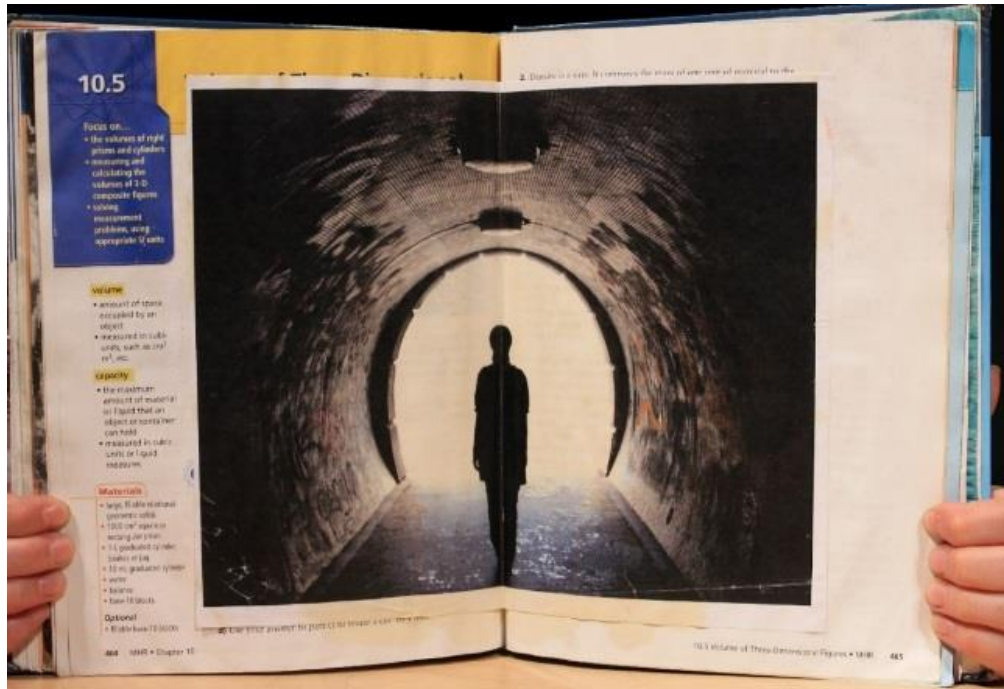


Figure 23. An altered book image shows a silhouette at the end of a tunnel. (2018). Textbook. Image Credit: Brett Kibbler.

I reconciled with my wounded eye, the result of an suspected abuse injury and the catalyst that led me into a life in foster care. My eye injury is an unconscious trauma embedded in my early development. Although I cannot remember, I am certain my eye remembers; and my body remembers. I get up every morning to greet my traumatized eye staring back at me in the mirror, my wounded eye sees its own reflection.

Beverley Borawaki (2007) wrote, “Traumas contain complex layers of personal, social, and cultural values, and the traumatic event itself is merely the beginning of the story as it comes to be interwoven with the past and present and a future yet to be determined” (p.108). *Figure 24* shows the threads are now tethered through the once tattered tapestry. All the threads have their sacred place – even the broken and knotted ones belong perfectly where they are.



Figure 24. The bookends of a life lived – the front and back inside cover of my altered textbook that shows the finished side of a tapestry and the underside. (2018). Textbook. Image Credit: Brett Kibbler.

History is the threads that ties the past, present and future together. History is the graffiti written on our internal walls. People as well as places struggle to come to terms with their unique past. History is everywhere and in everything. I wanted to understand the “why” of history. We want to know who we are as human beings and where we came from. My historical record is the interpretation of events about growing up in the foster care system. The narrators are not my voice, but rather a chronology of my historical events as recorded by those in the foster care system. For many years, my narrative was the foster care experience and its complexities. I realized my eye injury, and my relationship to my wound, is a central part of my story.

I learned I was not much different from the orphaned children in Zimbabwe, the farmer on the West Bank, or the land mind victim in Afghanistan. We were all struggling to discover ourselves within our adversity and find our place in the world.

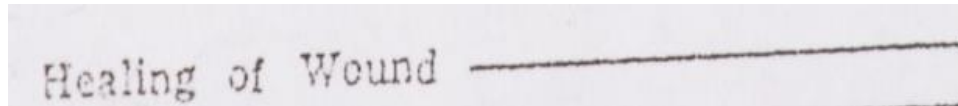


Figure 25. “Healing of Wound” is a section in the hospital report that was left blank.(1971). Image Credit: Amanda May

CHAPTER THREE:

HEALING OF WOUND

This chapter has two parts. Part 1 examines the theoretical framework for this study an arts-informed approach which includes altered books, the Human Library and autoethnography. Part 2 provides an in-depth exploration of my learning journey through various altered book workshops and art classes. The methodologies I have chosen are mechanisms for creating space, pausing and reflection. The art process allows for the exploration of the complexities of a learner in foster care; the displacement, grief and traumatic loss.

Theoretical Framework

Arts-Informed Research

Arts-informed methodology is optimal for this study. Researchers Gary Knowles and Ardra Cole (2008) purport that an arts-informed methodology “infuses languages, processes, and forms of literacy, visual, and performing arts with the expansive possibilities of scholarly inquiry for purposes of advancing knowledge” (p.58).

In my study, I collected data in various forms — documents from my Care and Custody File, childhood photographs, and doctors’ reports — as well as found materials such as textbooks and a mirror, and used both of them in a different way and incorporated them into my research about trauma and learning. By incorporating childhood images into my research, those who read

the altered book feel more connected to my childhood and may become more aware of a disrupted learning narrative. As Knowles and Cole note, “images literally help us to adopt someone else’s gaze, see someone else’s point of view, and borrow their experience for a moment” (p.45).

Altered Books

An altered book is a form of mixed media that transforms a book from its original form into something different, thereby deliberately altering its appearance or intended meaning. The book itself can be cut, collaged, painted or otherwise transformed in some way, and the alterations often incorporate the book’s text and/or illustrations. Giora Chilton (2007) wrote: “A book evokes responses on many levels and, by altering the printed text, the artist confronts a symbol of authority, reality or convention, and changes it. Thus, the artist becomes a rebel agent of change and transformation” (p.458). Recently, interest in the altered book as an art form has increased. Books are conceptualized as art canvases that provide structure, stimulation, portability and increased opportunities for reflection. Altering books provides a symbolically rich canvas with which to express one’s inner life and emotional well-being. The process of making art intentionally through creatively altering a book may be healing, life affirming and stimulate growth and change. Altered book artist Arthur Ward, as cited in Chilton, 2007 contends that this is because “you are driven by the book, driven by the theme, driven by the text, driven by the images, you can really develop a story of images across your pages.” (Chilton, p.60). The very nature of the book’s form is interactive; a book’s cover invites one to open it, and its pages are meant to be turned. Many art techniques for altered books involve incorporating interactive details, such as windows, accordion folds, tags and envelopes with enclosures. Symbolically, books represent knowledge, illumination, learning, wisdom and revelation, of both the universe

and the self.

Human Library

The Human Library (formerly the *Living Library*) is an initiative that enables people who may have experienced adversity, prejudice or stereotyping in life can become human books and be used to stimulate conversation by a ‘reader’ (Goebel, 2011, p.161).



The Human Library dates back to 1993 when five teenagers, motivated by the violent stabbing of a friend in Copenhagen, created *Stop the Violence* dedicated to reducing youth violence and counteracting the negative stereotyping of Danish youth that emerged in media reports following the final fatal stabbing. The conversations at the heart of the Human Library create learning opportunities that are seldom found elsewhere. The human books tell their story, and then answer questions from participating readers. Darlene Clover and Fatima Dogus (2014) state:

Putting a human face on prejudice and stereotyping encourages people to think differently, and this can motivate them to support and advocate for more accepting and supportive environments for all. Sample themes discussed by human books in the Human Library include transgender experiences, living with AIDS, lesbian marriage, atheism, substance abuse, domestic violence, depression, adoption, male feminism and raising an autistic child. (p.77)

Figure 26. Human Library name tag. (2016). Illinois State University. Image Credit: Amanda May

Stereotyping categorizes the vast amount of information we receive about others; however, it often leads to blatant misrepresentation, and it can have serious, negative consequences for individuals and groups. People live in communities and, through their lives socially, culturally, economically and politically, often know little about one another other than and due to rumours. To move beyond stereotyping, intolerance and ignorance, educators suggest using processes that challenge the apparent safety of relying on existing knowledge and catapult the unaware into unfamiliarity. The Human Library is founded on two principles: inclusion and choice (Human Library UK, 2016). Inclusion is how living books are recruited from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences. Choice has a number of different aspects: readers must choose to participate, which living book to borrow, the questions they want to ask, and the conversation they will have with the book.

The first Human Library opened in schools in Finland in 2009. They provided an opportunity for young people to meet others in a safe and supportive environment. The Human Library supports human rights education, enhances communications between diverse people, introduces new ways of working together and allows teachers to select different topics to pursue in their courses. The underlying values of basic education include human rights, equality, democracy, and multiculturalism, all of which can contribute to a sense of community and responsibility, as well as respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual (Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2004). The values foster non-violence, promote cultural understanding, and build an environment that supports the development of communities based on equality and tolerance. In terms of education, the borrowing experience also supports the development of students' communication skills, and stimulates new ideas.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore personal experience and connect an autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. Margot Duncan (2004) states:

Although ethnographic and autoethnographic reports are presented in the form of personal narratives, this research tradition does more than just tell stories. It provides reports that are scholarly and justifiable interpretations based on multiple sources of evidence (p.5).

H. Chang, as cited in Colleen McMillan and Helen Eaton Ramirez (2016) wrote “Good autoethnography must be emotionally engaging, critically self-reflexive of one’s socio-political interactivity, and contains text that is relational, yet provocative enough to dislodge a reader from complacency” (p.432). An autoethnographic methodology allows for a deeper, more meaningful, and holistic exploration of a traumatic event. Moreover, artwork is considered to be an approach to autoethnography that “evokes



Figure 27. *Various interpretations of a lady.* (2017). Acrylic paint on canvas. Image Credit: Amanda May

response from others, inspires imagination, gives pause for new possibilities and meanings, and

opens new questions and new avenues of inquiry” (Ellis, p. 215).

Given this, I use an artistic form of an altered book, and art classes in the hopes that it will provide insight into my individual experience while also engaging teachers to reflect upon students’ adversities. The three-dimensional form of the altered book provides more space for inspirational stories than traditional writing formats because images evoke response. The textbook is the vehicle used in arts-informed research to create an arts-informed autoethnography.

Preliminary Research

This section highlights two distinct elements of the artistic process, making meaning of the representation and a visual narrative. I enrolled in art classes that helped me explore my foster care experiences, my traumatic eye injury and the question, “Who am I as a learner in the context of adversity?”

Skill Development

Altered Book Workshop, California

In order to develop the concept of my altered textbook, I participated in altered books workshops that allowed me to develop techniques to visually represent my own experiences. Under the guidance of book artist, Nancy Walter’s themed workshop *Observations*, I learned about gelli (monotype) printing, stencilling, collage, and altering a small children’s book. Gelli print plate looks and feels like gelatin but is durable, reusable. Monoprinting on a gelli plate using an acrylic plate creates original prints (See Figure 29).

The book the instructor gave me to alter was *Dora and the Unicorn King*. In developing my altered book concept, I was offered boxes of materials, such as patterns, stencils, acrylic paints, and various art supplies. I engaged my imagination by asking myself, “What colours and

patterns resonate?” I was attracted to earth tones, shades of greens, aqua, and blues. I experimented with brighter colours, particularly oranges as time went on. I began to discover and work with the materials I had brought with me such as images of my eye, a silhouette, and an eye chart. I placed an image of my eyes on the first page, as the book opens, compelling the reader to look into my eyes. I placed an eye chart on the second page, and an image of a body silhouette straddling the edge on the opposite page. As the reader turns the page, only the right side of the silhouette is revealed. Several key images, textures, and themes emerged through this first altered book.



Figure 28. Dora the Explorer book used in a altered book workshop. (2016). Children's book. Image Credit: Amanda May.



Figure 29. Dora the Explorer children's book cover altered with stencils that resemble coffee stains. (2016). Gelli print stencils, acrylic paint, ribbon. Image Credit: Amanda May.

Coffee stains stencil. The stencil reminded me of coffee stains and the meaningful conversations people have together while sipping coffee or reading a book. The coffee stains are set on a gelli print with shades of greens, navy blue, and browns (see *Figure 26*). The Dora the Explorer book cover is now altered, it appears used and worn.

Eyes. The reader opens the book to a double spread featuring a colour photograph of my eyes looking off into the distance. The right eye is slightly out of focus making my injured left eye stand out.

Eye chart. Turning the page, the next image is a symbol of my many visits to eye doctors and discussions about my injured eye. It was placed on a gelli print using small bubble wrap.

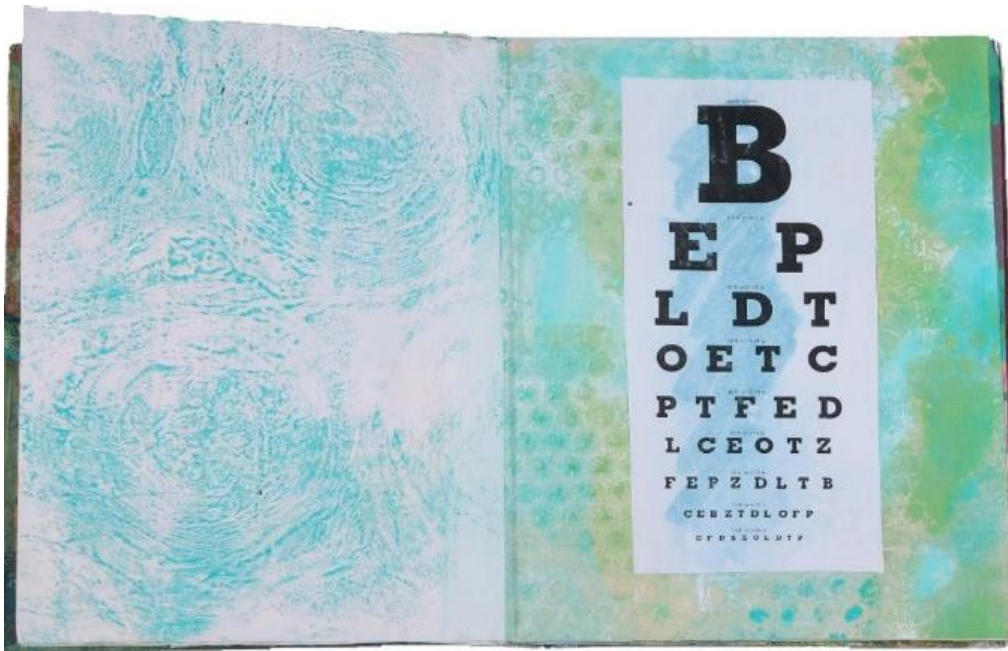


Figure 30. An eye chart in the altered page of the Dora the Explorer book. (2016). Acrylic paints, eye chart, bubble wrap and circle stencils. Image Credit: Amanda May.



Figure 31. Silhouette straddles a page in the Dora the Explorer book. (2016). Acrylic paint, book, stencils. Image Credit: Rob Henderson.



Figure 32. Outline of a silhouette during the painting process. (2016). Acrylic paint, paper, stencil. Image Credit: Amanda May.

Silhouette of left/right side of body. Next is an image of a painted body silhouette that straddles the pages' edge. At the time, discovery of my lack of connection with the left side of my body occurred during my first yoga class in January 2014. I looked down to see if my arm was aligned on the mat and could not see it. The left side of my body does not function in the same way as my right. I rely on my right to keep me safe. As I have become more conscious of my left side, I try to engage it.



Figure 33. Gelli print.(2016). Acrylic paints, stencils, silhouette. Image Credit: Amanda May



Figure 34. Gelli print (2016). Acrylic paints, stencils, silhouette. Image Credit: Amanda May

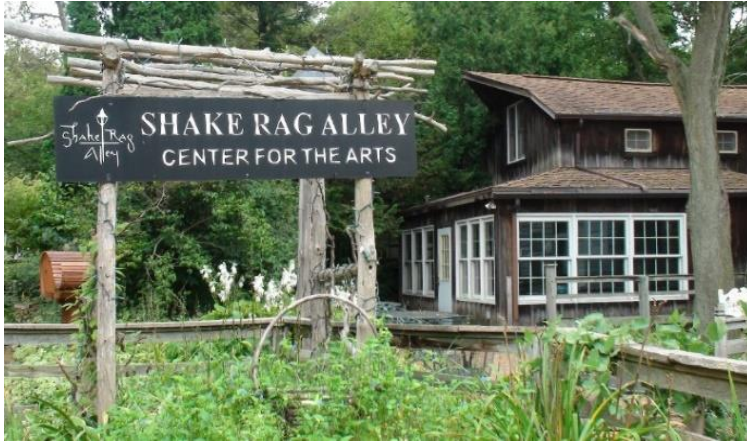
Altered Book Workshop, Wisconsin.

Figure 35. *Shake Rag Alley Center for the Arts.* (2016). Image Credit: Amanda May.

Book Unbound Deluxe
Edition: An Interactive Altered
Book workshop provided space for
me as a researcher to develop my
own personal narrative with found
objects. This workshop informs the
preliminary research of the concept
development of the altered textbook.

In preparation for this workshop in Mineral Point, Wisconsin, I spoke to the book artist instructor, Lorraine Reynolds, beforehand and received guidance on how I could visually represent my narrative with the focus on adversity and trauma. Seeking random found objects that reflected my personal narrative or provided inspiration, I went to the Halifax Salvation Army Thrift Store to engage in the process of imagining my altered book. As I entered the store, I was immediately, and unusually, drawn to the baby clothes section. I held a pair of little pink pants in my hand I wondered what happened to my infant self. I told my infant self she was safe now, a tear fell to the floor. I took childhood photographs and various found objects with me to explore.

The altered book workshop exposed participants to specific techniques such as: mixed media collage, pocket making, transparency use, and images created using various transfer techniques. I learned to transform ordinary pages of text into something personally profound. This process-oriented class allowed me the freedom to explore my visual narrative with guidance from an established instructor. I selected a new book to work with - an academic series on

American authors. It was a 1962 hardcover about John Greenleaf Whittier, an American Quaker poet and advocate for abolition of slavery in the United States. I skimmed through the book to acquaint myself with the text and noticed it was stamped “High School Library, Mineral Point, Wisconsin”.

Braille. Placing a sheet of Braille over the cover of my altered book helped me to reflect not only on physical blindness but also on spiritual blindness. I saw Braille as a symbol of awakening from darkness (spiritual blindness): connecting the dots was both literal and figurative, a significant metaphor for appreciating the wisdom, insight, and healing that occur in the in-between spaces.

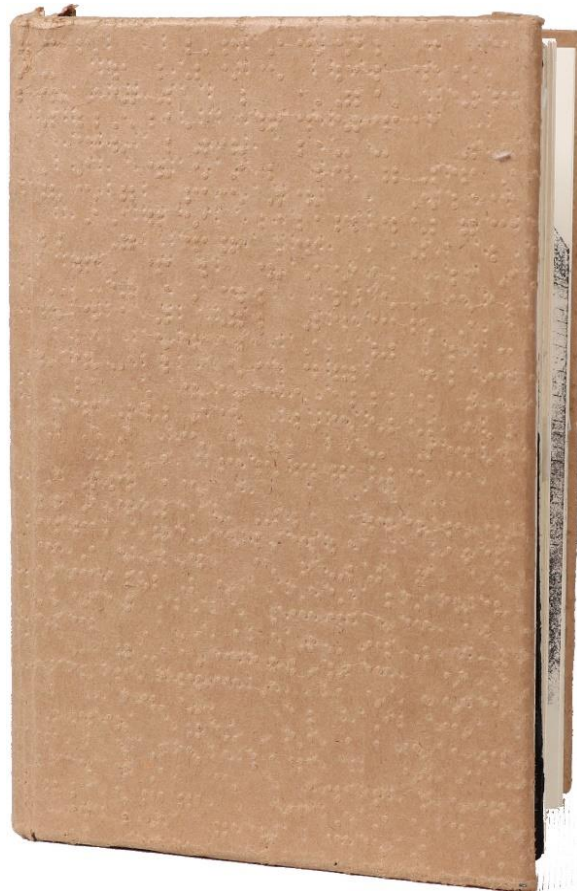


Figure 36. Braille sheet on the cover of an altered book.
(2016) Book, Braille sheet. Image Credit: Amanda May.



Figure 37. Altered book page with my childhood portrait and my wounded eye.(2016). Book, childhood photograph, eye photograph. Image Credit: Amanda May.



Figure 38. Amanda removed from her foster home (left) and inserted in a pocket of my wound eye (right). (2016) Book, childhood photograph, eye photograph. Image Credit: Amanda May.

Absence of self. The instructor, Lorraine Reynolds, encouraged me to cut and rip my photographs, which at first I resisted. “Cut myself out of my childhood photograph?” I thought. Although I had brought photocopies of childhood photographs, it is not a natural instinct to cut these images with scissors, as photographs tend to be sacred. As I cut myself out of my childhood photograph and made a pocket using a piece from the injured eye photograph, I found the act comforting to both my wounded eye and my child self. In the act of cutting myself out of my childhood, it was as if I left my foster home. I had been released; however, I could return home again when I needed. The colour photograph of me at about eight years old beside my injured eye, perhaps truly together for the first time, adds a healing dimension to this altered book.



Figure 39. Photograph at age 8. (1978) Image Credit. Amanda May

Old abandoned house. I learned a technique using Xylene, a process that uses oil and cotton swabs to lift a black and white photograph and embed the image onto a page. I selected a black and white photograph of an abandoned house in Earltown, Nova Scotia that I had photographed a few years earlier. I remember that this house had called to me the moment I saw it, and I wrote about and photographed the unexpected encounter. I had been instantly drawn to the doorsteps, despite the “No Trespassing” sign. Somehow, I knew this house understood my grief – the carpeted stairs, frayed and slanted; the yellow painted walls chipped and faded; the Christmas lights and broken plates lay on the floor. I could see what the years had taken away.



Figure 40. Slanted stairs in the old abandoned house. (2011). Image Credit: Amanda May.



Figure 41. Transfer image of the abandoned house in an altered book. (2016). Book, photograph, xylene. Image Credit: Amanda May.

Lorraine Reynolds instruction informed my creative process and altered textbook concept development to a large extent. For example, she provided bins of found objects that included old sheets of music, black and white vintage photographs of men and women, and children's doodling in colouring books. As I ruffled through the bins, I found a black and white image of a roof on a house, a floor plan, and sheets of Braille. Even though I arrived with my own found objects to use, my altered book process was also influenced by what the instructor made available. In this workshop, I focused on and delved into the creation of a visual narrative that was less about the technical aspect of the altered book and more about using these materials to create the story. This altered book is tactile and has interactive components. There is Braille text, and the Post-it notes can actually be moved.

Concept Development - Altered Eighth Grade Discarded Textbook

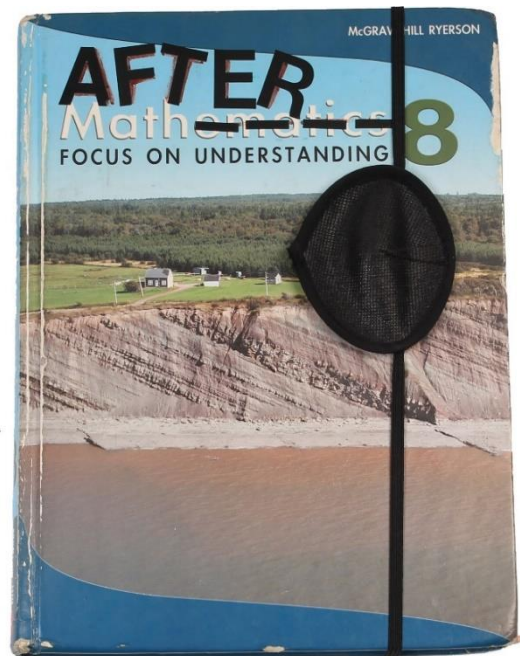
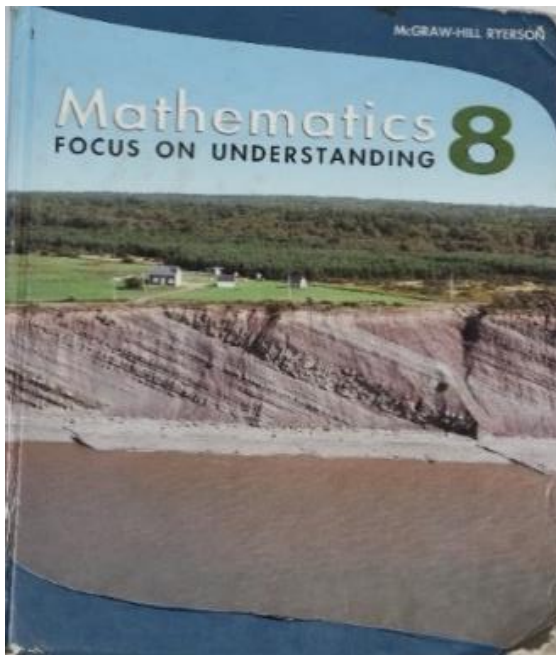


Figure 42. Before and after images of an altered eighth grade math textbook. (2016). Textbooks, eye patch, vinyl letters. Image Credit: Amanda May

I will now position the use of an altered book within the context of adversity and the learner. I created an altered book using McGraw-Hill Ryerson's *Mathematics 8 Focus on Understanding* (2008) to explore my lived experience. Using a donated discarded Halifax Regional School Board textbook, I examined and expressed the disruption I lived by creating an altered book that used numerous techniques: overlaying, inserting, cutting, tearing and pasting. The textbook title was altered from *Mathematics 8: Focus on Understanding* to *Aftermath 8: Focus on Understanding*.

Creation of the Altered Textbook Pages

I used basic art supplies including discarded textbooks, scissors, vinyl letters, paint-brush, pencil, clips, mirror, and a glue stick, childhood photographs, Modge Podge, retractable utility knife, and various images that represented my journey, as well as folders to organize spread layouts and materials. The following images are a series of photographs of the altered textbook process.



Figure 43. Materials for my altered textbook.(2018). Glue stick, Modge Podge, mirror, textbooks, paint brush, letters, pencil, eye patch. Image Credit: Claire Fraser.

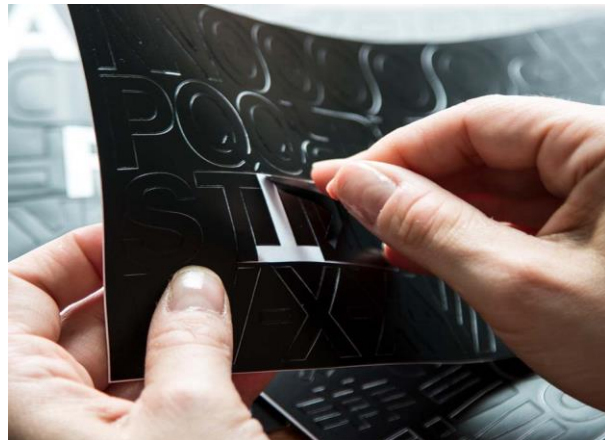


Figure 44. Vinyl letters. (2018). Image Credit: Claire Fraser.



Figure 45. The Girl with the Injured Eye.(2018) Vinyl letters, textbook. Image Credit: Claire Fraser.



Figure 46. Cutting myself out of my childhood photograph.(2018). Textbook. Image Credit: Claire Fraser.

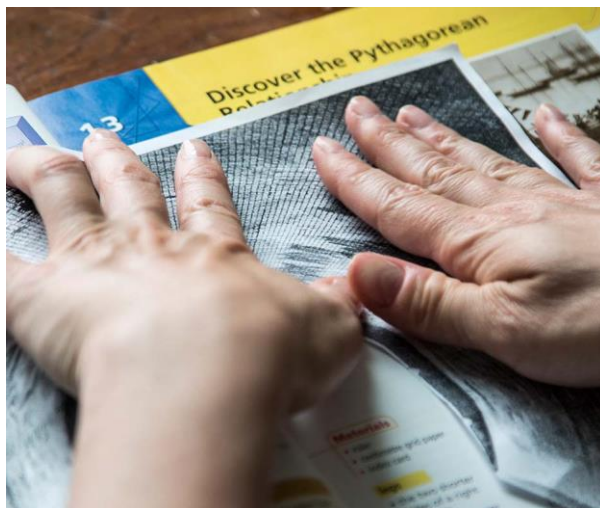


Figure 47. Pasting in a tunnel.(2018). Textbook. Image Credit: Claire Fraser.



Figure 48. Pasting my childhood photograph in a tunnel. (2018). Textbook. Image Credit: Claire Fraser.



Figure 49. Page spread with floor plans. (2018). Floor plans, image of stacked suitcases, scissors, glue, paint brush. Image Credit: Claire Fraser.



Figure 50. Pasting a floor plan in the altered textbook. (2018). Floor plan image, textbook, glue. Image Credit: Claire Fraser.

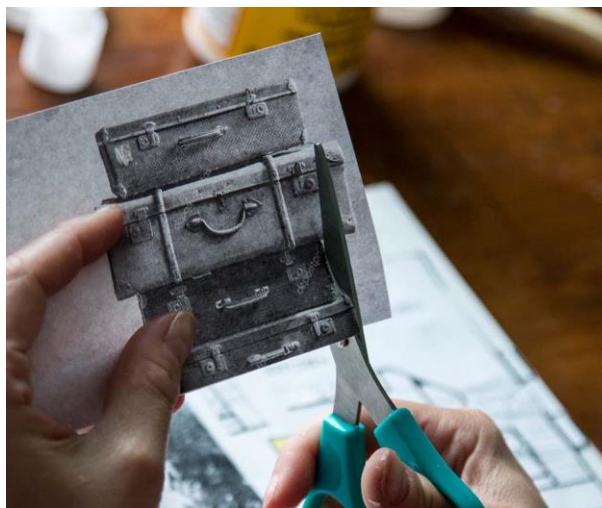


Figure 51. Suitcases representing displacement. (2018). Image Credit: Claire Fraser.

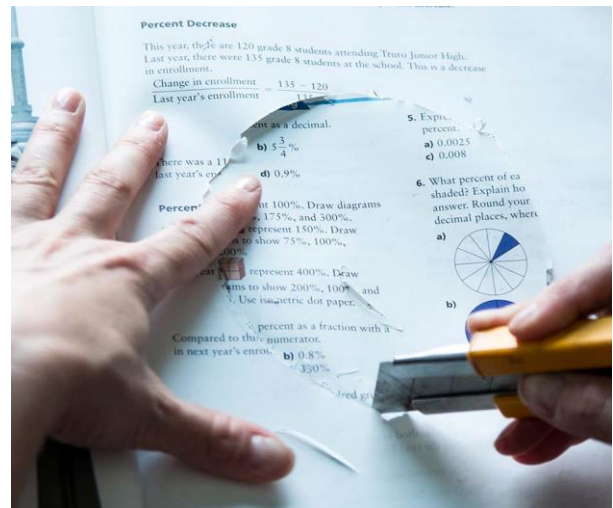


Figure 52. Inserting the mirror. (2018). Image Credit: Claire Fraser.



Figure 53. Textbook page spread of a mirror. (2018) Mirror, textbook, pencil, glue. Image Credit: Claire Fraser.



Figure 54. Textbook page spread of a mirror and photograph of my wounded eye. (2018). Mirror, textbook, pencil, glue. Image Credit: Claire Fraser.



Figure 55. Silhouette, representing myself, arriving at the end of a long tunnel. Textbook. (2018). Image Credit: Claire Fraser.



Figure 56. The tapestry of life. (2018) Textbook, tapestry image. Image Credit: Claire Fraser

Exploration through Art

I chose to explore my experiences through a variety of methods of art making and making meaning of what emerged from the process. Through my art process, I altered books, created books and repaired books. I used a variety of materials such as paints, brushes, canvas boards. I enrolled in workshops in monoprint, book repair and screen printing at the Centre for Craft Nova Scotia. It was established in 1991 as a public institution dedicated to education, promotion and the provision of opportunity for Nova Scotia artisans and artists. At the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD University) I enrolled in courses in book binding, drawing, acrylic painting and mixed media so as to explore art and story.

Workshops - Centre for Craft Nova Scotia

a) Screen Printing

Honouring the Wound.

In this workshop at the Centre for Craft Nova Scotia, I learned about screen printing, block printing and various resist methods. Under the artist's instruction, Kate Ward, I explored the theme of eye injury, focusing on the exterior wounding with materials including tracing paper, tape, transparency, paints, fabric and a screen. Using pink and green paint I screen printed a two - layered print of an eye on tracing paper and photocopied the image onto transparencies. Through this exploration, I embraced the extraordinary beauty of my eye's traumatic scar.



Figure 57. Use of transparency to cut out the iris and pupil. (2017). Transparency, linen, screen print paint, screen. Image Credit: Amanda May



Figure 58. Honouring the Wound. (2017). Paint, linen. Image Credit: Amanda May

b) Book Repair

During this book repair workshop organized by the Centre for Craft Nova Scotia, Through the instruction of Rhonda Millier I explored how to restore and repair a damaged book. We were encouraged to bring a book that needed repair. I repaired a single page from my grade 9 textbook, *Starting Points in Math 9*. It became damaged when I ripped the pages from the thread. Using Japanese rice paper, I mended a page titled “From Arrow Diagrams to Graph” that had missing information. I made the page whole, although the damage remains visible.

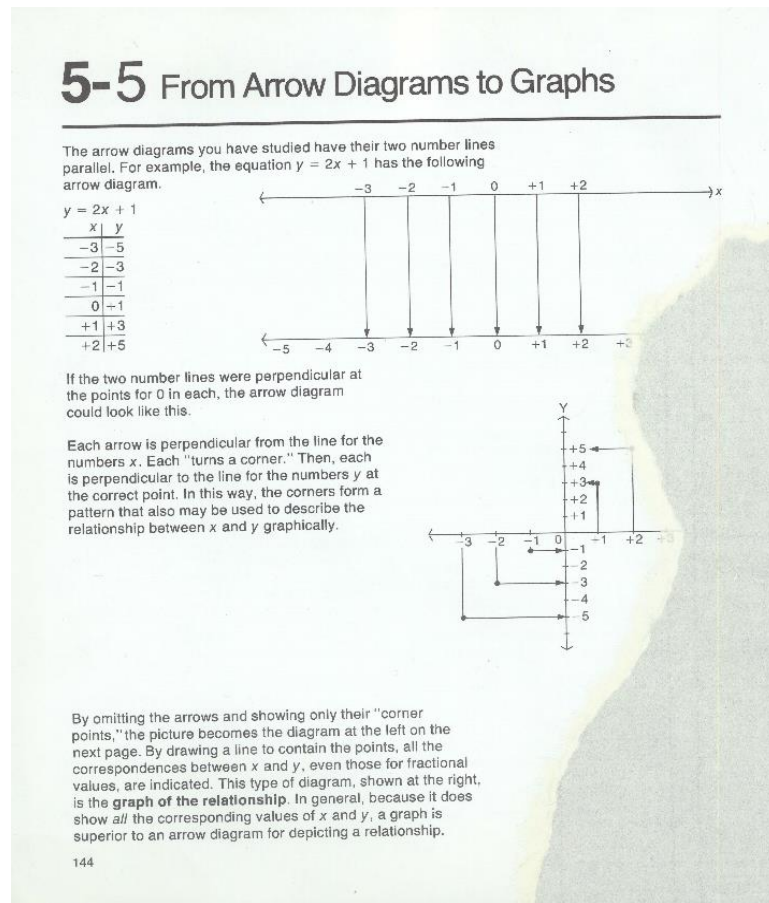


Figure 59. Repaired grade 9 textbook page with Japanese rice paper. (2017) Image Credit: Amanda May

c) *Monotype Print*

I took the monotype print workshop at the Centre for Crafts Nova Scotia. A Monotype image is transferred from the piece of Plexiglass onto a sheet of paper by pressing the two together, using a printing press. The first week I did not bring any found objects to class but the instructor provided some materials to work with and this became my source of inspiration. In the box was old tatty pieces of clothes, mostly pockets. The next week I took children's clothes I bought at the Halifax Salvation Army Thrift store as a source of exploration. I also took a discarded textbook.

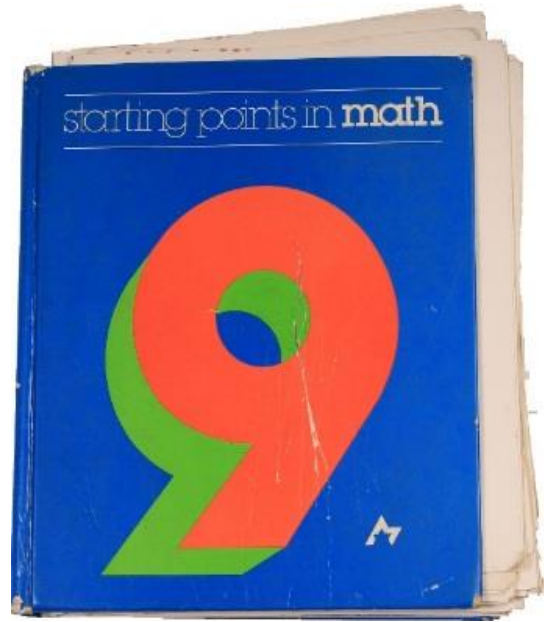


Figure 60. Discarded grade 9 textbook. (2017). Textbook. Image Credit: Amanda May

In 2016, I found a discarded math textbook, *Starting Points in Math*, at a used book sale. I had used this book in the ninth grade. I remembered it vividly because I failed grade 9 math, as well as grades 7 and 8 math. There were three copies tossed in a box with other discarded textbooks. A piece of my academic past I once used. First published in 1982, the dents and cuts in this book shows its students' learning journey. Several triangular indentions and straight lines on the cover are evident upon closer inspection, revealing a shallow crack through the 9.



Figure 61. Cover of grade 9 math textbook with a shallow crack through the 9.(2018)
Image Credit. Brett Kibber



Figure 62.The thread broken in a ninth grade math textbook. (2017). Image Credit. Brett Kibbler

I had no specific plans for the textbook in the workshop but I sat looking at my grade 9 textbook suddenly feeling the urge to rip out the pages. I began to rip the pages out and the thread that bounded the pages broke, I decided to pull the thread from the pages rather than pulling the pages from the thread and spine. I was surprised by the extent in which the thread held this book together. After returning home from the workshop, I photographed the thread. I began to see through the camera lens the thread come alive as if my life story with its twists, turns, and ups and downs was revealed. I discovered the thread still held the memory of the pages that once bound it. I set the thread free (see *Figure 63*).

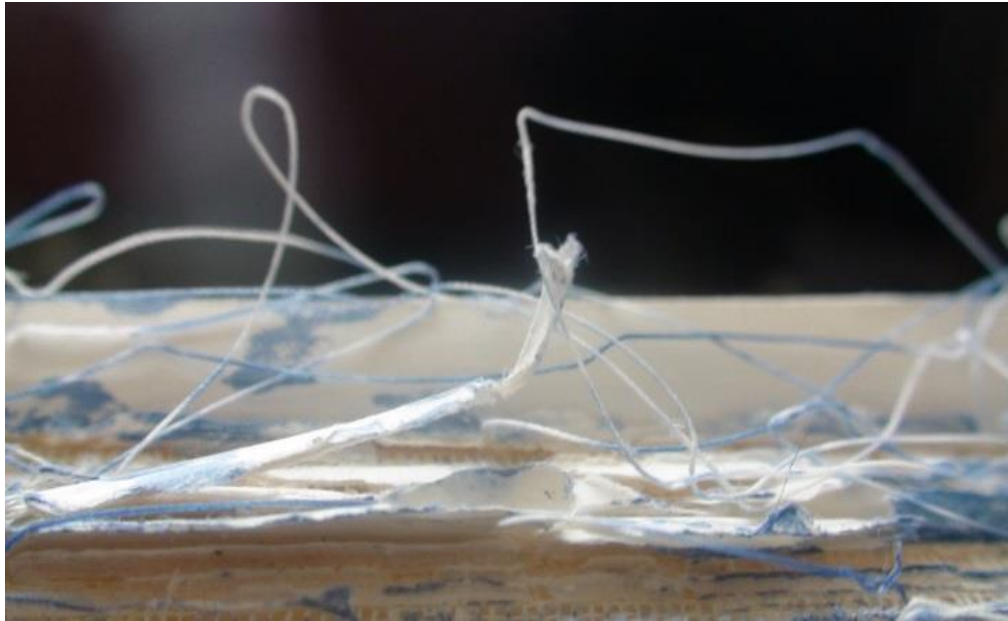


Figure 63. The thread still holds the memory of the pages it bound.. (2017). Textbook. Image Credit: Amanda May.



Figure 64. Monotype print of the thread and spine of the altered ninth grade textbook. (2017). Textbook, ink, plexiglass, print press, paper. Image Credit: Amanda May.

Graffiti.

When I was photographing this textbook, I noticed the graffiti and former students reminders to self “must know” and “do over” in the grade 9 textbook. Although this textbook is a learning tool, it reflects a social, emotional and academic interaction of the learners on the pages. As an adolescent I could relate to the words “Fuck You.” Inside the cover were names of former students. “Sherry loves Ian” one student wrote; while another student wrote, “Hi there everyone, 1988.” I wondered about the journey of this particular textbook and the students who carried it since its publication in 1982. I wondered where the students’ lives had taken them.

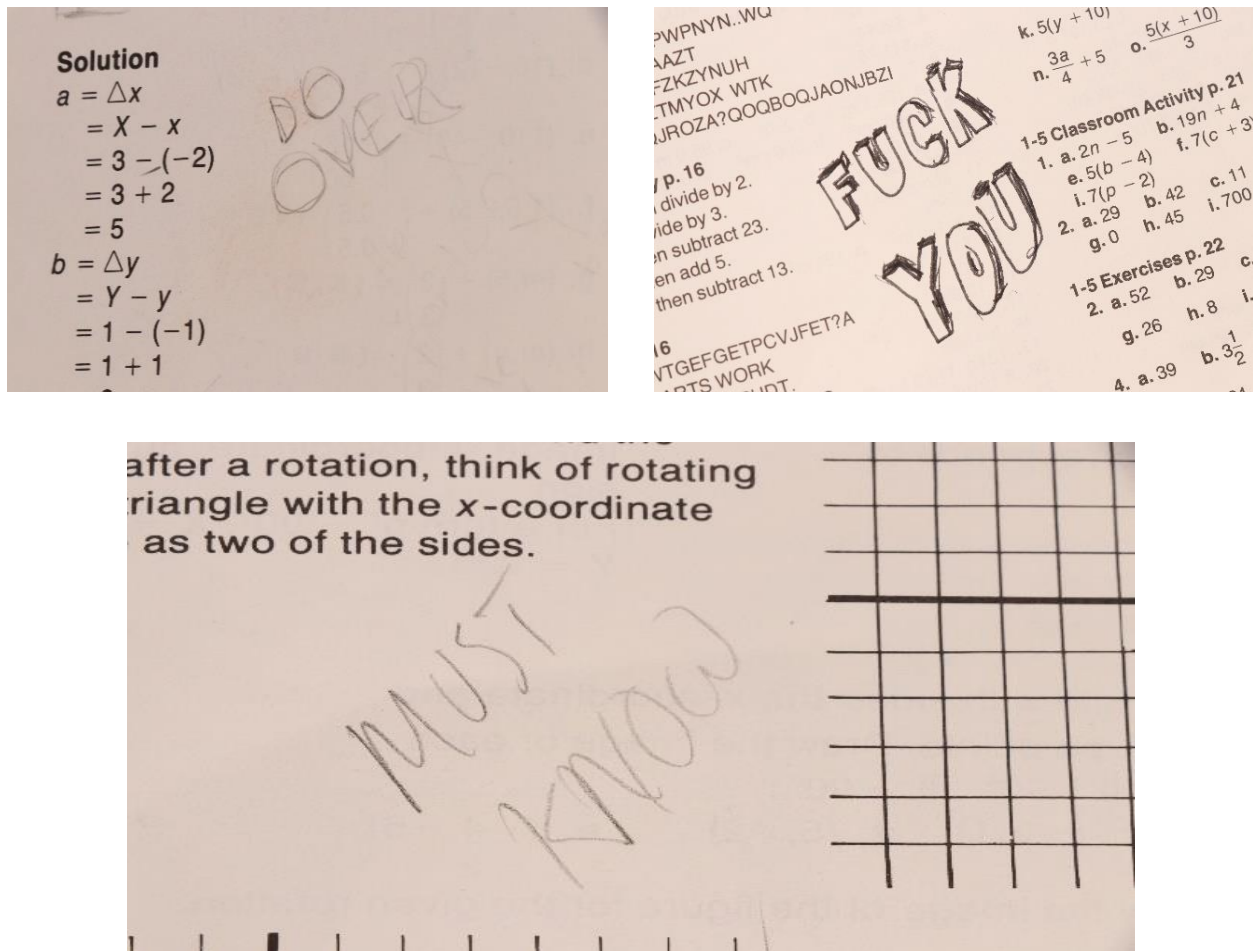


Figure 65. Students' thoughts in the ninth grade textbook. (2017). Textbook. Image Credit: Amanda May.

Classes - Nova Scotia Collage of Art and Design**a) *Mixed Media***

I am Free from the Pages that Bind Me.

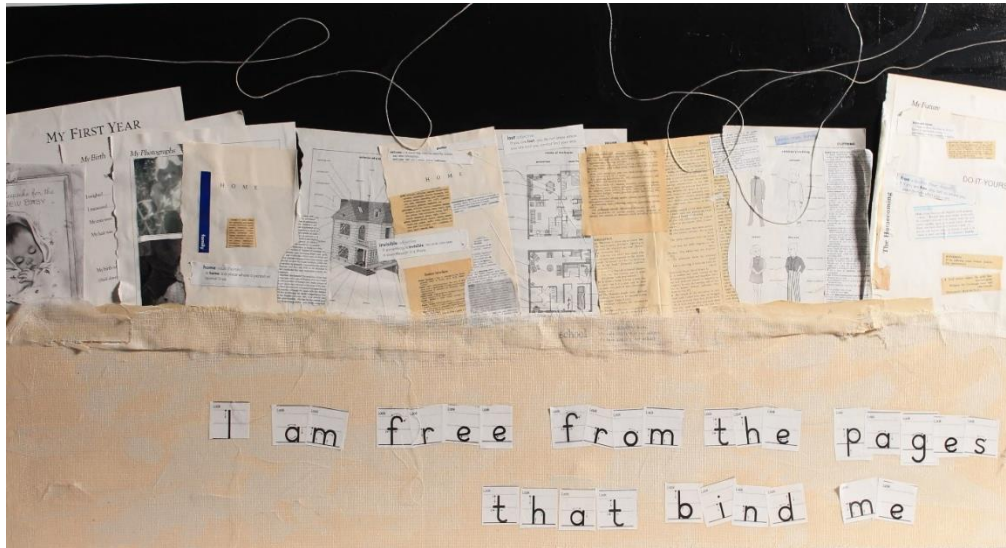


Figure 66. I am Free from the Pages that Bind Me. (2017). Dictionary pages, thread, acrylic paint, book binding mull, glue, tracing letters. Image Credit: Amanda May.

The pages ripped out of my grade 9 textbook inspired this art piece. It was an exploration of the pages that bound me. Using various dictionaries including a student dictionary and visual dictionaries. I looked up various words including “adversity,” “foster child,” “child welfare system,” “history,” “grief,” and “family.” I used tracing letters from a student’s letter tracing book, thread and binding mull which is the material found in the spine of the book.

Exhausted Learner

Figure 67. *Exhausted Learner*. (2017). School supplies, acrylic paints, zippers, beads. Image Credit: Amanda May.

The mixed media piece *Exhausted Learner* stems from my own learning experience. As a learner, I experience invisible adversity. From K through grade 12, I went through 19 years in foster care, including eleven foster home placements. The backpack, representing the exhausted learner, was created from layers of acrylic paints and actual school supplies including an eraser, a pencil sharpener, broken crayons, pencils and a protractor. As an adult learner, I reflected on these experiences and understood who I

was as a learner in the context of adversity. The mixed media instructor, Vanessa Vaughan posed the questions: What is revealed? What stays hidden? Upon reflection of this piece, I asked: What is hidden yet revealed? All our life experience comes to school with us as learners.

The following excerpts from my care and custody file. These are comments from a foster parent as recorded by a social worker while I was in grade 9. “*They feel Amanda does not have*

any interest in her school work and puts little into the work she does do.” When reviewing the summary notes of the same year it stated that I had been in three foster homes during the year.

Finding the Value of X and the Story of Y

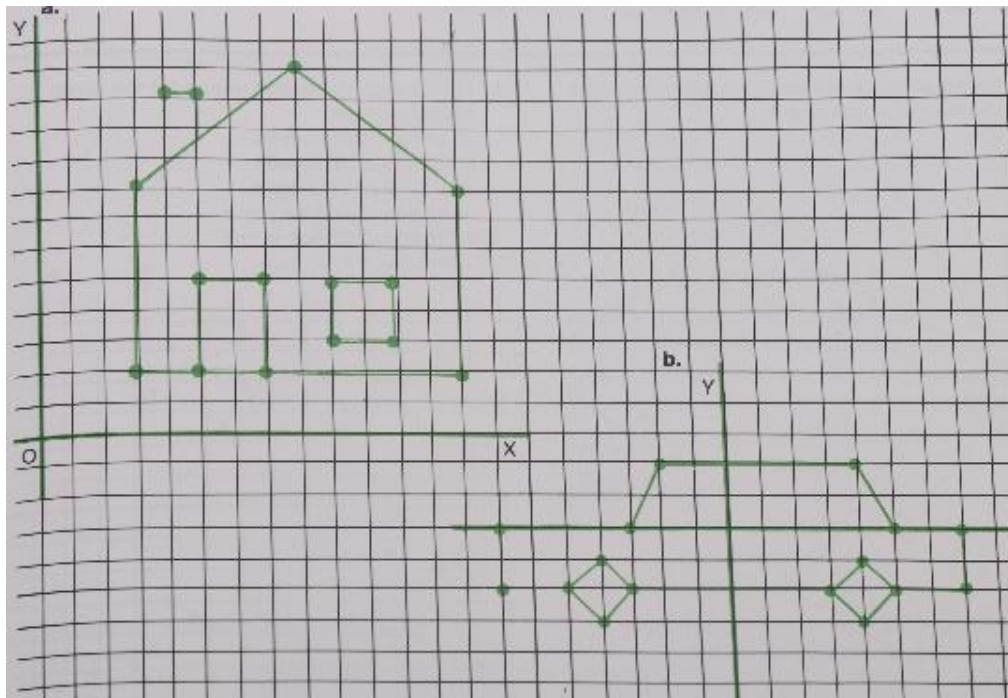


Figure 68. House and car on X and Y grid in an altered ninth grade textbook. (2017). Textbook. Image Credit: Amanda May



Figure 69. Creating different images using the house on a grid. (2017). Textbook image, acrylic paints, canvas, glue, paint brush, scissors. Image Credit: Amanda May.

Finding the Value of X and the Story of Y is an art piece from my acrylic painting class at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. I had an image of a house and car on an X and Y grid from the grade 9 math textbook I had used and discovered at a book sale. This piece is an investigation of the intersection between home, family, and the learner.

A home is central to any child but, for a foster child, home represents displacement. As I flipped through the pages of my grade 9 textbook, I came upon an image of a house and car and made a mixed media piece. In this exploration, I cut out parts of the house and used the images of the car to represent movement from one community to another and from one house to another. I cut out windows and doors, and placed a photograph of my infant self in the house (see *Figure 70*).

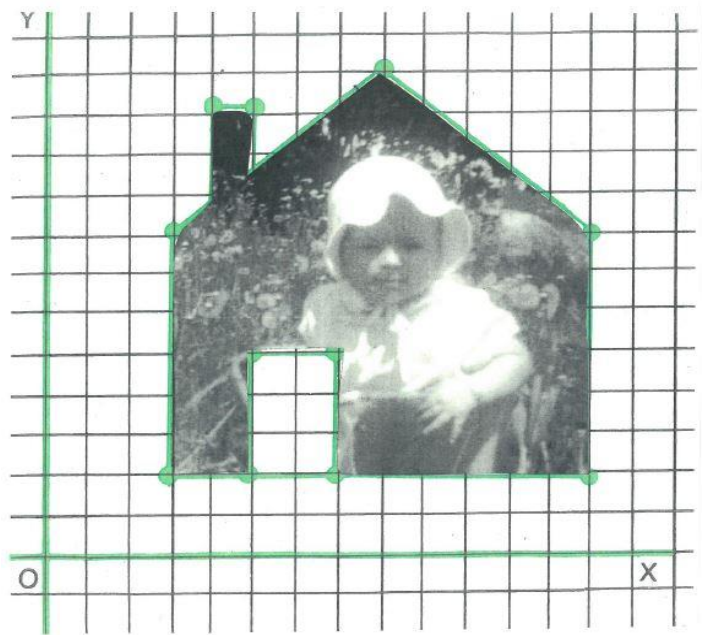


Figure 70. Childhood picture placed in a house on a grid in my altered grade 9 textbook. (2017). Photograph, textbook image. Image Credit. Amanda May.

b) Acrylic Painting

Self-Portrait



Figure 73. Baby self-portrait finished. (2017). Acrylic, canvas, brush. Image Credit: Amanda May



Figure 72. Baby Photograph.(1970). Image Credit: Unknown

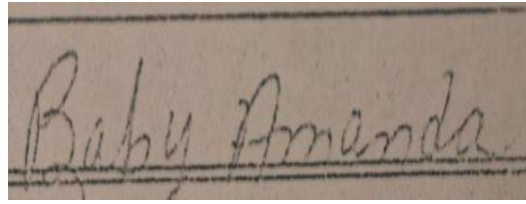


Figure 71. "Baby Amanda" written on the hospital admission chart. (1971). Hospital report. Image Credit: Amanda May.

In this acrylic painting class at NSCAD, under the instruction of Charlotte Marble, I was required to bring a black and white photograph. Using a grey scale, which is white to black with various shades of greys. I traced my black and white childhood photograph on tracing paper and then used transfer paper to transpose it on the canvas. For this assignment we were required to use only the grey scale. Although I did not finish this painting in class I do feel its completed.

Exploration of Eye.

Under the instruction of Charlotte Marble, in my acrylic painting class, we were required to research an impressionist painter. During my research, I found a painting titled: Eye of the Impressionist. This seemed appropriate since I was exploring the theme of eye. With the permission of the instructor, I explored the details of an eye through a replication of Taylor Wise's *Eye of the Impressionist*. I divided Wise's image on the canvas into one-inch grids and drew an eye in the matching grid on the canvas. The task of reproducing a painting became an exploration of the intimate details of the eye.

Figure 74. Eye of the Impressionist.
(n.d) Photocopy of print with a one inch grid. Image Credit: Amanda May.



Figure 75. Replication of Taylor Wise, Eye of the Impressionist. (2017). Acrylic Paints, canvas, paint brushes. Image Credit: Amanda May.

“Eye” am a Survivor.

“Eye” am a Survivor is a piece that acknowledges and pays tribute to my wounded eye’s resilience. An eye is painted in the top right corner. My left eye sees abstractly, with no defining features.

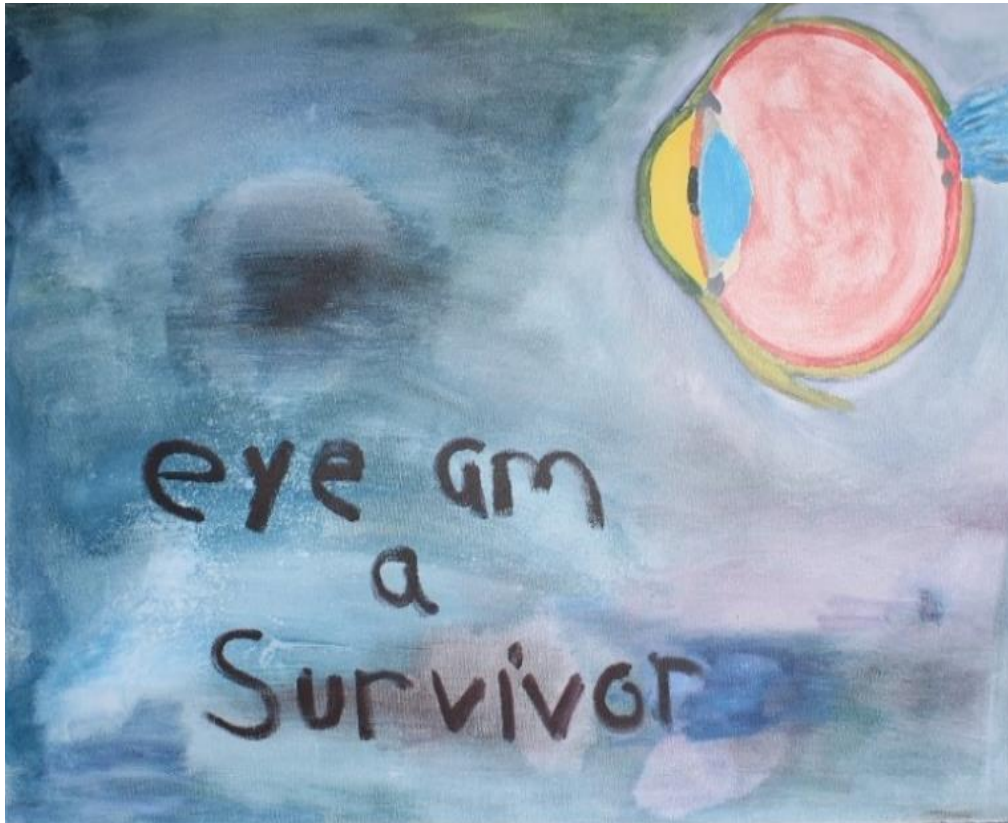


Figure 76. *“Eye” am a Survivor*. (2017). Canvas, acrylic paint, paint brush.
Image Credit: Amanda May.

Does she have sight in this eye?
Yes, she does have sight in that eye, I did not expect that she would but she does,

Figure 77. *Eye surgeon’s testimony*. (1971). Court transcripts. Image Credit: Amanda May.

c) Drawing

Exploration of I

Under the guidance of Patrick Rapati, I drew a self-portrait while looking in the mirror using a Conte pencil and charcoal. Finding an entry point to my wound and capturing its essence was difficult. I reflected upon the time in my life I wanted to have my eye removed.

I soften the lines on my face with a cloth which was a very nurturing experience; a reminder to be gentle and compassionate with myself.



Figure 79. Self-portrait in progress. (2017). Paper, conte pencil. Image Credit: Amanda May



Figure 78. Self-portrait.(2017). Paper, conte pencil. Image Credit:Amanda May

In this exercise, I explored drawing with my left and right hand without looking at the paper.

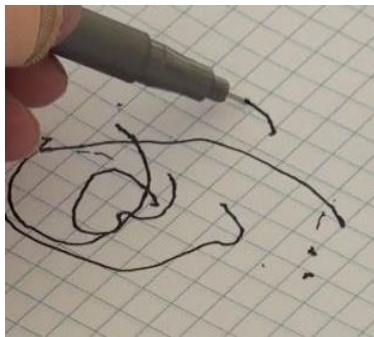
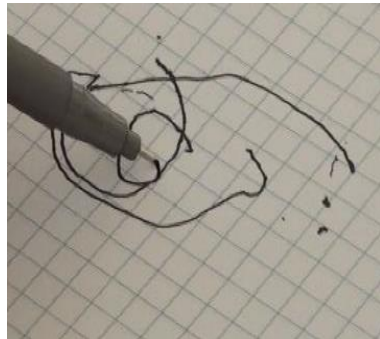
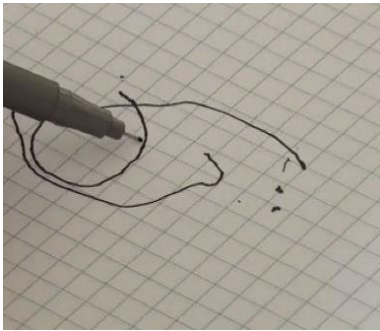


Figure 80. Pictures of my eye drawn with left hand. (2017). Graph paper, pencil. Image Credit: Amanda May

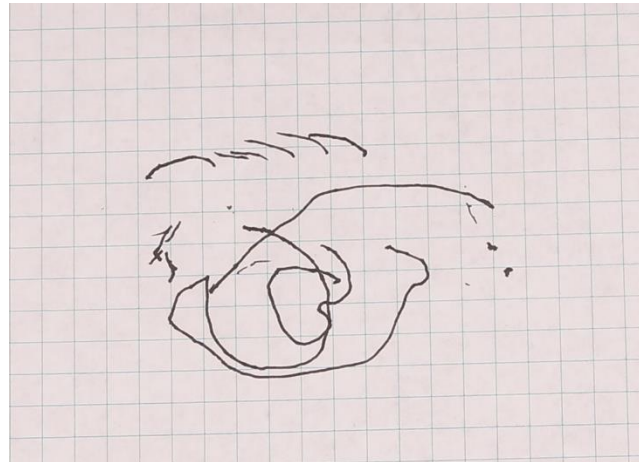


Figure 81. Picture of my left eye drawn with my left hand without looking at the page. Graph paper, pencil. (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May

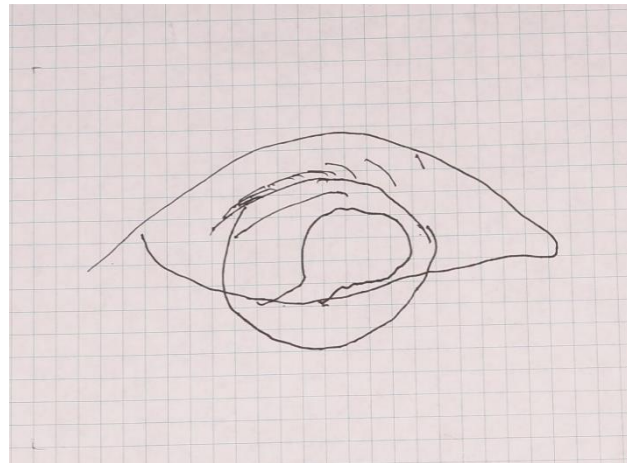


Figure 82. Picture of my left eye drawn with my right hand without looking at the page. (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May

d) Bookbinding

I was altering books, repairing books and now making books. In the book binding classes at the Dawson Print Shop Dawson collection is housed in more than a thousand of these drawers. Each holds various type, little metal or wood letters or objects that have to be arranged on a press, ink rolled over them and pressed onto paper.

In this class, under the guidance of Joe Landry, I explored the art of making books. I learned how to customize my own book from scratch both with stitching and gluing. In making a book cover, I looked through various print block drawers to find a source of inspiration. I came upon a drawer labelled “Clocks and Calendars”, a timely theme, and opened it to find a block print of a clock with a reversed face pointing to 4 o’clock, as well as two calendars, one with the days removed.



Figure 83. Drawers of block prints in the Dawson Print Shop (2018). Image Credit: Amanda May.



Figure 84. Drawers of block prints in the Dawson Print Shop. (2018). Image Credit: Amanda May



Figure 85. A drawer labeled “Calendars and Clocks” – a calendar with a block print with days removed. (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May



Figure 86. The ruts left behind as days are removed from a calendar (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May.

In this exploration, I thought about the days I had lost due to debilitating grief, and the amount of time it requires to move through traumatic experiences. I believe whoever etched these days out of the calendar knew deep grief. The reverse clock reminded me of when I

thought I was moving forward but had to go back to address unresolved grief. I discovered that the days of unresolved trauma, grief and loss are now gone.



Figure 87. Print block of a clock with a reversed face. (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May.



Figure 88. Print blocks of a clock, calendar and a calendar with days removed. (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May

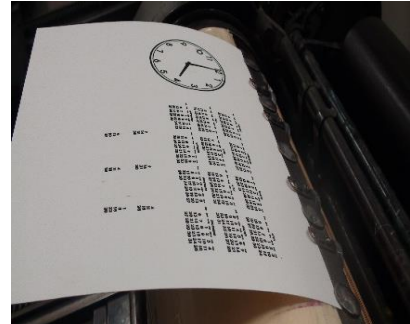


Figure 89. Cover of the book themed time on a print press machine. (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May

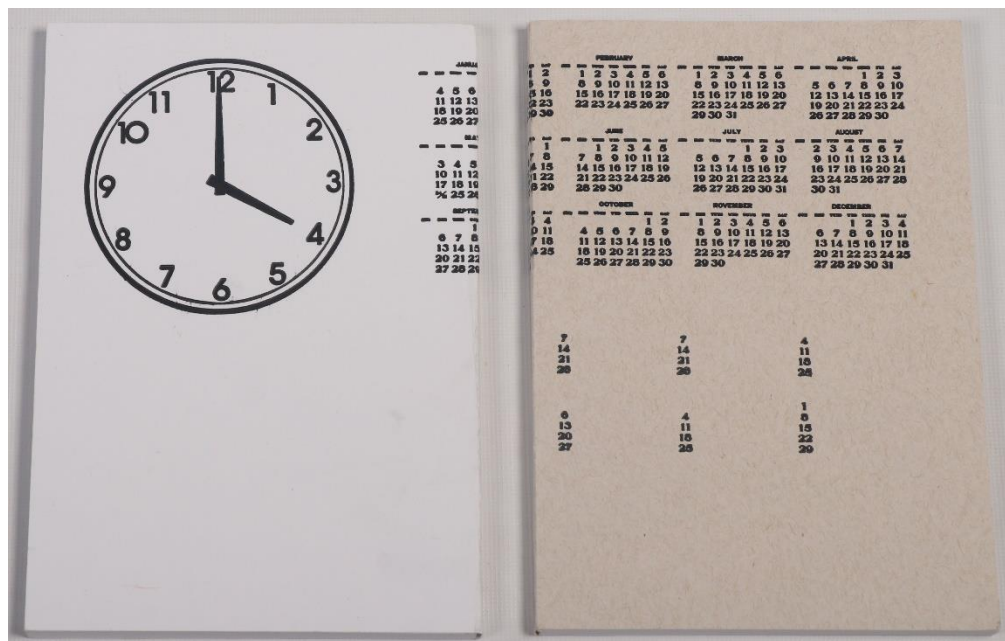


Figure 90. The completed book back and front. (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May



Figure 91. Amanda painting a eye chart with left eye while right eye is covered with an eye patch.(2016). Acrylic, paint brush, paper. Image Credit: Julie Diebolt – Price.

An arts-informed methodology comprising of altered books and art classes assisted in my understanding of myself as a learner and others as a learner. As an adult, my foster care experience has shifted from being the central part of my life story onto the periphery. My story has become about my relationship with my wound eye. My eye taught me to see differently. I learned that my eye has its own history. I became aware of my eye's own trauma and adversities. The wound is raw and vulnerable, yet its inner strength, beauty, and resilience have emerged throughout my art process. Wounds carry wisdom I have discovered.

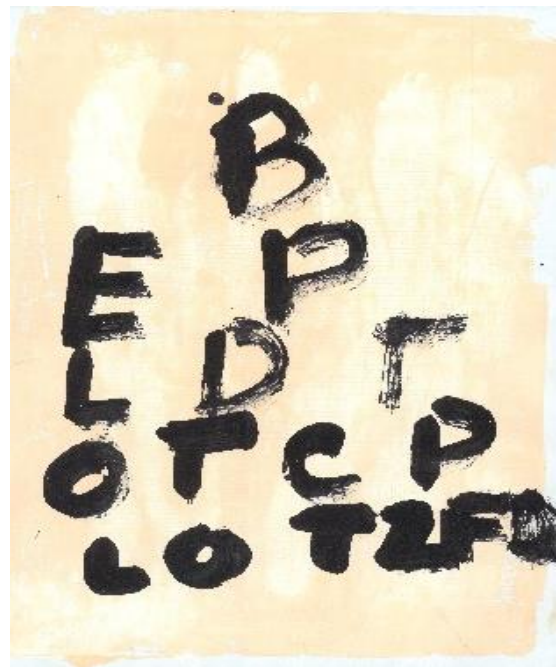


Figure 92. Eye chart painted with my left hand. (2016). Acrylic paint, paper. Image Credit: Amanda May.

prepared the wound and pupil

Figure 93. "Prepared the wound and pupil" is an excerpt from the eye doctor's description of surgery in testimony during court proceedings leading to my placement into foster care in 1971.

CHAPTER FOUR:

PREPARED THE WOUND AND PUPIL

The Pocket Metaphor. A pocket represents the things we carry. Inevitably, the pocket is impacted by what is carried. The images of the pockets I used represent the diversity of learners. Notice how the pockets are affected by the burden they carry within.



Figure 95. Unaffected pocket. (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May



Figure 94. Pocket impacted by what was carried. (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May

A Classroom of Diverse Learners

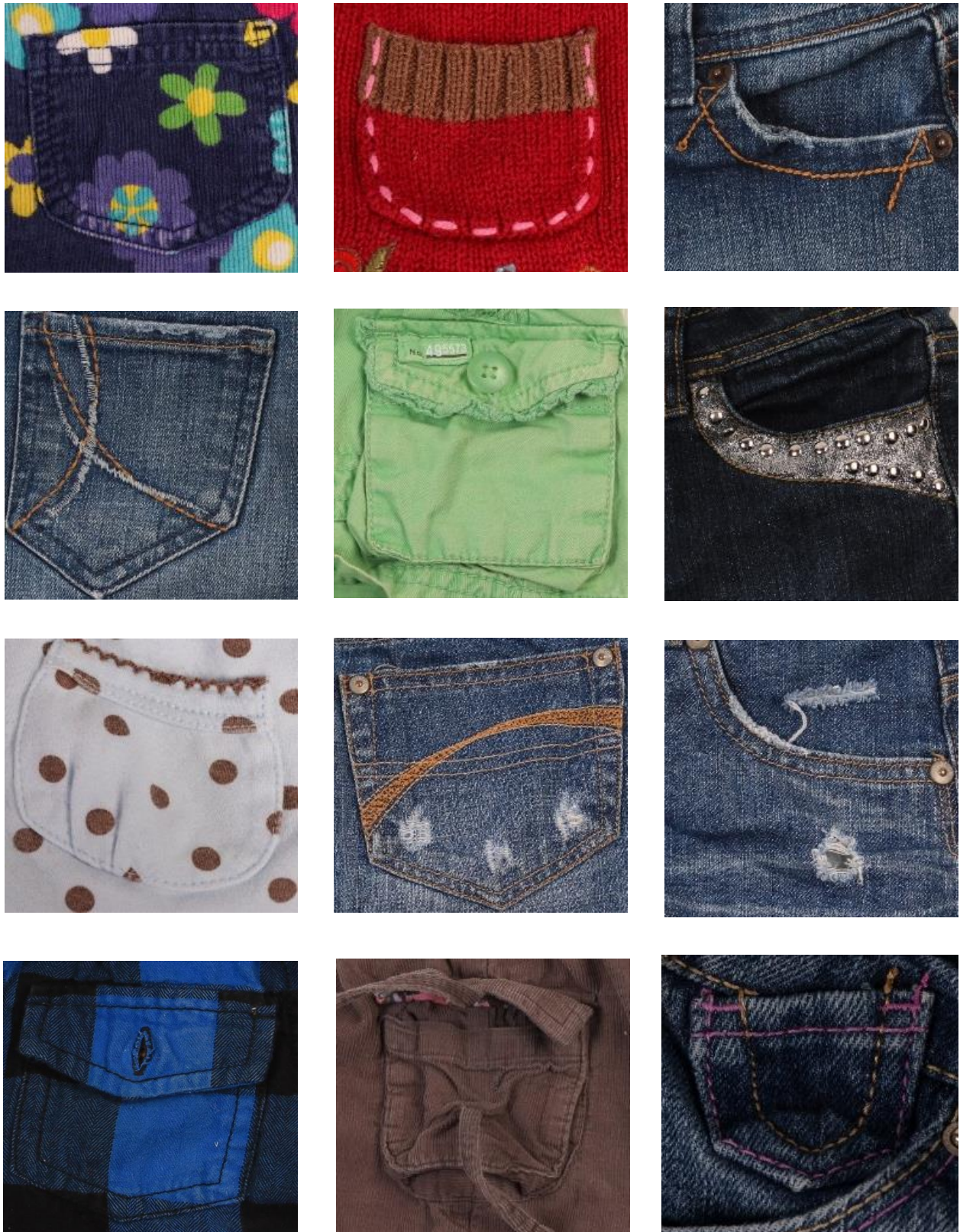


Figure 96. Children's clothing pockets. (2017). Image Credit: Amanda May

Literature Review

Trauma and Learning

Achieving a consensus definition of trauma is essential for progress in the field of traumatic stress; however, creating an all-purpose, general definition has proven remarkably difficult. Stressors varies along a number of dimensions, together with the magnitude which itself varies on a number of dimensions which includes threat of harm, interpersonal loss, complexity, frequency, duration, predictability, and controllability (Weathers & Terence, 2007). Brunzell, Strokes, and Walters (2016) suggest A simple trauma can be defined as a brief-occurrence or one-time event that threatens bodily injury or serious harm. Complex trauma, sometimes referred to as relationship trauma, describes traumatic exposure that can be longer in duration and involves multiple incidents, ongoing personal threat, violence, and violation (Brunzell, Strokes, and Walters, 2016).

Eric Rossen and Robert Hull (2013) assert that trauma can interfere with the healthy development of academic and cognitive skills necessary to read, write, listen effectively, speak clearly, think abstractly, process information well, and solve problems. In order to learn, a student must possess the ability to focus, pay attention, comprehend, organize thoughts, and assimilate presented material. Students impacted by trauma often have difficulty processing verbal, nonverbal, and written instruction. In many cases this short-circuits their ability to learn. Rossen and Hull (2013) suggest that trauma often results in diminished concentration and memory, loss of focus or perspective, confusion, rigidity, self-doubt, perfectionism, difficulty in making decisions, hypervigilance, and impaired thinking. Prolonged periods of trauma can impair the ability to learn for months or even years, creating a barrier to academic success. This is further affirmed in a study by Hope Bell, Dobie Limberg, and Edward Robinson (2013)

delineates the symptoms of trauma and gives classroom examples of how these symptoms might manifest physically, behaviourally, emotionally, and cognitively.

Educational Vulnerability of Foster Children.

A subcategory of trauma – impacted students are those who are or have experienced foster care. Researcher Susan Kools (1997) defines foster care as:

Residence in a supervised setting outside the biological family as mandated by the social services or juvenile justice system. Foster care placements for children and adolescents include foster family care, group homes, and various forms of residential treatment (p.263).

According to The National Post, the 2012 Canadian census was the first time the number of foster children removed from their families was recorded (Kirkley, 2012). Approximately 47,885 children are in care and custody across this country; and of those, approximately 960 children were in care of the government in Nova Scotia. (Statistics Canada, 2012). Hundreds of children are placed into care across Nova Scotia.

In a study reported on by the Harvard Medical School, the University of Michigan and Casey Family Programs (Plotkin, 2011), former foster children are almost twice as likely to suffer from post - traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as U.S. war veterans. Furthermore, The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, which traced 659 alumni of the Oregon and Washington state welfare agencies, found that “former foster children also have low completion rates for post - secondary education and lower employment rates compared to the general population” (Pecora, Kessler, Williams, O’Brien, Downs, English, White, Hiripi, Wiggins, and Holmes, 2005, p. 3).

Lauren Palmieri and Tamika LaSalle (2017) state that students in foster care who progress through the foster care system face diverse challenges. They include displacement from their families, friends, belongings, familiarity and culture. A history such as this places students at risk for experiencing many challenges at school. Andrea Zetlion and Lois Weinberg (2005) and Lauren Palmieri and Tamika LaSalle (2017) found that foster care students have difficulties paying attention, following directions, socializing, and controlling their emotions, leading to poor academic outcomes. However, students in foster care have shown characteristics of resilience, despite the overwhelming challenges they face. Positive educational experiences contribute to resiliency, and serve as a resource in helping students recover from trauma and stressful home environments.

The Role of Teachers

Teachers want to help students impacted by trauma while still meeting the needs of the larger group. This is a difficult yet critical balancing act. Teachers play an important role in the lives of students, they often witness the lived experiences students bring into the classroom. A semi-structured study conducted by Eva Alisic (2012) with elementary school teachers, which highlighted concerns about working with students who have experienced trauma. Alisic found that most of the teachers felt uncertain about the best way to offer optimal support to traumatized children. They felt their role as teacher was unclear and expressed a need for increased knowledge and training to better balance and respond to the conflicting needs of traumatized students and their classmates.

Pedagogy of Witness and Testimony

In one study, Elizabeth Dutro (2009) defines testimony and witness in relation to students and teachers in the classroom. Testimony is defined as the multiple parts of a student's life that can either be very apparent or very subtle. On the other hand, she defines witness as the way in which teachers recognize and respond to testimony. Often students, who have difficult lived experiences have difficulties in school because they feel they have to hide their emotional distress. Dutro and Andrea Bien (2014) conducted a study on adverse lived experiences of students. They state: "Teachers and students are all too often asked to live and teach within schools and classrooms in spaces in which the emotional and personal can be bracketed from the cognitive" (p. 243).

Bell, Limberg and Robinson (2013) emphasize the importance of promoting a safe environment to support all students and have outlined the best practices for educator. As education systems have an ethical duty to assist all students. Acknowledgement and recognition of trauma in the classroom can led to early intervention.

Philip Bernhardt's (2009) study explored issues of identity, history, and lived experience in ways that broke the boundaries that had existed in his classroom. He begins his project with the question, "How can the use of autobiography create a curricular space which values and embraces student voice, encourages an ethic of care and understanding between students, and embodies both the lived and living experiences?" (p.62). Bernhardt's class project explores self as an important aspect of the classroom experience and in order to connect lives with what students are learning in school creating space for voice. Bernhardt's classroom became a space where students could develop meaningful relationship with classmates, personal creativity was valued and embraced. He goes on to say, "I witnessed how, over the course of a few weeks, a

group of strangers can develop into a well-connected community of learners who were sincerely concerned for the success and well-being of one another” (p. 66). Bernhardt also shows how creating this connected community of learners can be challenging for teachers. Bernhardt recounts one student began to cry during the autographical process. “When I saw tears rolling down her face, I realized I was not really sure how to handle the situation.” (p. 65).

Kelly Wissman and Angela Wiseman (2011) conducted a study that included the story of Sherie, a grade 8 student living in foster care. Through a poetry class, Sherie was given the opportunity to share a poem about being sexually abused by her mother’s boyfriend. Her positive engagement in her English class was unique, and she attributed it to having opportunities to write about self-selected topics and to developing close relationships within the class. In school, teachers had identified her as a student who was at high risk of dropping out because of her negative attitude towards learning and her disregard for homework; however, when given the opportunity to share her lived experiences in English class, she was highly engaged and responsive, often volunteering answers and asking questions. For researchers, teachers, and students, sharing trauma narrative within schools carries a definite risk; however, these researchers assert that Sherie’s case demonstrates the possibility and potential of connecting students’ experiences with their literacy practices in school.

William Ayers, as cited in William Pinar (1995) has argued that it is the insider’s view of crisis that is missing from the literature. It is critical to understand how students understand their situation. Ayers suggests that scholars should work with children to “convey their lives as they present them, to portray the world with immediacy as they see it” (p. 24). This approach is reflected in the case studies discussed earlier that showed the impact of giving voice to students’ lived experiences. School has the potential to be a powerful force toward normalizing the lives of

students in foster care and can help build the skills that these students need to support themselves as adults.

In conclusion, throughout the literature it is well documented that traumatic events impact students' learning. Although childhood trauma is a broad issue affecting many students, foster children are particularly at risk for traumatic experience and academic failure. Lived experiences are brought into the classroom, making teachers witness to the emotional learning journeys of students. Although telling personal stories in the classroom has risk, research has shown that it can be beneficial to students academically and personally.

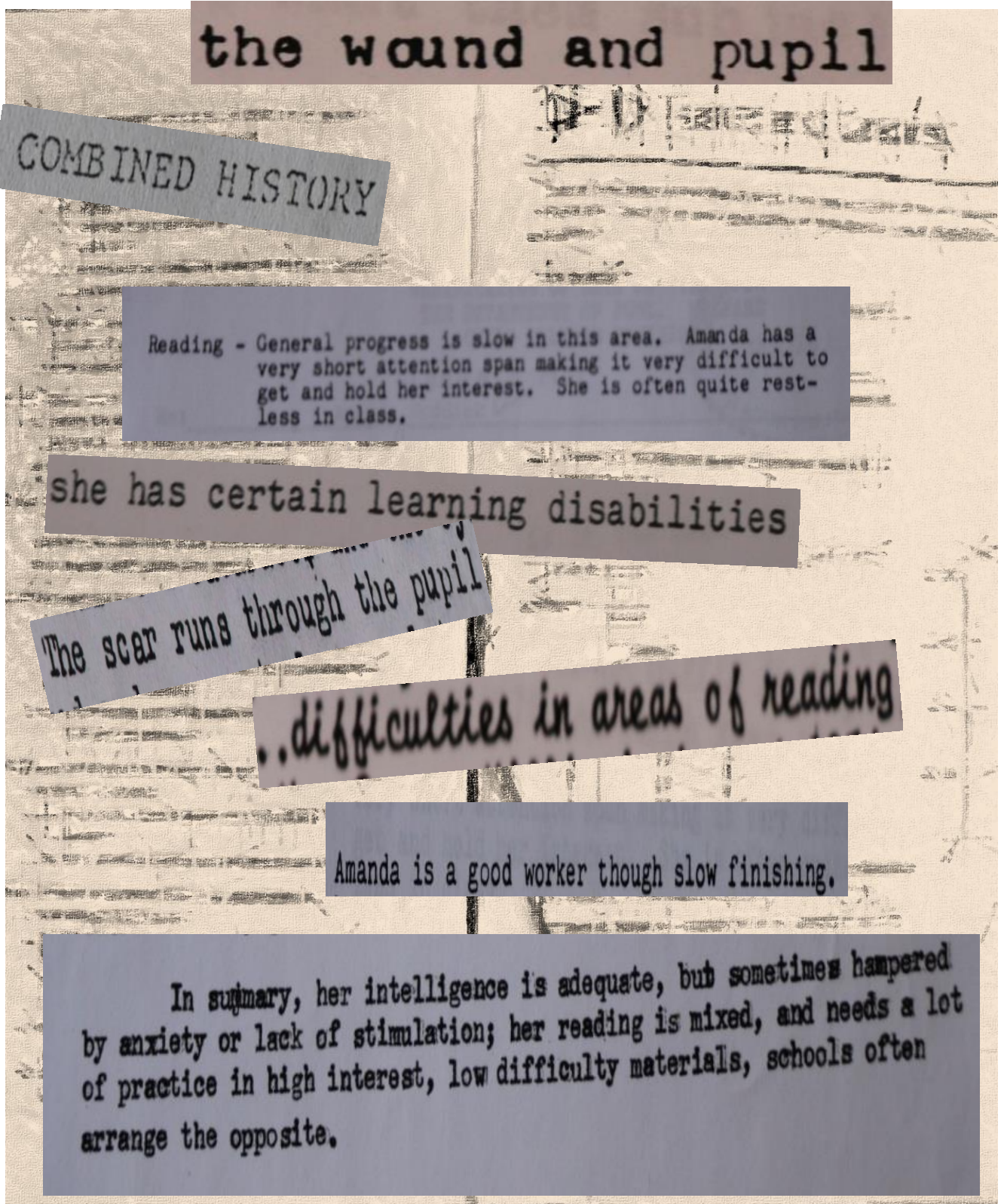


Figure 97. "The wound and pupil" is a collage of third-party accounts from my elementary school teachers, a school psychologist, and an eye doctor found in my Care and Custody File, 1978. Image Credit: Amanda May.

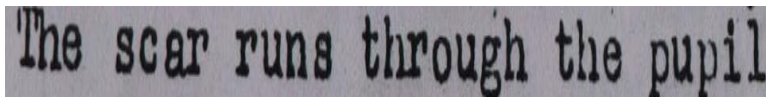


Figure 98. “The scar runs through the pupil” is an excerpt from the eye doctor’s description of the eye injury in court proceedings, 1971.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE SCAR RUNS THROUGH THE PUPIL

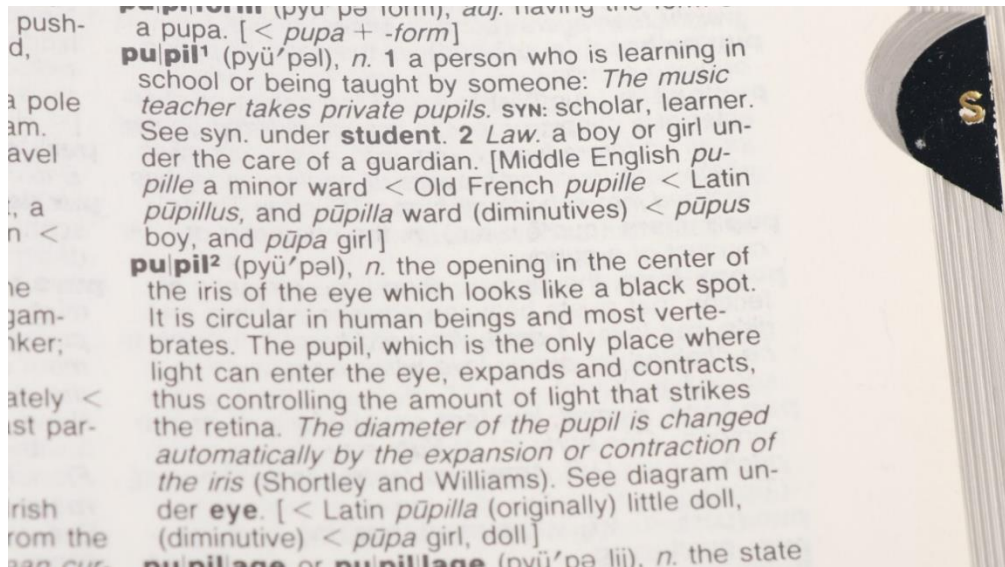


Figure 99. Definition of pupil.(2018). Dictionary. Image Credit: Amanda May

There are two definitions of the word pupil – one describes the part of the eye and the other the learner. (Avis, Gregg and Scargill, 1979).

Trauma-informed care and its importance for students with adverse lived experience are discussed in this chapter. Educational institutions address the academic requirements of our learners, but they do far more than that. Here, I discuss the process of how I raised awareness of the impacts of childhood trauma through my altered textbook, Human Library participation, and community engagement at the Nocturne: Art at Night. I explore use of altered books in

elementary and high school curricula, as well as these tools to engage discussion on traumatic lived experiences of students. As with all caregiving institutions, schools are a significant and long-term social environment; a forum where youth learn about themselves, others, and the world. Here children and adolescents succeed, fail, gain competency, and/or internalize vulnerability. They experiment, they express their ideas and they lay a foundation for future roles. Without question, our school experiences help shape who we ultimately become.

In grade school, my academic performance was impeded as a result of adversity. When I left the child welfare system and moved on to post-secondary education, my unresolved trauma impacted the experience and led to academic failures, withdrawals and deferrals. I did not know how to navigate the education system, or self-advocate my learning needs to university professors. Having to deal with past issues made my undergraduate education longer than average. As a result, my transcripts were not a reflection of my academic capabilities, but rather a representation of my childhood adversity. During this prolonged journey, I was unable to understand and recognize my strengths and weaknesses as a learner. Therefore, I never asked myself, “Who am I as a learner?” I now know I am a learner in the context of adversity. Foster children often lack the financial resources and emotional support and guidance in an academic setting, according to Shannon Davidson, a researcher with Education Northwest (p. 9). This was certainly my experience as I struggled to navigate the school and university settings and understand myself as a learner.

Implications of Trauma - Informed Approaches: A Call to Action

Despite society's efforts to protect children from harm, many young people undergo profoundly distressing life experiences that severely affect their development and functioning. There is ample evidence that psychological trauma in children and adolescents nationwide is commonplace, but not outside the range of normal human experience. Schools can no longer just be a place where a child goes to learn; they must become an epicentre of social and emotional development. A shift to being more trauma-informed will make way for maximum academic growth.



Figure 100. Altered textbook in an old school desk. (2018). Image Credit: Michelle Doucette

If educational environments avoid validating damaging childhood experiences, the toxicity of trauma will simply corrode the potential of learning. Children and adolescents who are exposed to traumatic events can access a number of child-serving agencies for help and information about health, mental health, education, child welfare, first responders, and the criminal justice systems, to assist them in their recovery. Service providers need to incorporate a trauma-informed perspective in their practices, to enhance the quality of care for children in need. This includes making sure children and adolescents are screened for trauma exposure,

service providers use evidence-informed practices, trauma resources are available to providers, survivors, and their families and there is continuity of care across service systems. Schools have long been identified as ideal entry points for mental health services for children; however, most school-based mental health programs do not systematically screen, assess, or provide counseling or referrals for traumatic stress problems (Margaret Paccione-Dyszlewski, 2016). Trauma confronts schools with a dilemma: how to balance the primary mission of education with the reality that many students need



Figure 101. Discarded textbooks. (2018)
Image Credit: Michelle Docuette.

help to deal with traumatic stress so they can attend regularly and engage in the learning process.

Margaret Paccione-Dyszlewski (2016) suggests trauma-informed care is an organizational, structural and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing and responding to all types of trauma. Trauma research can make available the backstory for many student difficulties that trouble our educational system. Armed with this awareness, it is time for schools to adjust their cultures and become more trauma-informed. She states:

A central concept of being trauma-informed is that everyone who interacts with a student should assume that every child has trauma in their background and acts accordingly.

Educators need to have an understanding of all the symptoms of toxic stress, as well as how they present in a school setting. A culture based on trust and acceptance goes a long way

toward creating a positive learning environment that can heal and transcend the effects of toxic stress” (p. 554).

E. Getzel as cited in Janice Carello and Lisa Bulter (2015) suggest the importance of, “increasing the awareness of instructional faculty on students with disabilities and incorporating concepts of universal design into faculty instruction and curriculum that benefits all students in their learning process” (p.265). Trauma-informed and universal design theories have similar principles, in that they are strengths-based, person-centered and solution-focused. A trauma-informed approach also recognizes that many survivors face difficulties functioning in certain environments. The goal of trauma-informed education practice is to, “remove potential barriers to learning, not to remove traumatic, sensitive, or difficult material from the curriculum” (p.265).

More attention must be given to implementing school-wide trauma-informed approaches in the design and structure of professional development for all school personnel. The role of universities is also changing to meet increasing community needs. Moreover, how they partner with schools should continue to change as well since voluntary, service-orientated school - university partnerships are here to stay (Anderson, Blitz & Saastamoinen, 2015). Schools are now asking for help from university social work and teacher education faculties, to help them better support children’s cognitive and social-emotional development. Incorporating trauma-informed approaches in school settings is critical to meeting the needs of children who have experienced multiple adverse circumstances. University involvement can bring expertise into public schools, and help develop innovative models to address complex needs and support optimal student outcomes.

Abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, poverty and other adverse childhood experiences have profound health, social and emotional consequences for individuals

across the lifespan. Research indicates that adverse childhood experiences are common across cultures and socioeconomic strata, and yet few health and human services providers graduate from training programs with the competencies that need to address the impact of trauma and toxic stress. (Lieberman, 2016)

Shannon Davidson (2016) also advises, “policymakers and practitioners to recognize that trauma-related information is a necessary part of post-secondary and ongoing professional education” (p.6). The most experienced educators can unwittingly expose students with a history of trauma to uncomfortable or distressing situations; however, with support from universities, high school and college faculty members and administrators can more effectively provide instruction and assessment that helps all students achieve success. Colleges and universities are learning environments, and creating a trauma-informed environment requires the involvement of the entire campus-community faculty members, administrators, staff members, counsellors and clinicians - to foster a shared understanding of the impacts of trauma on learning and adopt a campus-wide approach. All staff members must work together with a sense of shared responsibility for the physical, social, emotional, and academic well - being of every student. Davidson suggest “training staff and faculty members in trauma-informed practices by including training as part of new employee and incoming student orientation, incorporating it into annual training opportunities/requirements, offering annual training to student leaders and student groups, and instituting training regarding the effects of trauma for all student health services personnel” (p. 20).

Research indicates that adverse childhood experiences are common across cultures and socio-economic strata, yet few health and human services providers graduate from training programs with the skills they need to address trauma and toxic stress. Faculty should join the

discussion of changes needed in professional training curricula to prepare a trauma-informed workforce and a culture that acknowledges and understands the impact of trauma in educational spaces and beyond.

Altered Books Curriculum

Elementary/Junior High Curriculum - Altered Textbook Unit

The formal learning process involves both the classroom and support material. My altered textbook is a snapshot of adverse lived experiences that interconnected with my emotional learning journey. Teachers also use altered books in school curriculum more broadly; teacher Michelle Rutkowski at Saint Marys Middle School, Georgia, USA uses altered books in her grade six and eight classes. Some of her guiding questions include: What is your book about? Does it express how you feel about a certain issue that you care about? Will it show who you want to be in five years? Students learn that an altered book can be used to create powerful messages about social relationships and their personal life including family, friends, school, media, internet, and pets (Rutkowski, Michelle, n.d).

High School Curriculum - Altered Textbook Unit

Student Teacher Rebecca Brittain, Pennsylvania State University used altered books in her high school curriculum unit “Change the World with Your Book.” Working with collage materials, such as various types of paper, magazines, newspapers, fabrics, and string, the students were encouraged to consider the following questions: What is an altered book? What changes would you like to see in the world? What is an important issue that is

meaningful to you? What are the most vital concerns associated with your topic? What are some techniques that artists use to help communicate their message?

Some learning objectives for this course unit include:

- a) Students learn about and research their topics, contemporary altered book artists, and techniques;
- b) Students explore available materials and begin planning and creating their book;
- c) Students create the first spread of their altered book (Brittain, Rebecca, n.d)

Sheffield Galleries and Museum Trust - Altered Book Unit

Another example of incorporating altered books into the curriculum comes from the Sheffield Galleries and Museum Trust in the United Kingdom. Sheffield Galleries and Museum Trust mission is to connect with visitors, share stories about Sheffield and the wider world. The Trust worked with grade 10 students from two secondary schools and a local artist to create altered books. Similar to my work, the artist encouraged students to express their personal identity and cultural background. Students' books focused on a variety of topics including, growing up in war, childhood memories of travelling through England, dreams, nature, the life cycle, and athletics.

Although these various educators incorporated altered books differently into the curriculum, the tool helped students learn to understand themselves in society and reflect on their own social relationships and personal growth.

Human Library ‘Book’ Participant

I had the opportunity to participate as a “human book” at Illinois State University in the small town of Normal, outside Chicago. Rather than simply talking about my experience as one normally does at a human library, I positioned my altered textbook in the context of this Human Library. Human Library readers were first - year students.

The Human Library is an innovative method designed to promote dialogue, reduce prejudice and encourage understanding. The initiative provides

students with the opportunity to break stereotypes by challenging the most common prejudices in a positive manner.

The goals of the Human Library outlined by Illinois State University are:

- Provide a shared and structured opportunity for students to become more self-aware and respectful of differences;
- Provide a safe environment for students to learn about and ask questions of individuals who may be different from them;



Human Library speaker helps students see adversity

Figure 102. Amanda holds altered textbook at the Human Library, Illinois State University (2016). Image Credit: Kate Arthur.

- Provide a safe environment for human books to share their stories of discrimination, prejudice and perseverance with student readers;
- Effectively recruit, orient, and train quality books and librarians (primarily students, charged with managing the event and taking care of the books); and,
- Work collaboratively with the appropriate campus entities to deliver a valuable experience to student readers and books (Burgess, C., 2016).

The Book

Recruitment: Human books were recruited by Illinois State University through posters and via the internet. Participation in the Human Library event is strictly voluntary. There were 52 books with nine students readers.

Orientation: I received an orientation guide that included logistics (parking, checking in, etc.) and preparation information for my book reading with tips and advice.



Figure 103. Amanda holds her modified textbook with a mirror. Human Library, Illinois State University.(2016). Image Credit. Steve Smedley.

The Reader

Training: Students received sensitivity training on how to ask questions of the books. One example of a training exercise provided to me by Corey Burgess, Coordinator of the Human Library event at Illinois State University, asked students to consider identity groups and multiple identities. This exercise reminds students that, “Our identities are not static. We are shaped and reshaped by what goes on around us and our identities constantly change” (Burgess, C., 2016).



Figure 104. Amanda holds modified book, Illinois State University. (2016). Image credit: Steve Smedley

As a book, I selected five time slots in which to share my story, though I was only required to present twice throughout the day. My book was one of 52 that covered topics such as depression, date rape, living with a brain injury, immigration and bi-polar disorder. A book room was available for the participants to relax, have snacks and speak to other participants. The readers could ask questions after a 20-minute presentation. I introduced myself and thanked the students for attending. Then I talked about my journey in foster care and the circumstances about

my wounded eye. I invited participants to try on the eyepatches I had brought, so they could experience what it is like to only see out of one eye; they could also put a hand over one eye if they wished. Some students were not comfortable covering an eye, but this was not mandatory. Most of us take full vision for granted, and some students were very reluctant to try on or even hold an eyepatch.



Figure 105. Illinois State University freshman Lori Michelson of Burbank places an eye patch over her eye to experience a visual impairment. (2016). Image Credit: Steve Smedley

Students then had the opportunity to ask me questions, which included:

- Was there any significance in why you chose a math book?
- When did you make this (altered book)?
- How did you get the idea to do that?

The students also provided feedback, such as:

- “I actually learned a lot and I could relate to her.”

- “Very interesting to hear about her story.”
- “The book teaches us not to take our eyes for granted.”
- “I am glad to have chosen this book, very touching.”
- “Amazing story; loved the idea of the book she made.”

Overall, the students seemed to gain an understanding of adversity from me as a “book” as well as from my altered textbook. The experience informed how I could use the altered book in the Human Library context. This innovative approach had not been done prior and seemed to be successful based on students’ comments.

Nocturne: Art at Night. Altered Lives, Altered Textbooks Exhibit

In partnership with the United Way of Halifax proposed an exhibit called *Altered Lives, Altered Textbooks* to the Nocturne: Art at Night. The 2017 theme of Nocturne: Art at Night was Vanish. “The term Vanish relates to both the temporary nature of the Nocturne experience as well as the shifting focus that occurs as new or forgotten memories are transposed over prevalent narratives and pasts. Vanishing, in all of iterations, is a term that implies an active state of disappearing.”

The *Altered Lives, Altered Textbooks* exhibit explores the question “Who am I as a learner in the context of adversity?” Our exhibit was displayed in the lobby of the Halifax Central Library on October 14, 2017. It included a pull - up banner, a display board, and a slide show on a monitor screen showed images from my altered textbook and artwork. In addition to my paintings titled *Exhausted Learner*, and “*Eye” am a Survivor; I am free from the pages that bind me*, I provided display copies of my art portfolio, a guest book, and discarded textbooks, which I

invited the visitors to take home to alter. I provided an artist statement and an exhibit description, and gave visitors the opportunity to view the original altered textbook.



Figure 106. Exhibit Display at Halifax Central Library, October 14, 2017. Image Credit. Tracy Boyd

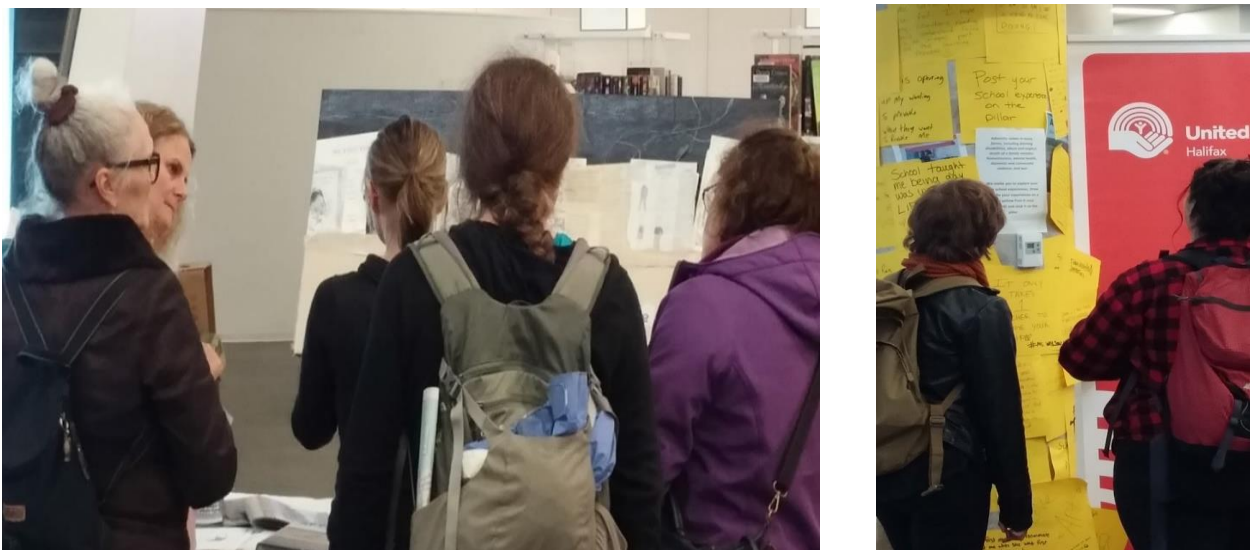


Figure 107. Visitors to the exhibit. (2017). Image Credit: Tracy Boyd.

We invited visitors to explore their own experiences, and draw or write them on a large yellow Post-It note and stick it on a pillar for others to see.

Some comments from the exhibit visitors include:

- “You are a survivor and it's incredible the awareness you are creating with your life's experiences. Your art is a wonderful representation of it and looked amazing. Your story heals as well.”
- “Very glad that I stopped by – what you have done is amazing. It increased my awareness about what happens in children's lives before they enter school (and in school).”
- “This is such a creative, thoughtful project. Congrats on sharing your painful journey in such a way that will have an impact on the lives of many – fascinating and inspiring.”

The pupil is irregular.

Figure 108. "The pupil is irregular" is a description of my wounded left eye. (1995). Medical report. Image Credit: Amanda May

Discussion - The Pupil is Irregular

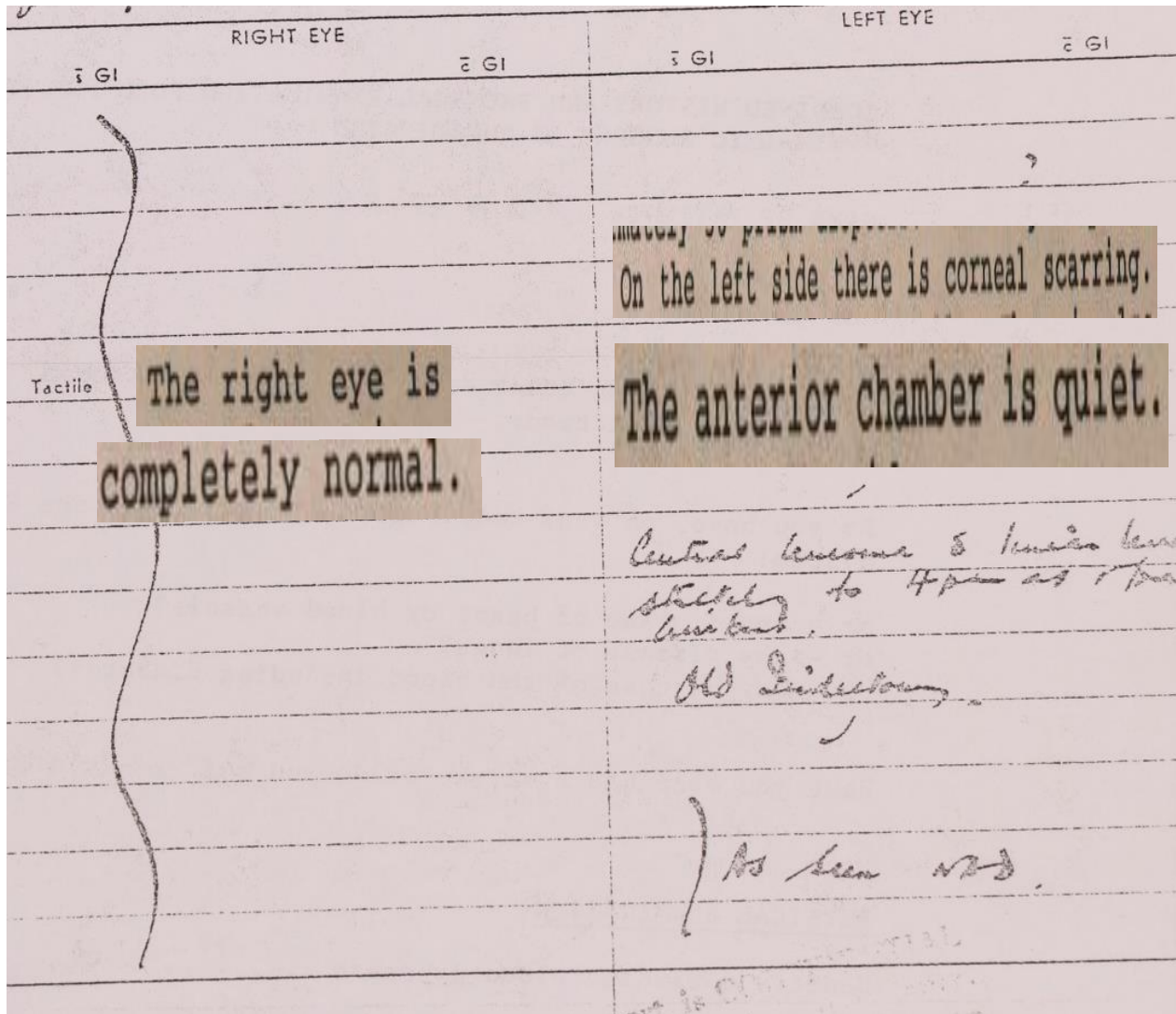


Figure 109. Collage of hospital and medical reports with descriptions of my eyes. (2018) Hospital report, Care and Custody File. Image Credit: Amanda May

The central theme of this study is childhood trauma, learning and resilience. There is a singular guiding question: *Who am I as a learner?* Over the years, eye doctors have said the following comments: “blind in left eye since 1 ½ years old”, “defective vision left eye”, “sight almost nil left eye following abuse injury”, “cataract”, “count fingers vision left eye,” “evidence left eye injury”, “disabled by diminished vision-traumatic cataract”, “traumatic scar”, “the pupil is irregular”, “anterior chamber is quiet”, “severe amblyopia”, “legally blind left eye” and “massive corneal wound” (Medical reports, 1971 - 2017).

As someone who experienced trauma in early life, I had a number of developmental delays. Academic struggles often stem from early strife, and, with childhood trauma, I was ill prepared for succeeding in a traditional school system. The whole child and their traumatic history enters the classroom. My adversity disrupted by learning narrative and led to academic struggles. During K to 12, I lost my foster mother of 10 years; I had to move homes, schools, and communities in the middle of grade 5, and consequently failed the grade; I had to process being in multiple foster homes, meeting biological family members for the first time, and grappling with the suicide of my brother. In addition to meeting set academic requirements, I had to process these layers of complexity. As I pursued a post-secondary education, I dealt with unresolved grief and loss that further affected my learning. I had to leave school a number of times, and take breaks from my formal education to process unresolved grief. All of this disrupted my schooling, and did not reflect my academic potential. Although I struggled in school I always valued education and thought it would provide more opportunities in life. I need academic accommodation at the graduate level; however, I now understand my strengths and weaknesses as a learner, and can navigate academic institutions and achieve success.

Ripping out the pages of a textbook, revealing the thread still holds the memory of the pages that bound it, embodies my traumatic experience. By exploring my own story through an autoethnographic approach in my graduate studies, I became aware of the gravity of my experiences and my resilience as a learner, and the potential for this to contribute to the body of research on trauma-informed approaches and practices.

I undertook to transform books and explore art process as part of an autoethnography and arts-informed methodology. Metaphors – pockets, backpacks, and more – are central to this methodology, and themes of adversity and resilience that define the work. Among the projects and pieces, I completed are *The Exhausted Learner*, which depicts the backpack with actual school supplies. “*Eye” am a Survivor*, which taught me about resilience, and my altered math textbook, and use of pockets at various ages and stages in childhood development, which illustrated the whole child as the learner. Through this exploration, I became aware of learning challenges arising from my injury from the perspective of my eye’s trauma, as well as my bodily trauma and the unconscious memory of the event. I now understand that the recovery from childhood trauma is lifelong; while the wound is healing, the physical and emotional scars remain.

Thus, this study builds on existing knowledge of the effects of adverse lived experiences on students, and unites the arts-informed research methodology of an altered textbook, with an emphasis on adversity in the context of learning. My art portfolio was compiled through workshops that explored trauma, adversity, eye injury, foster care and learning challenges.

Displaying my research in an altered textbook provided an accessible entry point into a conversation about trauma, foster children, and the adverse lived experience of learners that might not otherwise be relatable. While foster care or trauma might be unfamiliar to some,

everyone has a relationship with learning and education. An individual lived experience becomes a shared experience through this accessible medium of an altered textbook. The artistic components of my work including excerpts of case documents, altered photographs, paintings, and collages, as well as the documentation of the stages of my creative process, convey these findings more effectively than a simple sharing my experience orally or in writing could have achieved. Presenting my research at community events such as the Human Library and Nocturne: Art at Night created a special space for the discussion of trauma and adversity. In this way, I helped to break down social barriers and the stigma surrounding trauma and foster children.

Sharing their experiences with teachers and school administrators will highlight the learning experiences of students who live, or lived in, foster care. Educators and other professionals such as social workers, school psychologists, school administrators, and policymakers will benefit from understanding the complexity of the lives of foster children. Adverse lived experiences are very significant so understanding foster children's emotional learning processes is essential to improving educational outcomes.

This research crosses professional disciplines; it can apply to education, social work, psychology, law, policy, and more. All of these disciplines can and should collaborate to create systems that are trauma-informed and encourage institutions to implement best practices to support those with adverse lived experiences. This individual exploration has significant relevance for the education system. It demonstrates how lived experience can be not only infused but also welcomed in the classroom.

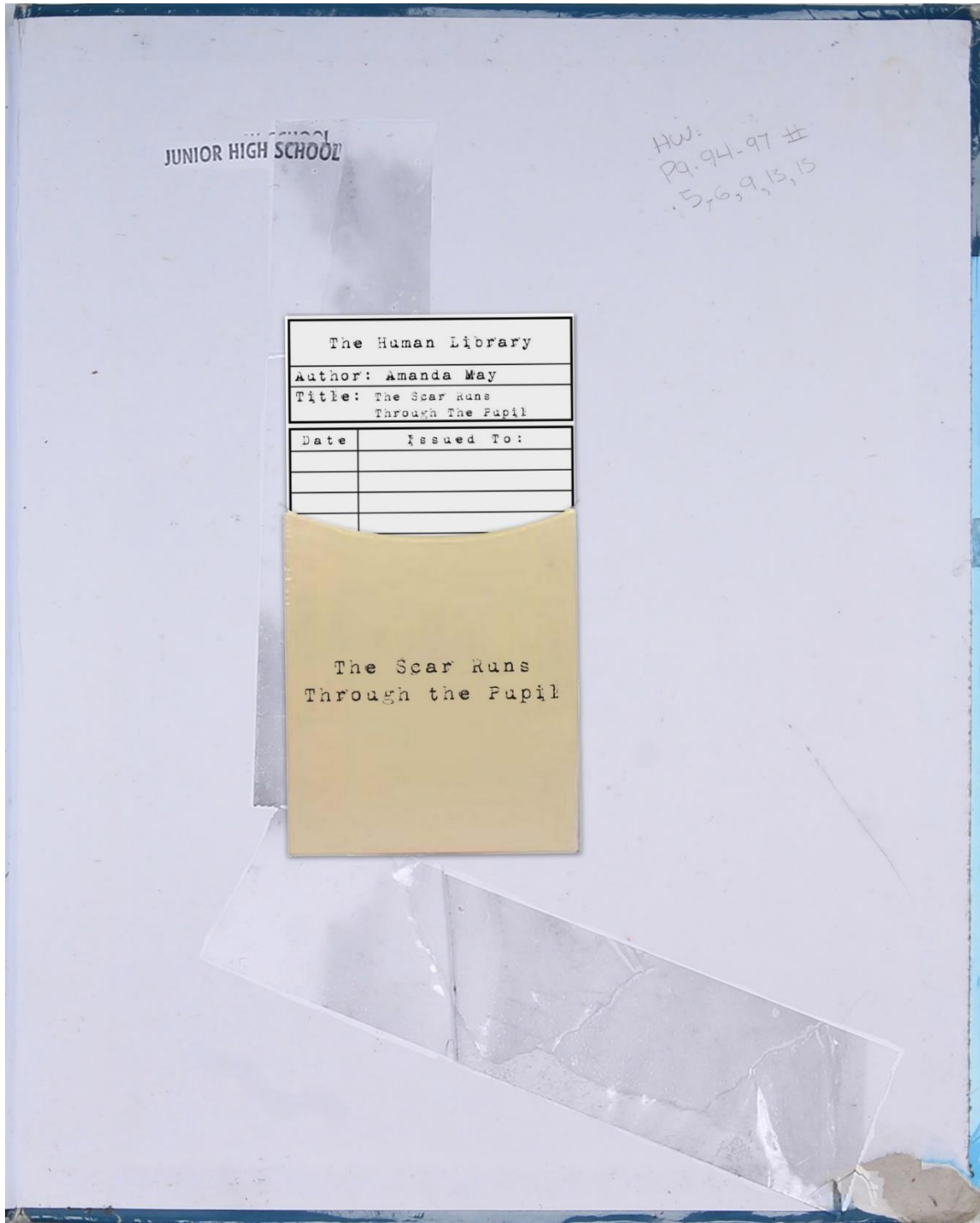


Figure 110. Inside cover of a textbook with a library card titled: *The Scar Runs through the Pupil*. (2018). Textbook, library card. Image Credit: Amanda May.

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[fst/fam/Pages/highlight.cfm?TabID=3&Lang=E&Asc=1&PRCode=01&OrderBy=999&Sex=1&tableID=304](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/hlt-fst/fam/Pages/highlight.cfm?TabID=3&Lang=E&Asc=1&PRCode=01&OrderBy=999&Sex=1&tableID=304)

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